

Third Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 5, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 214—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I move, seconded by the member from The Maples, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité—well, anyway, Bill 214—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Fletcher: —moving along—

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Fletcher: Be now read a first time. *[interjection]* Or the whole thing? That bill—

Moved by myself, seconded by the member from The Maples, that The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fletcher: My apologies to the French language. The h's always mess me up.

But this bill, Madam Speaker, I have dubbed Marlee's law. Marlee is a caregiver and friend who is always wearing high heels: in mountains, in snow, on beaches, and though it is certainly not something I ask, it's something that is often demanded by employers, that female workers are required to wear high heels. And that is ridiculous in this day and age.

This bill has been on the Order Paper for quite some time and it is quite similar to another bill that was entered in today, but is different in its wording in that it does allow for the exception of the area of modelling and movie-type situations.

So, Madam Speaker, this is a bill that specifically deals with high heels—word for word—in the actual legislation.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

**Women's World Curling Championship Team—
Team Canada**

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am honoured and thrilled to rise today to extend the government of Manitoba's congratulations to skip, Jennifer Jones; third, Kaitlyn Lawes; second, Jill Officer; lead, Dawn McEwen and fifth, Shannon Birchard for their outstanding, wire-to-wire gold medal performance at the 2018 women's world curling championships in North Bay, Ontario.

Capturing their second world championship title, the Jones rink is now arguably one of the greatest curling teams in all times. Just look at the track record, Madam Speaker, at this remarkable and incredible team. They hold two world titles, a record six Scotties Tournament of Hearts titles, an Olympic gold medal for the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games and more grand slam victories than any other women's team in history.

It must have been an exceptionally satisfying win for the Jones rink team because it also marked, unfortunately, the end of a very stellar career for one of its most solid and accomplished team members, Jill Officer. What better way for a team to cap off a very remarkable career—or, for a player to cap off a very remarkable career and for a team to bid a very fond farewell to a beloved teammate and friend. It was so wonderful for the team to have so many family members and friends on hand to share that very, very special moment.

And, Madam Speaker, on behalf of this Chamber, I would like to extend our sincere best

wishes to Jill Officer as she steps away from competitive curling. We all wish her well as she moves on to the very next chapter in her life.

And, recently, and before the world championships, Jennifer Jones and Jill Officer were also inducted into the Manitoba Curling Hall of Fame. And, usually, Madam Speaker, individuals are not inducted into the hall of fame until after they retire, but when you've accomplished as much as Jennifer and Jill, you can hardly blame the Manitoba Curling Hall of Fame for being a little impatient about wanting to acknowledge two of Manitoba's greatest curling legends.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba holds a special place in its heart for the curling sport—for the sport of curling and our curling heroes. It's a sport deeply woven into the fabric of our culture, history and people, and there are reasons why we like to call ourselves the curling capital of the world. You only need to take a look at the Jones rink to know where that belief comes from.

And it is also why our government is creating an International Curling Centre of Excellence here in Manitoba, and we are so proud that Jennifer Jones and Jill Officer are both serving on that very important committee.

Madam Speaker, I invite all Manitobans, all—everyone here in the Chamber today to join us in congratulating Jennifer Jones, Kaitlyn Lawes, Jill Officer, Dawn McEwen and Shannon Birchard for all of their accomplishments and especially for winning the 2018 women's world curling championships.

Hurry hard. Thank you.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I want to honour and say a special congratulations to our Canadian woman's team for winning gold in the Ford World Women's Curling Championships this March. Led by Canadian curling legend Jennifer Jones, Team Canada defeated all competition on the road to an undefeated 12-0 record during the round robin.

In playoffs, the team next—the team's next game was in the semifinals, where they faced a long-time rival, the United States. Here, Team Jones put up a valiant effort and achieved victory with a score of 9-7.

Canada's final matchup was a heavyweight exchange for the ages, where they faced off against their best competition in Team Sweden. With each of

these two teams winning one of the past two Olympics, the sold-out arena was for—a real treat for everyone in attendance, Madam Speaker.

The gold medal game truly lived up to its hype, as Sweden was able to force the game into extra ends, but in the end it was Team Canada who emerged victorious in the extra round.

With four of their members born right here in Manitoba, our team representing Canada truly has some deep Manitoba roots, and their efforts are something all Manitobans can celebrate together.

Today, we want to congratulate Team Jones, and especially Jill Officer, who announced that she will be finishing her career next year. This—what a wonderful memory to have with the team that she's had so much success with.

Miigwech and congratulations.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Lamoureux: It is my distinct pleasure to rise today to acknowledge six exceptional women for their world-class achievement.

* (13:40)

Last month, Jennifer Jones, Kaitlyn Lawes, Jill Officer, Dawn McEwen, Shannon Birchard and their coach, Wendy Morgan, distinguished themselves at the 2018 women's world curling championship.

After dominating the round robin as the only undefeated team, they continued through the playoffs to capture the gold medal in grand fashion, winning in extra ends.

Madam Speaker, this was an especially fitting farewell for Jill Officer to go out as a champion as she steps away from the game she has excelled in for all these years.

These women, our Team Canada from right here in Manitoba, stand as examples of determination, teamwork and excellence to our province and, indeed, all of Canada.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Tartan Day

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, on another ministerial statement, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am honoured to rise again to recognize Tartan Day, which celebrates people of Scottish origin and their many contributions to help people—to help building our wonderful country.

Since 2011, Tartan Day has been nationally recognized on April 6th as the anniversary of signing the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320, known as the Scottish declaration of independence.

In Manitoba, Tartan Day had been declared by the Legislative Assembly in 1994 in recognition of the role that Scottish Manitobans have played and continue to play in Manitoba's cultural heritage. Manitoba has had an official tartan since the passing of the Manitoba tartan act in 1962.

Scottish settlers had been—Scottish settlers have been central to the development of the province when Scots employed by the Hudson's Bay Company first set foot in the territory, and in 1783 a group of Scottish traders founded the competing North West Company based in Montreal, causing the traders of both companies to push westward in their search for furs.

Historically, the best-known group of Scots in Manitoba is surely the Selkirk settlers, Manitoba's first known group of refugees who, in 1812, fled the Highland enclosures that had left them homeless. Two centuries ago, Lord Selkirk signed a treaty with five First Nations chiefs, led by Chief Peguis, that founded the Red River Colony and formalized a relationship that had begun when Chief Peguis and his people first came upon the struggling Scots and helped them survive, Madam Speaker.

Many names from that time have come down to us today, attached to towns, streets, parks and schools. We recognize the names of Thomas Douglas, Miles Macdonell, Kildonan, McGillivray, Gunn and many others.

And last year, Manitoba honoured the bicentennial of the signing of the Selkirk-Peguis Treaty in 1817.

And one of the best recognized of Canada's many influential Scots was Sir John A. Macdonald who immigrated to Canada with his family when he was only five and went on to become Canada's very first prime minister.

And, Madam Speaker, the list of Canadians of Scottish birth—or, of descent who are famous in this area of—in the areas of endeavour is too long to list. They include educators, politicians, inventors, entrepreneurs, athletes and artists. And Scottish—and Canadians with Scottish heritage have been central to such wide-ranging accomplishments such as the invention of the telephone, the implementation of universal health care and our women's right to vote.

I hope you will all join me in the Chamber today in congratulating the St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg and celebrating the many contributions that Scottish culture and people have made to our wonderful province and our very amazing country here in Canada.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It is in the truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom, for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself. On April 6th, 1320, these words appeared in the Declaration of Arbroath, considered by many to be the Scottish declaration of independence. Tomorrow, 698 years later, we recognize Tartan Day and honour not only Scotland, but the extraordinary role and contributions of Scots in our history of Manitoba and Canada.

The history of Scots in Canada extends back at least as far to the first trading posts of the Hudson Bay Company. Although the company was run out of London, it was largely the Scots, many from the Orkney Islands, who worked on the bay.

More than 200 years ago the Selkirk settlement was founded by Lord Selkirk, a noble who recognized the struggles of Scottish peasants displaced by wealthy landowners who found they could make more profit from sheep than people. Lord Selkirk assisted many with the voyage to Manitoba to rebuild their lives. These Selkirk settlers, who were welcomed and assisted greatly by Manitoba's indigenous people, are a part of our province's history and heritage.

Many Scottish Canadians have played a predominant role in shaping our country. Factories, hospitals, schools, railways and airlines were established and organized by Scottish-trained immigrants. Women's rights moved forward thanks to Nellie McClung, Agnes Macphail and Thérèse MacDonald Casgrain. Workers' rights advanced with Scottish tradespeople and labourers who fought for the right to organize and to bargain. Winnipeg's 1919 general strike, blamed by many in power on eastern European immigrants, was in fact in large part organized by Scottish-Canadian workers, many of whom had fought for Canada in the First World War.

And, of course, our country would not be the same without the father of medicine and our greatest Canadian, Tommy Douglas, who was born in Scotland.

Lest my comments be taken as political, I point out that more than half of Canada's prime ministers, many Manitoba premiers, and many, many Manitoba mayors, councillors and other leaders of all political stripes have had Scottish blood.

To say that our plural societies in Manitoba and Canada would not be the same without Scots is an understatement. Today there are 4.7 million Canadians of Scottish heritage, almost as many as there are Scots in Scotland. Tomorrow on Tartan Day let us recognize and celebrate those Scots, past, present, and future, who have toiled to build our province and country we know and love today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the Ministerial Statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the Ministerial Statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: The Scottish clans of Canada have been working for over 30 years to have Tartan Day named in parliaments and legislatures across Canada, from a motion written by the clans of Nova Scotia that said this to be a day chosen to promote Scottish heritage by the most visible means.

People of Scottish heritage have proudly worn their tartan, even during the 40-plus years they were made illegal across the United Kingdom.

This month, Madam Speaker, the Liberal biannual convention will be taking place where this

motion was first made, and all Manitoban delegates will be wearing their Manitoba tartan scarves that are for sale right here at the legislative gift shop.

In closing, Madam Speaker, heritage should be worn proudly. It should be celebrated. And it should be respected by all governments.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Chinese Lantern Light Festival

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I'm happy to report Manitoba has a vibrant and growing tourism sector.

In celebration of Canada-Chinese year of tourism 2018, and the 30th anniversary of the twinning of Winnipeg with sister city Chengdu, Sichuan, China, Mayor Brian Bowman announced yesterday a Lights of the North, Chinese Lantern Light Festival will be showcased in Winnipeg in the autumn of 2018.

Winnipeg will be the first Canadian city ever to host a light show of this magnitude, and we thank His Worship Mayor Brian Bowman, Dorothy Dobbie, Brian Wood, Steven Wu and all the local investors who have accepted this challenge, and it is a daunting challenge.

It is a \$4-million venture, whereby it will take 75 to 100 Chinese artisans six to eight weeks to construct towering Chinese lantern light artwork statues using various common items such as cups and saucers, plastic bottles and ping-pong balls to be showcased to thousands of visitors from around the world across 10 acres of land dispersed among different events, including authentic Chinese music and dance shows, craftwork displays and food vendors, for two months.

We thank Winnipeg's sister city Chengdu, China, for helping to bring this light show to Winnipeg. It is a celebration of Chinese culture, it is a celebration of diversity and it is a celebration of our similarities.

This festival rekindles and strengthens an existing bond that was created when giant pandas Cheng Cheng and Rong Rong were brought to Winnipeg 30 years ago, a relationship that continues to bring lasting benefits for both countries.

Please join me in welcoming Dorothy Dobbie, Brian and Monica Wood, and Steven Wu, who are here in the gallery today, and in thanking them for previously bringing the pandas to Winnipeg, for securing the Lights of the North, Chinese Lantern Light Festival for Winnipeg and for promoting Manitoba tourism.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

* (13:50)

Tina Fontaine Memorial

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Grade 11 R.B. Russell high school student Trinity Harry never knew Tina Fontaine, but felt a deep connection to her. Trinity could particularly relate to her feeling of being unsafe while walking in our city. Trinity's fear of being unsafe grew following the non-guilty verdict of—in the Tina Fontaine trial.

After expressing the way she felt to her welder teacher, Mike Johnston, he suggested that he—she turn her fear and worry into something that represented love and healing. Trinity decided to create a memorial that would both commemorate Tina Fontaine and raise awareness of the—on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Trinity wanted to honour the Fontaine family and to show them that they are not alone.

Trinity and her classmate, Joseph Ginter, worked 30 hours to create a beautiful four-foot-tall rose made entirely out of metal. Tina's name sits in the very centre of this rose. Last week, the member of St. Johns and I were honoured to meet Trinity, Joseph, Mr. Johnston and Principal Jacqueline Connell and had the honour of seeing first-hand how amazing and beautiful this rose was. Principal Connell explained how proud she was of Trinity and Joseph expressing their feelings of heartbreak and fear in creating a memorial of love.

We're so proud of Trinity and Joseph's memorial, but we are once again reminded of the struggles indigenous women and girls have to face. The fear Trinity expressed is not unique, unfortunately. Many of our mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins, nieces feel this every day.

This is not okay. Indigenous women and girls should not fear becoming another victim of violence. And despite the verdict in the Tina Fontaine case, our indigenous youth are not disposable. They are resilient, brilliant, valued, strong and embody—and an embodiment of love.

Both R.B. Russell and Winnipeg School Division are proud of Trinity and Joseph. I encourage everyone to attend R.B. Russell's open house on April 19, 2018, between 1:00 and 6:00 to see this beautiful work of love and reflect on what we all can do to make—to create a safer city, province and country.

Madam Speaker: Sorry, the member's time has expired.

Is there leave to allow the member to continue with her statement? *[Agreed]*

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech. I ask my colleagues to join me in honouring these young people, their educators, their parents, who are here in the gallery today.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

I ask for leave to have the names included in Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include the names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

R.B. Russell Vocational School students, family and staff: Ian Campeau; Jacqueline Connell; Brad Davidson; Conrad, Debra and Joseph Ginter; Lindsey, Steven and Trinity Harry; Mike Johnston; Samantha Mann.

William Pearcey

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I am honoured to inform this House about a member of the Portage la Prairie Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 65 who has received the prestigious Governor General's Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers.

The medal was presented to comrade William Pearcey on March 20th at the Legion's annual general meeting. This award is given for extraordinary individual volunteer achievements by a Canadian citizen. The medal builds on the legacy and spirit of Caring Canadian Award by honouring the dedication and commitment of volunteers.

William Pearcey was born in St John's, Newfoundland, and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1957, took his basic training in Borden air base in Ontario and continued to serve in the RCAF for the next 25 years. While in service William travelled throughout Canada with postings in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and ultimately in Southport, Manitoba. William retired in 1982 and settled with his family in the Portage la

Prairie community and continues as an active volunteer in the community.

William has been a member of the Legion for nearly 40 years and has been the local Legion's service officer from 2004 to 2014. He works to promote veteran recognition and assists veterans to access services and supports.

William has spearheaded the initiative for free parking for veterans in Portage la Prairie. He generously provides rides for veterans as needed and is devoted to checking on their well-being. William is very involved in Remembrance Day and other commemorative services and helps various local Legion activities and events.

I ask all honourable members to join me in congratulating William Pearcey on receiving this well-deserved award and recognizing his volunteer achievements, dedication and commitment.

Maureen Wood

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): On March 28th Maureen Wood embarked upon an epic journey. She is walking from St. Theresa Point to here, our Legislature, which is about 1,100 kilometres, but her goal is to walk to Ottawa, a further distance of 2,200 kilometres. She wants to bring attention to the meth crisis in our Island Lake communities. It's hitting hard all over Manitoba.

Maureen started with her family. They first walked to Garden Hill, but there is no road between these two communities so they had to walk in deep snow at times, as the homemade ice road was just too hazardous. She was joined by people there. They then continued towards Wasagamack, and again, people joined.

Those Island Lakers then walked the winter ice road to Norway House, a distance of about 225 kilometres. Once there, some simply could not continue and returned home.

Currently her movement has reached up to 30 walkers.

Maureen is a single mother. Her eldest is taking care of his nomishoom here in city and her 15 year old is on her—with this walk.

On the night I left the group, 100 kilometers from Ponton, it was minus 34 with the wind. It takes about one hour to walk five kilometres. One person has lost a toenail. Many have swollen legs and feet. All have blisters upon their blisters. Every person

is walking for a family member. There are even some who are currently struggling with addictions walking.

It is a spiritual walk. They carry eagle feathers inside a Bible. Prayers are said throughout the day for the strength to continue.

I would like to thank the three Cree Nations from that territory that have stepped up and donated food, shelter, clothing and a place to rest.

I hope everyone here can support somehow, perhaps even saying a quick prayer.

Kitchi miigwech to the walkers for doing this for our people. You are all loved.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Personal-Care-Home Staff

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I rise in this house today to recognize and honour a group of people that play an important role in the lives of many Manitobans: that is the staff and workers at the many personal-care homes across Manitoba.

Since being elected in 2011 I have had the privilege of visiting many personal-care homes in Manitoba, but more so in the last year since my mother-in-law became a resident in one of these homes.

I must give credit to the staff for all they do to make the residents feel at home. Many residents come to these PCHs unwillingly; they don't want to be there. Many have physical challenges. Some suffer from dementia. It takes a special person to work with these residents and add to their quality of life.

It seems the only time we hear about PCHs is when somebody wanders away or other negative news.

While visiting my mother-in-law I have seen many staff members go above and beyond their job description to help residents feel at home, helping celebrate a resident's birthday and more. From what I have seen, I know my wife feels confident that her mother is being well looked after.

I would ask all members to help me thank the workers and staff of the many PCHs as they look after some of Manitoba's most important residents.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

We have seated in the public gallery from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate 18 grade 9 students under the direction of Jeremy Siemens, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer).

On behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome you to our Manitoba Legislature.

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Carbon Reduction Plan Transition to Green Economy

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): We are going to hold over the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) carbon tax bill into the fall. It does not meet the needs of Manitobans.

You know, we're asking Manitobans right now, in this historic moment, to switch to a greener lifestyle, to start heating their homes in a energy-efficient way—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to use more transit, to start driving electric vehicles, and what programs are there to help them? Nothing.

There are no programs being offered by this government that will actually help the average family switch to a greener lifestyle. All that they'll be getting is \$300 more in taxes for the average family to pay.

Now, we want them to switch, and instead this government is taking money away.

When will this Premier bring forward a real plan to help deal with climate change and also help families with affordability?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, as if 17 years of degrading the environment was enough—wasn't enough for the NDP, now they're stalling on measures that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the province and are continuing their legacy of not taking action on climate change.

We wish the members opposite would just get with us on board at reducing our greenhouse gas emissions in the province of Manitoba. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, order. Order.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: We know that the Premier refuses to provide a real climate change action plan for Manitobans.

We want Manitobans to switch—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to start using less carbon—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to heat their homes, to start using less carbon in the commute to work, or maybe just to start taking the bus.

Now, what sort of assistance is this government providing families who want to make those green choices? Absolutely nothing. In fact, it will become harder to make a transition to green technology with \$300 less in your pocket at the end of the year because of this mistaken carbon tax plan that's being offered.

By the way, under this government, transit is getting more expensive and hydro is getting more expensive, too. This is simply not a way—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to fight climate change.

Will the Premier withdraw his current carbon tax bill and bring forward a real one that ensures that every dollar collected with a price on carbon goes back towards fighting climate change?

Madam Speaker: I would just like to point out to members in the gallery that there is to be no engagement in events that happen down here, so I would ask consideration that there be no applause from the gallery as those are the rules of this Chamber.

Thank you, and I appreciate everybody's co-operation.

Ms. Squires: Perhaps the members opposite need reminding that it was just a mere six months ago that the Auditor General came out with a scathing report

about their environmental record. They had no plan; they had no way in sight of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: The only thing that this—that the previous NDP government ever did for the environment was take a recycled promise, write it on a recycled napkin and call it an environment plan.

Unlike them, we've got a plan that is better for the environment and better for the economy. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: Recycled answers from this government.

They've held four press conferences to announce this plan. How many programs that will actually help the average family in Manitoba switch to a greener lifestyle? None. Zero. Zip. That's why we are delaying this bill until the fall. We want Manitobans to understand that they are going to be asked to pay more money, but they're not going to get any sort of assistance to try and switch to a greener lifestyle.

And, again, under this government's watch, hydro is getting more expensive, transit is getting more expensive.

Why doesn't this government understand that as they make—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —green choices less and less affordable and take tax dollars away from Manitoba families that the green transition that we know needs to happen now for the sake of our children, for the sake of our environment, will become harder and harder for all of us to make?

Ms. Squires: Well, in keeping with NDP legacy, they just called \$140 million zip, nada, nothing. And, unlike members opposite who don't value \$140 million, our government's committed thus far \$102 million into a conservation trust that will have lasting benefits in perpetuity in enhancing green infrastructure and an additional \$40 million in green technology. That's just starting—that's just us getting started on the path down to transitioning to a low-carbon future.

I wish members opposite would get out of the way and get on board with supporting our Climate and Green Plan.

Madam Speaker: We're only on question two, so I would ask everybody's co-operation. We've got a lot of guests in the gallery today, including students, and I would ask everybody's co-operation that when members are standing to ask a question or to answer a question, that we all respectfully listen to what is being said. I think that would make a great example for these students that are here in the gallery today.

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

Special Drug Program Request to Retain

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Without consultation and without warning, this Premier (Mr. Pallister) has cut the special drugs program for over 1,100 Manitobans. We know that the families of these patients have been scrambling. They have barely two months to come up—thousands of dollars for life-saving medication that they need just to stay alive.

Now, we've learned from a freedom of information request that the Premier's been planning this cut since at least September of 2016. Now, he didn't tell Manitoba families about this in the last election. They didn't tell people that they were going to get the life-saving drugs that they need taken away from them, and what is the advice that this government comes up with that we see in the freedom of information document for families who are going to need these life-saving drugs? Well, it's, quote, run a tab, end quote. It shows a complete disregard for the well-being and wellness of Manitobans.

Will the Premier reverse his cut to the special drugs program?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, knows something about running a tab. He ran a tab, the former NDP government did, of \$1 billion a year for Manitobans. That tab, that deficit each and every year, was left to young people.

When it comes to the special drug program we have a much better plan, and we, of course, have the Pharmacare plan, a comprehensive plan, a fair plan. In fact, there was somebody in this House in 2006

who said that the Pharmacare program was the most comprehensive and the most fair program anywhere in Canada. That was Gary Doer, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: This Doer sounds like a great guy, and just like the member from Steinbach, I can't wait for his party to get back in government.

Now, Pharmacare is again—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —a great program.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: We should have enhanced Pharmacare—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, to continue.

Mr. Kinew: Again, Pharmacare is great. We should have universal Pharmacare. We should be moving towards universal Pharmacare, and yet this government's cut to the special drugs program moves us in the opposite direction. It is reducing coverage, and it is reducing coverage for people who are chronically ill and in some cases terminally ill, Madam Speaker.

* (14:10)

And what is this government's strategy for people who are terminally ill or chronically ill? Is it full universal Pharmacare coverage? Is it giving them the drugs that they need to stay alive? Is it helping them meet the affordability challenge with their life? No, it's, as these documents show, to just run a tab.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) acknowledge that patients need these medications in order to stay alive and put that realization into action by reversing his cut to the special drugs program?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition seemed to indicate that Gary Doer was coming back to lead the party. I don't know if the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) has a new secret plan, if he's organizing another rebellion, but if—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —if Gary Doer is coming back to lead the party, I'll be happy about one thing, Madam Speaker. Gary Doer understood that the Pharmacare program in Manitoba is comprehensive; it's fair; it's one of the best programs, if not the best program, in all of Canada. That Leader of the Opposition has a long way before he's close to Gary Doer.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: Could there be a more clear example of playing politics with a life-or-death issue? Again, we're talking about the special drugs program. We're talking about medication that people need in order to stay alive. And, you know, the Minister of Health wants to take shots. He's perfectly within his rights to do so, but why doesn't he get back to work and enhance drug coverage for Manitobans instead of cutting it?

We know that this is a very serious issue for the people from Diabetes Canada. They wrote the minister in February to say, with the seven short weeks' notice, in absence of prior consultation, Diabetes Canada is concerned some people will be unable to pay the required deductible.

They go on to say that they've been receiving many calls from distraught individuals. This is the face of health care under this Premier. This is the damage that is happening to people in our province.

Will the minister or the Premier simply take responsibility, admit that this cut was wrong and reverse the decision?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, 98 per cent of those who have diabetes are under the Pharmacare program, and that was the case when the NDP were in government. Never once—never once—did they raise a concern that the Pharmacare program was unfair for those individuals. More than 75 per cent of those Manitobans who are living with cystic fibrosis are under the Pharmacare program. They were under the Pharmacare program when the NDP were in government. Never once did a member of the NDP government ever raise a concern that the Pharmacare program didn't meet their needs, Manitoba—Madam Speaker.

The Pharmacare program is one of the best in Canada. It's one of the most comprehensive, it's one of the fairest and that's why the former NDP government never said anything in detriment to it

when those patients were—and they're still—under the Pharmacare program, Madam Speaker.

Safe Injection Site Funding Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Families were relieved to see the Main Street Project propose creating a safe injection site in the old Mitchell Fabrics building. This is certainly welcomed by those struggling with addictions and their families, who understand that the harm-reduction approach will prevent overdose deaths, Madam Speaker.

Unfortunately, this wasn't welcomed by the Minister of Health. In an interview, he referenced a report which said the majority of overdoses take place at home, indicating that a downtown clinic would not help. Yet advocates say the same the report shows the large—the largest numbers of overdoses take place in the North End, Madam Speaker.

Will he admit that a safe injection site may reduce the number of fatal overdoses in our province?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the NDP government, of course, never brought in a supervised injection site in Manitoba, and I expect it's because they had the same evidence that we have.

Certainly, when it comes to opiates, which the member references, more than 75 per cent of those who are overdosing on opiates are doing so in their home, Madam Speaker. It's a very different situation than it is in Vancouver or British Columbia, and thankfully so, because our numbers, as difficult as they are—every one is difficult—they aren't as they are in Vancouver or British Columbia.

We are charged with using the dollars that we have for addictions to do so in the most effective way, following evidence, following those experts, who know where the money should be used. And we continue to use an evidence-based approach, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: The minister can continue to make up baseless excuses about this, but front-line addiction workers know—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —but workers know the real value of safe-injection sites.

The minister said he needs Manitoba-based research to prove that this is a good investment. Dr. Virani, a public health doctor in Alberta, says this, and I quote, is an absurd requirement. And he goes on to say, and I quote: If we were waiting for medical and public health 'intervention' data to be applied to every geographic location, Winnipeg would have nothing. The minister is desperately using any excuse he can find.

Will the minister stop evading and just tell us if he will fund a safe-injection site?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member opposite seems to insinuate that the statistics that are published in terms of overdoses in Manitoba are somehow made-up, that they're not real. Now, certainly, not only are they real, they're tragic for every circumstance that's put in place, and I think it's a terrible thing for the member opposite to suggest that those are made-up statistics.

In fact, the former government didn't publish these statistics in the way that we are. We're making them public. We're being very open in terms of the opiate overdoses because we think it's important that people have the evidence that she doesn't seem to think is real and, yes, we do believe evidence is important.

She quotes an individual who says we shouldn't be waiting for evidence. We shouldn't have to rely on evidence. We will continue to rely on evidence because that's how decisions should be made, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: The evidence is—for the minister—is that too many people have died in our province because of overdoses. That is the evidence, and those could have been prevented, Madam Speaker. People with addictions deserve a judgment-free space that connects them to support services while keeping them alive.

The minister's opposition to this issue suggests he feels very differently. Marion Willis, the director of St. Boniface Street Links says that this minister is, and I quote, ill-informed and has failed to stay, and, again I quote, current with the emerging issues in addiction treatment.

Manitobans want and deserve a minister that believes in progressive solutions. This minister is stuck in the past.

Will he stop blocking this site and commit to funding it?

Mr. Goertzen: Well it may be, Madam Speaker, that relying on evidence is an old-fashioned idea. It may be, in fact, that looking to use the funds in the most appropriate way to help the most amount of people is an old-fashioned idea.

I admit, I'm not as progressive as the member opposite, who—apparently the progressive ideas they have on the NDP are to just throw money out the door without any evidence and hope that it helps people. That's what they did for many years: just shovel a bunch of money out the door while the problem gets worse. I know she's very progressive that way.

I would prefer to be old-fashioned than to have that kind of progression, Madam Speaker.

Government Air Services Privatization Concerns

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It's always the same playbook from this Pallister government. They cut, they slash, they mismanage—and I should say, Conservative government—essential services, public services. Then they try to privatize. That's what they're planning to do it seems with government air services. The minister didn't even know that Air Services was an essential service, but now he is slashing tens of thousands of dollars from administration, technical support.

Why is this government slashing funding for an essential service?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Like most Manitobans, our government wants to be a smart shopper. We have decided that we are going to go out and we're going to test the market. We'll test it to see if the market can do better than we can as government, and then we will make the decision and we will make it based on the facts and what's best for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

* (14:20)

Mr. Lindsey: The government has closed airports in northern Manitoba all in its quest to slash costs. It has delayed training for pilots, left positions

unfilled. Water-bombers are an essential service. Air ambulances transport patients to hospitals when there is an emergency. In northern Manitoba these services are essential as there aren't always roads, and the government is cutting the winter road budget, too, by the way.

Will the government stop its plan to privatize government air services?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, unlike the member opposite, who's caught in the past in ideology, we are not going to let ideology cloud our decisions. In fact, I would point out to the member that the same kind of smart shopping is being done in British Columbia—NDP British Columbia. I would like to point out to the member opposite that the same kind of smart shopping is also done in Alberta—NDP Alberta.

Madam Speaker, they know how to smart shop. Why don't the NDP opposite?

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lindsey: The government is investing over a million dollars less in capital costs for government air services. It's dragging its heels on training pilots, not making the right investment to keep up its fleet, clearly cutting and mismanaging as an excuse to privatize.

But this was studied in the 1990s when the Filmon government—what did they find out? Privatization for essential services doesn't make sense. Didn't make sense then; doesn't make sense now.

When will this government cut off its ideological blinders and stop its plans to privatize government air services?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, I will endeavour to take the member's statements and send them to Rachel Notley so that she knows what he happens to think about her and her approach.

I would, however, like to say to the member opposite, we will put our record up against theirs any day, Madam Speaker. Not a mile, not a yard, not a foot, not an inch was ever spent on Freedom Road. Lots of talk, lots of announcements, 17 years of talk, and, Madam Speaker, within 22 months we got Freedom Road built.

We'll put our record up against theirs any day.

**Canada Health Transfer
Use of Money Received**

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, yesterday in Estimates I asked the Health Minister a very simple question: How much additional money did Manitoba receive—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: The honorable member for Minto.

Mr. Swan: How much additional money did Manitoba receive in Health dollars last year after reaching an agreement with the federal government?

The minister wouldn't answer, but he said the Finance Minister would be able to answer that. We know the government received a signed agreement for \$399.6 million in federal funding.

So I'll take the Health Minister up on his offer and I'll ask the Finance Minister: How much money did his government receive in the last year after settling the agreement with the federal government?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Everyone wants to be the Finance Minister, Madam Speaker.

And certainly, while it is true that money from transfers does flow from the federal Department of Finance to the provincial Department of Finance, there's a statistic that we have received from the Department of Finance, and that is that we will receive from Ottawa \$2.2 billion less over the next 10 years from the federal Liberal government than we would have under the previously negotiated Canada Health Transfer agreement. That is a significant loss of funds for Manitobans.

I know that the member opposite, the member for Minto, he didn't ask any questions about that yesterday in his Estimates. He'll have an opportunity this afternoon to correct that error, that oversight so we can get to the discussion about ensuring that we have a real partner in Ottawa, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Well, a couple of weeks ago at Interim Supply, the Finance Minister confirmed that Manitoba's receiving much more federal money this year over last, and in fact, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) confirmed that there's more than \$85.7 million in additional money coming under the Canada Health Transfer more than last year. But the Health Minister, yesterday, could not tell me where any of that money was in his budget, and

he then told us he was still in negotiations with the federal government.

So, would the Finance Minister simply confirm for the House that every penny of additional money from the federal government under this new agreement will be spent on new health-care investments in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I'm always happy to talk about the investments in health. I'm glad the member asks about them. He didn't ask about them yesterday in Estimates, but if he would ask them in the afternoon—about the investments in Health—I'd be happy to talk to him about the 60 new full-time paramedics that this budget funds. Sixty new full-time paramedics who, by the way, are moving to self-regulation, I should add—never happened under the NDP. And in fact, the paramedic association said that those 60 new full-time paramedics was the largest, most significant investment in paramedics in the history of Manitoba.

Why doesn't he ask about that?

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm hoping Estimates will be more useful in this afternoon if the Minister of Health is actually going to answer questions that he believes, or believed yesterday the Minister of Finance should answer.

We know that the Province last year, on August 21st—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —issued a press release saying there'd be an additional \$10.9 million in year for federal health funding for commitments like home and community care and initiatives to address mental health and addictions. And in the press release it said funding began to flow to Manitoba immediately. Strangely enough, this was a press release that was issued by the Minister of Health. Yesterday he didn't seem to know if any of the money he said was coming immediately was coming or not.

Could the Minister of Finance stand up and tell us: Did the money show up or not?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I'm looking forward to the member opposite showing up for Estimates in probably about 25 minutes, and when he arrives for Estimates we're going to have lots of discussions about where money is being invested in

Manitoba when it comes to health care. And one of the key areas which he still hasn't asked about, but he'll have the opportunity in about 25 minutes, unless he wants to follow up with a supplementary question, is to ask about the reduction in ambulance fees.

Under the former NDP government, those who had to call, in their most desperate time, for an ambulance were paying more than \$500. Now, after only two years it's been reduced to \$340.

There's more work to do. We're fulfilling our commitments. We're responding to the priority of Manitobans, and that member still hasn't caught onto what Manitobans really care about, Madam Speaker.

Investments in Education

Economic and Social Benefits

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): The future of Manitoba is looking bleak because this government is putting the future of Manitobans at risk with all the cuts they continue to make.

Let's talk about education. It is one of the most important social indicators for issues, whether that be health care, justice or economic growth, just to name a few. Everyone deserves an education that will not shortchange them.

So I ask the minister: How can this government justify cutting funding to schools while enrollment continues to increase?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

And our government is very pleased to be investing almost \$50 million more than the previous government ever did in the K-to-12 system.

We are also pleased to move forward with a colleges review process, something the previous government never got around to even though they were mandated to do it every five years. And we are certainly working very constructively with post-secondary institutions to make sure that opportunities are there for all Manitoba students.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think I speak for a lot of the members here that we're getting sick of this government playing the blame game. They have been in government for almost two years. They have to start owning that.

Madam Speaker, studies have proven that it is absolutely critical for our economic growth that investments—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: —be made in human capital, education and skills training. If this government wants to help our economy they need to improve educational outcomes.

I ask the minister: Will he reconsider his short-sighted cuts to education and try using a method that's actually been proven to work?

* (14:30)

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

We're certainly working very closely with both the K-to-12 system and the post-secondary to use the information that was available to the previous government, the data on student graduates, that actually helps you focus where you invest your dollars to get the best result.

We're making that available to the school divisions, who have had that available for the first time ever and are very pleased to be working with that, so that they can focus their resources—which we have made more flexible—so they can focus them on getting better results.

Better results are what matter.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, an election commitment made from this Conservative government led teachers to believe that they would be getting assistance from this government to improve education outcomes. Instead, they got pay freezes and cuts to their schools.

Madam Speaker, the most improved province is going to need an educated workforce, but apparently that's not going to happen here in Manitoba.

I ask the minister: How can he justify cutting programs for schools and expect better outcomes?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member again for the question.

We're certainly looking forward to working with Manitoba teachers when it comes to a new literacy and numeracy program that'll be coming out in about a month or so, something that they were consulted broadly with, as was all sectors in terms of making

improvements to get better results for Manitoba students.

I know that we want a better-trained and a larger workforce of better-trained individuals, and certainly part of the college review pointed out that we, under the previous government, have lost ground against the rest of Canada in terms of the percentage of our workforce that was well trained.

We're very pleased to work positively to get better results for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The—[interjection] Order. The honourable member for Southdale.

Alert Ready System Public Awareness Test

Mr. Andrew Smith (Southdale): We on this side of the House believe that public safety is paramount to Manitobans and remains a top priority for our government.

Recently, there was an important announcement regarding a new system that will greatly enhance the public safety of Manitobans.

To ensure that we're all well informed on this initiative, can the Minister of Infrastructure please update the Assembly on what this will mean for the constituents of Southdale and for all Manitobans?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Well, Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Southdale for that question because last week, our government announced that the Alert Ready system will be expanded from traditional means like TV and radio to the more modern cell phones and smart phones.

This new system will be tested on May the 9th at 1:55 p.m. Madam Speaker, again, May the 9th at 1:55 p.m. with a distinct sound and vibration. Please do not be alarmed; it's just a test. If you are driving, please pull over safely, park your vehicle, check the message.

Madam Speaker, our government's all about safety. We'll continue to do so.

Lake St. Martin Road Access Contract Tendering Process

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure misled the public about the Lake St. Martin outlet channel access road. He said it was tendered, but it turned out it wasn't.

Then, the minister hid the details about the contract for weeks. Only after the media began investigating did the minister post the details.

Why has the minister continuously misled the public about this sole-source contract?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): For 17 years we had an NDP government that loved to talk about the Lake Manitoba channels and they talked and they talked until 2011, and catastrophe hit, Madam Speaker. Then, did they do anything about the channels? No, they continued to talk.

Madam Speaker, we were so secretive. We went to the Forks, had a press conference, announced that we're going to proceed with it. The member should maybe check the news releases once in a while that government sends out. We were public and open and transparent when we made that announcement.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Maloway: Several local contractors have calculated that the price of this contract is 70 per cent, minimum, over what should be expected for this kind of arrangement. It's shocking that the minister concealed this sole-source contract and its details.

Madam Speaker, will the minister now admit that the sole-source contract is not the bargain he says it is, but rather a 70 per cent padding of a contract to friends that should have been tendered?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, if the member would like, he could go up and talk to the First Nations who were terribly impacted by the 2011 flood, who lost their homes, their personal possessions, their family photos. They lost everything in that flood, and to them, those contracts were given.

Now, if he believes that there's something untoward to giving those individuals some hope as they return home, maybe he should go up there and should talk to them once in a while.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Maloway: There is no current emergency. This minister could have tendered those contracts, and he still can do that.

Madam Speaker, the recipients of this sole-source contract turn out to be party donors to the PC Party as well as donors to the campaign for the

member for Interlake (Mr. Johnson). That member, the member for Interlake, has sat on Treasury Board since August 17th of last year.

So, I ask the minister again, for the second time: Did the MLA for Interlake recuse himself from consideration of this sole-source contract at Treasury Board meetings?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, one would never accuse the member for Elmwood from not necessarily doing all his homework, although he didn't this time.

Those contracts were given to First Nations communities, and they chose their partners. I would like to point out to members opposite, unlike when they were in government, we allow our public servants to give those tenders out. They are the ones that do the actual work on it, unlike when the NDP were in office when tiger tube deals were given to friends and donors. Our government will never endeavour to do something like that. It was done through the department, Madam Speaker, and it was given to our First Nations.

Fish Supply Safety Concerns

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): So just to close out that last chapter, the tendered contracts which were then revealed not to have been tendered contracts are now apparently tendered contracts again. I have to tune into question period next week and we'll see what the next episode brings.

On a slightly different topic, Madam Speaker, the former minister for Sustainable Development—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —wrote her infamous dear fishers letter in March of last year which indicated, quote, enforcement priorities of our conservation officers are shifted away from tracking down fish exports, effective immediately.

Can the current minister tell us if there's any—been any negative consequences to that decision?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): I thank the member opposite for that question.

In regards to enhancing our fisheries and in making sure that we have a sustainable fishery for anglers and fishers, as well as making sure that we have a sustainable fish stock in all of our lakes, is

an incredible challenge, but it is one that we are certainly rising to the task. And we are working with all the fishers and the fisheries throughout Manitoba to make sure that we have markets for our fish products and that we are ensuring that we've got a sustainable fish stock in our lakes.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altemeyer: I dare say, Madam Speaker, that markets for our fish products are going to be severely threatened if the food safety of those food markets is threatened.

I would like to table today a report, a public report, that fish from Manitoba was shipped out of the country in fertilizer containers which had at the bottom of them, quote, a brown, sloppy liquid.

* (14:40)

This is the direct result of this government's decision to allow a private fish dealer to conduct himself in such a way that the food supply in perhaps Canada and the United States has been put at risk.

When did the minister learn about this? What has she done with that information to protect the food supply?

Ms. Squires: We are working with our federal counterparts. The CFIA is very much involved in ensuring that products are shipped safely and securely and in appropriate containers outside of our markets. So we are working with the CFIA, which has the lead on this.

And ensure—and in terms of working with our fisheries, we're very pleased that a lot of our fishers are receiving record-high prices for many of our species; 18 per cent increases on walleye, new markets for white fish.

Manitoba lakes are open for business, unlike what occurred under members opposite, where the monopoly had told fishers to dump white fish back in the lakes. We are open for business and supporting our fisheries.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Vimy Arena

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of Assiniboia, St. James, greater Winnipeg area and Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the City of Winnipeg to use the Vimy Arena site—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Fletcher: —as an addictions treatment facility.

The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes, and the City has not considered better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as St. Boniface industrial park or the 20,000 acres at CentrePort.

(3) The City of Winnipeg has indicated that the Vimy Arena site will be rezoned from park to commercial use to accommodate the addiction treatment facility and has not sought input from the community to consider better uses for the facility consistent with a residential area.

(4) The provincial licensing system is akin to that of a dentist's office and is clearly insufficient for the planned use of the site by the city and the province.

The proposed rezoning changes the fundamental nature of the community, zoned as a park area. The concerns of the residents of St. James regarding the safety, property values and the way of life are not being properly addressed.

(6) The people of St. James are largely hard-working, blue collar, middle-class citizens who are family-oriented toward children and seniors and do not have the financial resources of some other neighbourhoods.

This type of facility would never be considered for the popular Assiniboine Park nor for Heubach park, the park between Park Blvd. East and Park Blvd. West, even though it shares the same zoning designation as the Vimy Arena site.

The City and the Province would be setting a dangerous precedent with this, quote, unquote, process that could put other neighbourhoods at risk for future unwanted development without proper consultation.

(9) The Province needs to be inclusive in its decision-making process and improve its programs to prevent drug abuse and better supervise the

provision of drug prescriptions that could lead to addictive behaviour.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility.

I present this on behalf of Barry Garrett, Arlene [*phonetic*] Garrett, Tracy Caton and many others.

Madam Speaker: The member has not read the petition as printed, and I would ask, is there leave to accept the petition as printed? [*Agreed*]

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

The background to this petition is as follows:

1. The residents of Assiniboia, St. James, greater Winnipeg area and Manitoba are concerned with the intention expressed by the City of Winnipeg (City) to use the Vimy Arena site as an addictions treatment facility.

2. The Vimy Arena site is in the middle of a residential area near many schools, churches, community clubs and senior homes and the City has not considered better suited locations in rural, semi-rural or industrial locations such as St. Boniface industrial park or the 20,000 acres at Centre Port.

3. The City of Winnipeg has indicated that the Vimy Arena site will be rezoned from park to commercial use to accommodate the addiction treatment facility and has not sought public input from the community to consider better uses for this facility consistent with a residential area.

4. The provincial licensing system is akin to that of a dentist's office and is clearly insufficient for the planned use of the site by the city and the province.

5. The proposed rezoning changes the fundamental nature of the community, zoned as a park area, and the concern of residents of St. James regarding safety, property values, and their way of life are not being properly addressed.

6. The people of St. James are largely hard-working, blue collar, and middle class citizens who are family-oriented toward children and seniors, and do not have the financial resources of other neighborhoods.

7. *This type of facility would never be considered for the popular Assiniboine park nor for Heubach Park (park between Park Blvd. east and west) even though it shares the same zoning designation as the Vimy Arena site.*

8. *The City and province would be setting a dangerous precedent with this "process" that could put other neighbourhoods at risk for future unwanted development without proper consultation.*

9. *The province needs to be inclusive in the decision making process and improve its programs to prevent drug abuse and better supervise the provision of drug prescriptions that could lead to addictive behaviour.*

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Provincial Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Vimy Arena site is not used for an addiction treatment facility.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Further petitions?

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years old, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and

recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agency appointed by them.

Signed by Raven Rickner, Jasmine Smith, Carrie Lacnus [*phonetic*] and many other Manitobans.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reason—these are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years old, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol for MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to 'immediacly'-immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Alenna Mark, Indira Cortes and Megan Fry.

Medical Laboratory Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislature.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provision of laboratory services to medical clinics and physicians' offices has been historically, and continues to be, a private sector service.

(2) It is vitally important that there be competition in laboratory services to allow medical clinics to seek solutions from more than one provider to control costs and to improve service for health professionals and patients.

* (14:50)

Under the present provincial government, Dynacare, an Ontario-based subsidiary of a US company, has acquired Unicity labs, resulting in a monopoly situation for the provision of laboratory services in medical clinics and physicians' offices.

With the creation of this monopoly there has been the closure of many laboratories by Dynacare in and around the city of Winnipeg. Since the acquisition of Unicity labs, Dynacare has made it more difficult for some medical offices by changing the collection schedules of patients' specimens and charging some medical offices for collection services.

These closures have created a situation where a great number of patients are less well-served, having to travel significant distances in some cases, waiting considerable periods of time and sometimes being denied or having to leave without obtaining lab

services. The situation is particularly critical for patients requiring fasting blood draws, as they may experience complications that could be life-threatening based on their individual health situations.

Furthermore, Dynacare has instructed that all patients requiring immediate results, STAT's patients, such as patients with suspicious internal infections, be directed to its King Edward location. This creates unnecessary obstacles for the patients who are required to travel to that lab rather than simply collecting the test in their doctor's office. This new directive by Dynacare presents a direct risk to patients' health. This has further resulted in patients opting to visit emergency rooms rather than travelling twice, which increases cost to the public health-care system.

Medical clinics and physicians' offices service thousands of patients in their communities and have structured their offices to provide a one-stop service, acting as a health-care front line that takes off some of the load from emergency rooms. The creation of this monopoly has been problematic to many medical clinics and physicians, hampering their ability to provide high-quality and complete service to their patients due to closures of so many laboratories.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to request Dynacare to reopen the closed laboratories or allow Diagnostic Services of Manitoba to freely open labs in clinics which formerly housed labs that have been shut down by Dynacare.

To urge the provincial government to ensure high-quality lab services for patients and a level playing field and competition in the provision of laboratory services to medical offices.

To urge the provincial government to address this matter immediately in the interest of better patient-focused care and improved support for health professionals.

Signed by Benjamin Waschuk, Steve Kotz, Joyce Murphy and many others.

Madam Speaker: The member has not read the petition as printed.

Is there leave to accept the petition as printed?
[Agreed]

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

The background to this petition is as follows:

- 1. The provision of laboratory services to medical clinics and physicians' offices has been historically, and continues to be, a private sector service.*
- 2. It is vitally important that there be competition in laboratory services to allow medical clinics to seek solutions from more than one provider to control costs and to improve service for health professionals and patients.*
- 3. Under the present Provincial Government, Dynacare, an Ontario-based subsidiary of a U.S. company, has acquired Unicity Labs, resulting in a monopoly situation for the provision of laboratory services in medical clinics and physicians' offices.*
- 4. With the creation of this monopoly, there has been the closure of many laboratories by Dynacare in and around the city of Winnipeg. Since the acquisition of Unicity Labs, Dynacare has made it more difficult for some medical offices by changing the collection schedules of patients' specimens and charging some medical offices for collection services.*
- 5. These closures have created a situation where a great number of patients are less well served, having to travel significant distances in some cases, waiting considerable periods of time and sometimes being denied or having to leave without obtaining lab services. The situation is particularly critical for patients requiring fasting blood draws, as they may experience complications that could be life threatening based on their individual health situations.*
- 6. Furthermore, Dynacare has instructed that all patients requiring immediate results (STAT's patients, such as patients with suspicious internal infections) be directed to its King Edward location. This creates unnecessary obstacles for the patients who are required to travel to that lab rather than simply completing the test in their doctor's office. This new directive by Dynacare presents a direct risk to patients' health. This has further resulted in patients opting to visit emergency rooms rather than traveling twice, which increases cost to the public health care system.*
- 7. Medical clinics and physicians' offices service thousands of patients in their communities and have structured their offices to provide a one-stop service, acting as a healthcare front line that takes off some*

of the load from emergency rooms. The creation of this monopoly has been problematic to many medical clinics and physicians, hampering their ability to provide high quality and complete service to their patients due to closures of so many laboratories.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

- 1. To urge the Provincial Government to request Dynacare to reopen the closed laboratories or allow Diagnostic Services of Manitoba to freely open labs in clinics which formerly housed labs that have been shut down by Dynacare.*
- 2. To urge the Provincial Government to ensure high quality lab services for patients and a level playing field and competition in the provision of laboratory services to medical offices.*
- 3. To urge the Provincial Government to address this matter immediately in the interest of better patient focused care and improved support for health professionals.*

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). The title of the resolution is Provincial Government Cuts to Education Hurts Manitoba Students.

Madam Speaker: Pursuant to rule 33(8), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Concordia. The title of the resolution is Provincial Government Cuts to Education Hurt Manitoba Students.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader): Would you kindly canvass the House for leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only so that the Department of Infrastructure will be considered in room 255 instead of Executive Council?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only so that the

Department of Infrastructure will be considered in room 255 instead of Executive Council? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

So, it has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this—oh. Oh, okay.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the members of the Chamber for the consideration. I would ask that you call Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: It has now been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon.

The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply. Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

GROWTH, ENTERPRISE AND TRADE

* (15:00)

Madam Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Growth, Enterprise and Trade.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I guess we'll probably start with some follow-up from yesterday's discussions.

The minister had given some examples yesterday of organizations that have seen their funding frozen or reduced. Can the minister undertake to provide me a list of organizations that received grant money from the department for the last year and this year's budget? I'd like to see the budgeted amount and the actual amounts provided for last year as well as how much he has budgeted these organizations for this year.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): So that would be for 2017-18 and then what's budgeted for '18-19.

Mr. Lindsey: Yes.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. We can provide that. We can get that list for you. We don't have it here right now, but we will get that list for you.

But, while I have the floor, Madam Chair, staff has worked up some numbers for you in—from yesterday. You were asking for FTEs by division in the department, and we have that for 2016-17, '17-18 and '18-19. And then we have vacancy rates for '18-19 by division. So I will—do I need to read this into Hansard? *[interjection]* No? I can just—I believe I can just indicate that I've handed it over to the member and if he has any more questions, we'll certainly endeavour to answer them.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the minister for providing that information so promptly. Clearly, I'll need a little bit of time to look it over before I have more questions. So I'm sure we will come back to that at some point in time.

Where was I now? I'd like to return to a question from yesterday. The minister said there were 400.3 FTEs in the department in '16-17, and this year he's projecting 341. And then he said at current this is a 12 per cent vacancy rate currently in his department, which is about another 41 jobs vacant. Do I have the numbers correct?

Mr. Pedersen: Approximately 40.

Mr. Lindsey: So that would seem to be about 25 per cent of the positions of the minister's department has either been cut or are currently vacant since this government's first budget. Is that correct?

Mr. Pedersen: So there has been a reduction of 58 FTEs over the past two years, which is approximately 14 per cent reduction. And I just kind of caution the member when he's talking about vacancy rates, although it is about 12 per cent right now vacancy rate, it does fluctuate. It's a snapshot in time. Over the long term, it runs about 8 per cent; currently it's 12 per cent. And it's just—when you take that one snapshot it's right there now. But it's—and we're working hard to fill those positions.

Mr. Lindsey: So you're suggesting that the 25 per cent reduction in positions that I've talked about is not the correct number?

Mr. Pedersen: We're looking at—again, I just repeat that we're looking at about a reduction of 58 FTEs, which is about 14 per cent. Now, if you want to add 14 per cent reduction and a 12 per cent current vacancy rate to get 26 per cent, if that's the number you're getting to—but I think you have to—and I believe we talked about this yesterday. We have to separate staff reductions with vacancy rate. They're not the same. Every business, every government

department, including this, has a vacancy rate. So that should not be added on top of reductions in order to look at a larger reduction in a workforce, because if we were at full complement, if we had zero vacancy rate we would be reduced by 14 per cent which is those 58 FTEs.

So I just caution you not to add the two numbers together to get a larger percentage. Mind you, if you wanted to do that, you can; it's just—we'll just agree to disagree on that.

Mr. Lindsey: You—if you start off with a 8 per cent vacancy rate, you get rid of 14 per cent and still have 8 per cent, 12 per cent. I mean, I'm not going to quibble that the vacancy rate you talk about, it could be 8 per cent, could be 12 per cent. But, really, the total number is the additive number. Since you've taken office that 14 per cent of the vacancy rate is 14 per cent of people—14 per cent of positions have gone, and year over year you've averaged still 8 to 12 per cent. So in total there's more than just the 14 per cent. It may not be 25, but it's something more than 14.

Mr. Pedersen: If the member would go back over the last 17—and I guess we can talk 19 years almost, now—there's always been a vacancy rate averaging around 8 per cent. It will fluctuate higher and lower. My staff is telling me that just yesterday they got notice of a person putting in notice to resign, totally unexpected. So that's what vacancy rates are all about.

We are actively—you must separate out the 14 per cent. The 58 FTEs are gone; they are not coming back. But that 12 per cent vacancy rate that we've got right now, we are actively looking to hire people in there. So it is not the same as a reduction in staff. We are not purposely leaving those positions vacant. What we found when we came into government that there was a large number of vacancy rates, and if you were familiar with how budgets run, if you wanted to inflate your department to have money to use elsewhere, you would keep those vacancy rates high in order to have that money allocate, because once a position is allocated there's a budget there.

*(15:10)

We're not doing that. We are using—we have reduced FTEs. We are not going to replace that reduction of 58 FTEs. It's a move to streamline government. And then we have besides that—a totally separate issue—is the vacancy rate. And we are

actively trying to fill those positions. We need those positions filled and we will continue to work on that. I don't know how to describe it any clearer. If you want to run out and combine the two and message it however you want, that's your prerogative, but I've told you what exactly is happening in the department.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's not about running out and saying something; it's trying to understand and clarify. So if traditionally—all the way through—the vacancy rate has been 8 per cent, 12 per cent—bounces somewhere in that range whether we're talking the last year, or two years, or five years, or ten years—if that vacancy rate has always remained around that point. But you say you're actively trying to fill those positions. Then next year, would we expect the vacancy rate to go down to 3, 4 per cent? Or is going to remain, still, in the 8 per cent range?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I would be more than happy to come back and tell you that our vacancy rate next year is 3 per cent. That's what we're going to try for, but whether we can achieve that, given retirements—given the Baby Boomer population, there is a large number of retirements happening. It is getting in every business, go out and talk to every business out there, they're having trouble replacing workers, whether they retire, whether they move to—you know. We also know, I guess.

I'll try to explain this: there is no loyalty in the workforce anymore.

It used to be there was a person would get a career and they would stay there for 30 years. You should know this, but I'll explain it anyway.

Nowadays, my children's generation, who are in their 30s, they will have—the average career is five different careers. So people move, whether it's from the civil service, whether it's from private business, they move around.

So government is no different than private industry on this. There is a vacancy rate out—go talk to any business out there that's looking to recruit workers. They have a vacancy rate. We will endeavour to reduce our overall vacancy rate from the current 8 per cent and we will do our level best. We need those people in a department to keep the department working to achieve the goals that we have set for the department.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for your answer, and trust me, I would dearly love if people could have a career

that they didn't have to continually move around. Unfortunately, that's not the world that any of us live in at the moment.

Just looking at the chart that you've just given me, where it talks about the adjustment. So 2016-17, there was 400 and then there's an adjustment of 55.5. Was that part of a budgetary process or did it happen mid-stream? Mid-year, that it wasn't part of the budgeted?

Madam Chairperson: Before I recognize the minister, I'd like to remind all members to direct your comments through the Chair. It helps for a more respectful conversation, thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: It's a budget process.

Mr. Lindsey: So all of those 55 that disappeared, that was included in the 2016-17 budget? It wasn't a number that happened after the budget was released, it wasn't a mid-year reduction in workforce, it wasn't projected in your budget—in the budget?

Mr. Pedersen: So, over the last two years, these 58 FTEs have been reduced through the budget process. Budgets were set. The 58 FTEs were identified over the past two years as part of the budget process.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that.

Let's see. So you had said that an economic development strategy will be coming at some point in the months ahead. I was wondering, could you share a rough timeline when you think that economic development strategy might be available?

Mr. Pedersen: As I mentioned yesterday, the public consultations are getting under way with Dave Angus and Barb Gamey, and that is scheduled right now to wrap up by the end of April.

Again, we're keeping those dates a little bit open because if there's an overwhelming desire for more input from them we would certainly look to extend it somewhat. But we also know we need to wrap this up. They'll bring in their report. And I can't give you a firm date as to when we will publicly release our economic development strategy, but we would expect by summer sometime.

We know we need to get it done because we're already working on next year's budget. The budget process never stops. So we need to know where our economic development programs will be so that we can again then start putting them into the budget process going forward. So we're—we want to do it as

quickly as possible, but at the same time, we want to make sure we get it right.

Mr. Lindsey: The reason that I'm somewhat concerned is that both the money in this department and the staffing that might support the economic development strategy have been reduced for this year, right. Is it the intention to increase funding in year—is it the intention to increase funding in year-to-year support a new economic development strategy, or will the department be working with existing resources?

* (15:20)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Madam Chair, through you to the member.

What the member is attempting to do is prejudice the outcome of the consultations, and that's—they're—that defeats the purpose of having consultations if we've already 'prejud'. We have not prejudged what the economic development budget shall look like or the roll out of it or whatever. We want to get this public consultation in as soon as possible so that then we can begin to work on an economic development program.

We are not prejudging the outcome of this to—I cannot tell you right now—I can—sorry, I'll correct myself. I can tell you right now that we will not prejudice the outcome in terms of budget.

Mr. Lindsey: So then I'm to assume that if the consultation process suggests that you need to add money to the budget, you need to add money to the existing pool in year to reach your goals, that you're not opposed to doing that. Otherwise, you would, in fact, be prejudging the outcome if you're saying, well, it doesn't matter what they come up with. They only have this much money to spend.

Mr. Pedersen: You can make all the assumptions you want. We're not working on assumptions.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm just asking the minister if he, in fact, is opposed to the idea or in favour of the idea if the consultation process suggests that more money needs to be directed to the economic development strategy, that he will not force the strategy to stay within the existing budgetary confines, but will commit existing funds if that's what the strategy suggests should be done.

Mr. Pedersen: You can ask the question 17 different ways, it doesn't matter. I will not prejudice the economic development outreach that we've got right now. We need to see what we—for feedback what we

get in order to develop a new strategic economic development plan for the entire province.

Mr. Lindsey: I'll try once more, because it seems that if you're not prepared to make a commitment to increase the funding, if and only if that's what your budget or your consultation process suggests, then, in fact, the process is prejudged because it can only operate within the confines of the existing dollars. If the minister is prepared to suggest that new dollars could be added if that's what's determined to be required, then that's in fact not prejudging the system; that's allowing the system to determine what the dollars need be to achieve the goal.

Mr. Pedersen: The public consultations being done by Dave Angus and Barb Gamey are open to the public. I would suggest to the member that he make a presentation to the public presentations to lobby for whatever he is asking for or presuming that the outcome should be. I would really encourage him to do a presentation to them. We are not prescribing what they shall say, do. We are open to what the public has to say about this and then we will make our decisions based on the public presentations.

Mr. Lindsey: So the department has previously frozen funds for economic development. Now it's been cut. Yet the minister suggests that there may be money in the future, although he certainly has not committed any money for the future, depending on the outcome of this consultation process. So I'm left to assume, then, that that money might be in 2019-2020 if there is any increase in budget for the economic development.

I believe that the minister had previously said something about raid, raid, and then have a parade. And I'm wondering, now that he's starved the economic development initiatives for years, will there be more resources for economic of-development purposes just before the next election?

Mr. Pedersen: Now, I know about the steady growth signs by the previous government, how these signs miraculously sprung up all over the country. There was always steady growth signs, but there was never any signs of steady growth.

So, you know, if he thinks that we're going to take a page from the NDP playbook where you hold money back—in fact, we're even concerned about the federal government doing that right now, about holding back money just before an election. We believe in the economy, that the economy will drive this province, and we're going to do what's best for

the economy, not what's best for how we get re-elected, unlike the NDP who did that year in and year out, where they saved—raid, raid, raid, and then there was the parade. He was absolutely correct; that's what the NDP did, and I'm glad he's quoting what the NDP did. They were masters at that, and we will not do that.

Mr. Lindsey: I don't know if I should be happy or sad with that answer, because that would tell me that he's not planning to increase any funding for economic development going forward, which is too bad. But let's move on.

Can the minister tell me how much the Province's funding was for Research Manitoba in 2016-2017 and how much he's planning to provide for Research Manitoba this year?

Mr. Pedersen: I can provide those numbers. It was approximately \$17 million in 2016-17; it was \$15 million and change in 2017-18 and it is now budgeted at \$12 million and change for '18-19.

And I might add that we've—we have met a number of times, including a couple of weeks ago—yes, it was two weeks ago—we met with Research Manitoba. They are working very well with us. We've worked with—on administration costs with them, and they are continuing to do their programming.

I should add, I encourage all members and everyone in attendance in the room today that Research Manitoba will be in the Rotunda at 5 o'clock today showing off the research that they are doing in many different facets of our economy, and they will continue to do great work.

Mr. Lindsey: So that would appear to be, to me at least, quite a significant in reduction for funding for Research Manitoba. Could you—could the minister explain just why Research Manitoba has seen their funding cut by such a large amount?

*(15:30)

Mr. Pedersen: I think what's important to recognize, too, is that we were funding over 83 different agencies. I believe we went through this yesterday. Some of these agencies were going to various departments and topping up money from different departments.

All our economic development agencies have seen reductions and Research Manitoba is no different from the other agencies. Research Manitoba was one of the—was the largest individual

organization, and that's why it looks—and it is significant, the reduction to them, but as a percentage-wise, it is not as high as other agencies and we, like I said, we continue to work with Research Manitoba and they continue to do great work.

Mr. Lindsey: Would the minister comment, perhaps, on whether he thinks that great work will continue or will they struggle to do some of that great work with reduced funding that's been proposed?

Mr. Pedersen: No. Their work is continuing. There's no doubt about it. Again, I encourage the member and all members and the public, really, to be in the rotunda tonight and you'll see some of the great work that they're continuing to do in different facets—just give me half a moment; I'll even tell you about some of the great things that they're doing in different—what they call a world-class research event. They are doing research in—improves health outcomes, building materials for infrastructure, clean energy that combats climate change. That's just a few of the things that they're into. They do a lot of different research and they are continuing to do that research and we have very good relations with them and they are fully committed to continuing to do the great work they do.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm sure that their intention is to continue the great work, but it seems to me that it's going to become somewhat more difficult for them to carry on the good work they do if the funding level continually decreases.

You've said that several of these agencies were getting funding from other departments. Perhaps you could tell me which other departments Research Manitoba is getting funding from.

Mr. Pedersen: Research Manitoba has been very successful in leveraging money from the private sector, from the federal government, and they are continuing to do this, but, you know, the member talks—speaks that there's—what he doesn't take into account, that there's a lot of other things that affect Research Manitoba. A higher PST affected Research Manitoba. Broadening the PST affected Research Manitoba. The lack of raising basic personal exemption affects everyone who worked at Research Manitoba. There's a lot more at play in every organization and every person in Manitoba than how much money the government grants to them, and the member is—seems to be rather fixated on the idea that the only source of money is from government. There is a lot more out there in Manitoba than just the

Manitoba government, and as we've seen, we are working—we are struggling with a crippling debt in Manitoba that we need to reduce in order to make life even more affordable for Manitobans, including the people and the organizations, the people who work at Research Manitoba and the organizations such as Research Manitoba.

So they will continue to operate. It is not entirely contingent on how much money they get from GET, Growth, Enterprise and Trade. So there are lots of other factors at play and the good folks who are running organizations like Research Manitoba understand that, and that's why we can sit down at the same table and talk to them and work out how they're going to be moving forward in the future.

Mr. Lindsey: So, just to be clear, when the minister had suggested that this group, Research Manitoba, as he suggested, all or many of the other entities funded by Growth, Enterprise and Trade have been getting funding from elsewhere in this government, that's not really the case in the Research Manitoba. They got their funding from Growth, Enterprise and Trade. There was no other funding from a different department, is that correct?

Mr. Pedersen: Just to correct the assumption again that the member made. I did not say all agencies were tapping into other departments. I said some agencies were, and I'll give you a couple of examples of agencies who were—funding was reduced from GET to them. One of them is called Futurpreneur, and they went out—they had a funding reduction, but they went out and found other sources to match what was—what they were getting from us previously, and there's—very successful at helping young people. They focus on young people starting businesses and they've been very successful.

Another organization that saw reduced funding from us, and I mentioned this yesterday, is Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. They have gone out and found other sources of money, private sources of money to replace money, grant money, that was coming from government, because they realize, as all these organizations realize, that it's not a bottomless pit when it comes to government money, contrary to the way the member wants to think that there is a bottomless pit from government that it just keeps throwing more money out the door every day. And we don't do that. We're going to be fiscally responsible to all Manitobans and fiscally responsible to these organizations, too, because they have realized that they have to be fiscally

responsible, and that's why they've gone out and asked for money.

Mr. Lindsey: So there was no other Manitoba government source of funding for Research Manitoba; it's merely through Growth, Enterprise and Trade?

Mr. Pedersen: Not that we're aware of.

Mr. Lindsey: Cooperative Development also saw a reduction this year, and, again, I'm wondering if the minister can give me somewhat of an overview of what that division's activities are.

* (15:40)

Mr. Pedersen: So the Cooperative Development branch encourages a formation of new co-operatives and maintenance of existing co-operatives by providing information and advisory services to new and existing co-operatives.

So they provide information, advisory service, assistance regarding the formation and operation of co-operatives, research prospective co-operative models in the relation and adaptation to Manitoba environment, supports Cooperative Loans and Loans Guarantee Board, co-operative community strategies, steering committee and working groups and co-operative assistance fund.

So this is to help co-ops, whether they're forming a new co-operative or the maintenance of existing co-operatives, and I can tell the member that a lifetime ago I was part of an organization that did get a small grant from this. It'd be under the NDP regime, because I'm trying to think of when it was. It was probably around 1990 that we formed a feeder cattle co-operative and we got a small grant from there and—interesting, because we financed it ourselves. There was about 15 of us that financed it.

We lent money out to cattle producers to borrow money to feed—to buy feeder cattle. There was about a dozen of us at the time when our manager absconded with about \$120,000 out of our co-operative, and all 12 of us signed \$10,000 cheques and replaced it rather than going back to the co-operative fund that would have picked up the loss—or actually Manitoba government would have picked up the loss.

So that's true entrepreneurship.

Mr. Lindsey: That's nice.

So how close to budget did the Cooperative Development come in 2017-2018?

Mr. Pedersen: The results aren't in yet. They're still being audited and the final results will be in in the fall of 2018.

Mr. Lindsey: It appears that the Cooperative Development was actually significantly over budget in 2016-2017 due to loan provisions. So could you just explain what that is and how that works?

Mr. Pedersen: In 2016-17 there was a \$1.643-million provision, loan provision put in the budget that had to be put in because in previous years when there was a loan provision put, given there, it was not on the books. There was a—money budgeted for a loan provision but it was not entered into the books and it had to be entered because that provision was still standing. So that's why it showed up in '16-17, when it should have been done several years before.

Mr. Lindsey: So the adjusted budget line for that division was 601—I think that's million; today it's 360. So that's been pretty much cut in half. Can the minister, then, explain what services or what else has been reduced to achieve this?

Mr. Pedersen: So, under Cooperative Development, the estimate, the budget amount for '16-17 was \$421,000. The actual then for 2016-17 came in at \$2,031,000, which makes for a variance, in this case an over budget of \$1,610,000, which goes back to this \$1,000,643 that was not in a loan lock. This variance is primarily due to the requirement to book a loan provision that was not booked previous years before that.

Mr. Lindsey: So you're telling me the budget for Cooperative Development hasn't been cut or—?

* (15:50)

Mr. Pedersen: So, in expenditures in this, it was—the estimated expenditures for '17-18 were \$386,000. The estimated expenditures in 2018-19 are \$360,000. So it's about a \$26,000 reduction.

Mr. Lindsey: And what—the number in 2016-2017, then, was the \$601,000. But you're saying that's because of previous unbooked numbers?

Mr. Pedersen: So, in 2016-17, there was \$230,000 in a separate line for Cooperative Development. And what we've done is we've streamlined the grant process across the department. And this goes into PEG funding—partners for economic growth. It's called PEG funding.

And in '17-18, and again in '18-19, that becomes part of our PEG funding.

Mr. Lindsey: So, then, the overall money available for grant money in this PEG funding increased or decreased for the coming years?

Mr. Pedersen: That all depends, again, on where we land on for a final number.

Again, going back to our economic development review, that PEG funding is part of our economic development program as a—as—the program as a whole. So we are working on—we will be working on that once we hear back from Dave Angus and Barb Gamey.

Mr. Lindsey: So you've already moved funding for grants out of Cooperative Development into this PEG fund, but you don't know how much money is going to be available in this PEG fund, is that?

Mr. Pedersen: That's correct.

Mr. Lindsey: So how do we know how much money is available, then, for grants now? We don't, because you haven't determined that yet. Is that correct?

Mr. Pedersen: Correct.

Mr. Lindsey: Look at that. Next thing on the list is Partnerships for Economic Growth. So it also saw another year of reduction. Can the minister give me your—his sense of the companies that this division works with?

Mr. Pedersen: So the Partnerships for Economic Growth, PEG funding as we refer to it, and grant assessments were merged with our other grant funding, again, to—I say expand a single window, but it's getting it to a single-window approach to Manitoba funding for economic development partners. There are approximately 13 recipients under PEG funding and yes, that's what PEG funding is.

Mr. Lindsey: So there's 13 recipients under the existing PEG fund, but you're rolling other funding into this group, so will there be groups that are presently funded or partially funded or receive funding from a different division of Growth, Enterprise and Trade that will now fall under this funding entity?

Mr. Pedersen: So that's the purpose of the single window, is before there was the PEG program, there was other programs, as we talked about the

cooperative branch, and there was other funding streams within Growth, Enterprise and Trade.

And what we're doing is getting it into a single window so that it's easier for organizations to apply. They know that—prior to this, they didn't know whether they fit under PEG funding, whether they fit under a different program, whatever. We want to get it simplified so it's under one approach.

We also will know the total funds that we will have available so that we can make better determination or easier determination of who is getting funding and how much funding they're getting. This is red-tape reduction, really, is what you could call it, because it's simpler, nothing's—it's easier for both government and for the agencies that are applying here, that everyone's working off the same page, and we know how to—we can maneuver the system much better than what was previous.

Because that was one of the things that I found when I came into this department back in August, that there was PEG funding, there was cooperatives funding, there was other kinds of funding. Now we're streamlining it into one, and I can tell you, if I can understand it better, I'm sure the department loves it a lot better too, because it's so much easier to navigate, and not only for government, but for the agencies that we're involved with funding.

* (16:00)

Mr. Lindsey: Imagine how much fun we'll have when I understand it.

So, you've said that there's other entities that have been funded elsewhere, that now will fall into this single-peg funding thing, and yet when I look at the budget line, the adjusted budget line for 2016-2017 was \$6.3 million. This budget, it's approximately \$5.8 million, approximately \$500,000 reduction.

So, while you're saying, on the one hand, there's going to be more groups funnelled into this single window to get grant funding, the total amount is actually going to be reduced. Is that correct?

Mr. Pedersen: Again, I'll just go back to those approximately 83 different groups and agencies that we were funding before, and this is—will be part of our economic development strategy, is to—those 83 were applying under various programs within the department of Growth, Enterprise and Trade. What we are doing is moving them into a single window, so that it is easier for them to navigate, easier for

government to navigate, and again, will be based on the results of Dave Angus and Barb Gamey as their economic development outreach unfolds, and they put it—give it to the department for us then to work on.

There is—again, you're making assumptions that are not—are only based on speculation. We are not speculating. What we're doing is creating a single window to work much better for both government and the organizations and it will be based on—it'll be much—with a single window, it will be easier for government to have reporting back on results of the organizations that we are funding. Because it was scattered before, there was not tracking of results in previous years. We've started to do that, but it'll be much simpler under a single window.

Mr. Lindsey: So the single window, one place, one-stop shopping, where entities can go to get grants, to get funding, I get that concept. I understand that there may be some savings potentially there, but if everybody that's presently being funded under different programs is now going to be funded under this division, clearly, not everybody's going to get funded or not everybody's going to get funded at the same level, if the budget has been set already at \$500,000 less than what it was, just for this one window, when there's now people from multiple windows coming here. So how does that work?

Clearly, somebody's not getting the funding that they were getting.

Mr. Pedersen: So under the previous administration—and I'll go back to there because the member likes to keep going back to '16-17 and—which was a result of previous years' mismanagement of budgets. There was a lack of co-ordination within economic development. There was many streams to apply for funding. There was a lack of accountability to follow through to find out if we were getting results on that money—on the grant money that was been given out. There was different agency—or different organizations that were competing with each other and duplication, but the government had no idea—government at the time. The past government at the time had no idea whether there was duplication because you weren't following this because you had different streams that you were handing out grant funding on.

What we're saying now—and furthermore, it was on kind of a first-come-first-served basis before which, depending on the organization, if they were really good and really fast at getting their application

in, they had a better chance of getting it rather than—and it shouldn't be on a timing basis; it should be on a return-on-investment basis that you're doing this. Because we're looking for the best outcomes and we're trying to get this—we will get this aligned with our economic strategy which will be rolled out this summer.

And I don't know why the member has this idea that just because it's going to a single window, that automatically means—you take an—a group of organizations under a group of funding agencies, so now we're taking—what was—that was in the past. Now we're taking a group of agencies and putting them under a single window. Instead of having multiple funding mechanisms, we will have one funding mechanism, and that does not affect the net outcome of the group. It just means that we will have better organization within the department, and we'll have better use of taxpayers' money when there is grant money given out.

Mr. Lindsey: So the bottom line is there's less grant money going to be given out because entities won't have other streams to go to to get grant money. They're going to be directed to partnerships and economic growth, the single window that's already seen its budget cut for this year by \$500,000.

So never mind the money that might not be available from other divisions within Growth, Enterprise and Trade. Now we already know that there's less money going to be available for grants under the single window than there was available under the multiple windows. While it may be a laudable goal to simplify things and have a single window, a single source, when the source budget is been reduced before the other streams even come into it, it's only a logical conclusion, then, that the amount of grant money going out is going to be less.

* (16:10)

Mr. Pedersen: I guess I'll start to say that the member's assumption is wrong because he seems to think that multiple agencies funding—multiple funding streams within a department is somehow more efficient than one stream, and we'll just agree to disagree on that.

We think we're going to have—we know we're going to have a much better system here with one stream. It will be better for government; it will be better for the organizations that we're funding. It will align with our strategic planning going forward, and it's about—and we've seen this from different

organizations. And, again, I'll use the two that are the best examples here; Futurpreneur and CME have been very successful at attracting private investment. And I know that term's a little foreign to the member, that he doesn't necessarily like the private sector, but there is—these are organizations that are working in the private sector that understand the private sector, and they've been encouraged to go out and seek private funding to top up their funding so that they are successful and continue to be successful. And organizations like Futurpreneur and CME continue to be very successful in spite of funding reductions from our—from government, and that's the bottom line.

We're looking for better outcomes from—for both government and for the organizations that we are funding.

Mr. Lindsey: So the Industrial Technology Centre has also seen a significant reduction this year. What all companies does the Industrial Technology Centre support?

Mr. Pedersen: Sorry, I just didn't quite hear your—could you repeat your question, please?

Mr. Lindsey: Certainly. The Industrial Technology Centre saw a significant reduction this year. Can the minister give me a sense of what companies the centre supports?

Mr. Pedersen: The Industrial Technology Centre, ITC, does calibration testing for a wide range of industries, both domestic and foreign industries. One of the things they do is lottery ticket testing for Manitoba—for all lotteries across Canada and outside of Canada, so they're—they are doing—it's a business that is doing calibration testing. If it's in business, it should be able to recover their costs of operating and, hopefully, be profitable. Out of the testing that they're doing for the industry, if they are—if they're not that means that government has to subsidize an industry. And we don't believe we should be subsidizing—what we're doing, then, is we're—this government is subsidizing industry so that they get a cheaper rate on their testing. And we don't believe that that is a good model for government to be subsidizing industry.

Mr. Lindsey: So just to clear up for me, if we can: There was a budgeted amount from the government that went to the industrial technology centre. Was that whole amount expended—given to the centre in 2017-18, or was something less than that?

Mr. Pedersen: It was. Just a minute.

So just to back up a bit: The ITC is, again more acronyms, special operating agencies, an agency, which is, which is—which we call an S.O.A. So they're—actually operate independent of government, although they receive government funding. And, in this year, it was 700—the budgeted amount was 730,000 for '17-18. We—I cannot tell you right now how much of that they've actually spent because as an S.O.A., a special operating agency, they will do an annual report. The annual report will come in in the fall; it's a public document. And then we—they will then report as to whether they did spend the entire budget or how much they spent. So right now I can't tell you how much of the budgeted amount they actually spent.

Mr. Lindsey: What about for '16-17, then? Do you know what the budgeted amount was and how much of that was spent?

Mr. Pedersen: We don't have it right here, but it's—that's a public document. It's available. If you cannot find it, your research can't find it, then we can provide that. But it's a public document. It's—I believe they're tabled in the House, so it is a public document.

Mr. Lindsey: I would certainly appreciate your offer that—or the minister's offer that he supplies that. It would speed up the process rather than me trying to find it.

Is the minister prepared to do that?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, as long as it's not me that has to find it on a computer. I have full confidence in my staff that they can do that, and we can get it to you and get it—either bring it here for the next time we're in Estimates, or get it to you one way or the other. My staff is very good at that. And, like I said, as long as I don't have to do it, you're okay—so.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the minister for that. I certainly have confidence in his staff too.

The Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit, it stays the same budget amount. But, in 2016-2017, it was underspent by approximately \$300,000. Can the minister tell me why that was?

* (16:20)

Mr. Pedersen: The Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit: first of all, it's based on a calendar year because it is a tax credit. So it's based on calendar year rather than government fiscal year, and because it's a tax credit, the year that the member is talking about it was underspent by \$298,000. That has

nothing to do with government. That depends on two things. First of all, it depends on the uptake of the program if there is sufficient—from this number, then, there was not sufficient money coming—or not sufficient application on the tax credit coming forward. And it could even be a timing issue because timing—if they didn't get it in on our fiscal year and yet it's on a calendar year, there's an overlap there between the two. So—and it remains at—it was at 1.3—and it remains—oh, sorry, at \$1.3 million, and it remains at \$1.3 million.

And that is—again, it's a tax credit. We realize the importance of this. This has been a very popular tax credit that continues to be—and that's why it is maintained in the '18-19 budget as the same.

Mr. Lindsey: So do you know—does the minister know how much it was underspent in 2017-2018, if it was underspent.

Mr. Pedersen: That will be reported in the fourth quarter, which will be in the fall.

Mr. Lindsey: So just to wrap up this kind of section, over the last couple of years the Pallister government has massively reduced its programming and assistance for business development and much of it has been done in year, so it's not really clear until well into the fiscal year how deep the cuts are actually going to be.

Full-time employment, fallen by 5,000 jobs; thousands more job losses coming in the North alone in the coming years; what role does the minister see government playing in trying to address these job losses?

Mr. Pedersen: The member must have missed the budget for '18-19. There's tax credits coming. The basic personal exemption is being increased in—on January 1st, 2019, January 1st, 2020, which puts more money in the—on the kitchen table of Manitobans.

We've increased the tax credit—business tax credit from \$450,000 to \$500,000, which helps companies—that puts another \$50,000 into the company, allows the company to continue to grow.

We are doing—the member talks about the North; as pessimistic as he is about the North, I am actually very optimistic. I spoke with a fellow this morning who is doing the tourism within the Interlake and he is really excited about the tourism opportunities, which I think you can carry over into the North. There is tremendous opportunities. We spoke about

that yesterday and I won't bother going back into the funding—the extra funding that Travel Manitoba has on the programs that Manitoba travel has, the partnerships that Travel Manitoba has.

We've got our mining protocol which is going to help develop mines in the long run. We've got optimism from the mining sector to come to Manitoba. They call Manitoba the great untapped resource. And, you know, as much as the member wants to be pessimistic about the North, as a government we're very optimistic in the long run for the North. It's not going to turn around right away, but then after 17 years of chasing the mining industry out of Manitoba, it's going to take a bit to restore some confidence there, and that's what we're doing. Our outreach with our indigenous communities has been tremendous. I know the minister of indigenous relations is at the table here. She—between herself, myself and other ministers, we have reached out to every remote community, every indigenous community across Manitoba, not just once because you don't build a relationship on meeting them once. We will continue to build that.

So the long-term outlook for Manitoba is very positive. We'll continue to work on that, and, you know, I realize it's the job of the opposition to be the pessimists, but we're going to—we are optimistic and will remain optimistic, and we'll work with Manitobans to build on that optimism.

Mr. Lindsey: And here I thought I was done.

The Saskatchewan government, for example, has just created a fund to spur exploration in northern Saskatchewan, which has had immediate impacts next door to Flin Flon on the Saskatchewan side where we now see for the first time in many years exploration happening around Creighton, Denare Beach, in that whole area, because funds have been released in—and some property was freed up as well, which helped. But I guess I would like to be very optimistic because I know there's more mines there, and I know that mining can be a significant part of the future of northern Manitoba. But I want to know. It takes a number of years from starting exploration to determining viability of a mine to permitting process to getting the mine up and running to creating those more long-term employment opportunities. So, what, exactly, other than optimism is the government bringing to the table to spur that kind of economic activity in the North?

Mr. Pedersen: I'm sure glad that the member shares my optimism because any development that's happening around Denare Beach, Creighton, in that area, plus the exploration, the private exploration that HudBay is doing in that Snow Lake—between Snow Lake and Flin Flon—member knows the country much better than I do—is going to go a long way to ensuring HudBay remains active in Flin Flon because if there's anything—any resources discovered in that Denare Beach and Creighton area, it is not going—it's going to be a mine there, but it's going to be processed in HudBay, they're not going to build a processor outside of there and—because it all feeds into HudBay.

*(16:30)

One of the biggest concerns that we've heard back from the mining—from prospectors to mine development—mining development companies to the mining companies themselves is the lack of consultation process that was in—that was there up until we have taken up this consultation process. There—when there is uncertainty about being able to invest, investment won't happen, and we are doing our best to take that uncertainty out.

And yes, I agree with him also that mining is a long-term process. We're not going to turn it around overnight, but we've got really positive signs happening and we are quite confident that we, if—when we continue this work of developing the consultation process, when we work with the mining companies to make sure that they get permits timely and prospectors claim—you know, even one of the things that, when we talk to prospectors and the prospectors themselves don't agree on, is doing GPS claims versus actually going out and having to slash the bush—member from Burrows may not want to hear this, but they actually have to slash the bush and drive stakes in the ground to put a claim in, and we're looking at other jurisdictions have gone to GPS claim staking. If we can do this, it saves money, it's better for the environment, et cetera, et cetera, and this is part of the modernization we need.

The mines branch has got tremendous people working in it, but it hasn't been—seen a refresh in 20 years. We need to get up with the mining—the member can probably tell us about how mining has changed, has—the technology changes have happened in the mining industry where they have remote machines running by—we were given an example when, in one of our meetings in Toronto, where you can sit in an office in Toronto at the headquarters

of a mining company and they can watch a machine being worked on—being working in a mine in Argentina. This is the kind of technology that's out there.

Manitoba needs to get up with the times here and we will work hard to make sure that our industry is able to do that.

Mr. Lindsey: Just one more quick question before I turn it over to the member from Burrows.

The minister talked about the consultation with indigenous communities, that there was a deadline that the government had given. I believe it was—was it a year ago that they had hoped to have that consultation process in place and complete? I think there's been a couple of deadlines that have already been missed.

Do you have any sense of what kind of timeline you're looking at to complete that consultation process?

Mr. Pedersen: The member's dates are a bit off. The consultation process actually started last summer. The co-chairs met with a great number of not only communities but also industry reps and people within the mining industry. They are in the process of putting together their report right as we speak, and we expect it to be into the department very shortly. And that was within their mandate was to do that. So it's coming on time, and then we'll take it from there.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I'd like to thank the member from Flin Flon for allowing me 25 minutes today—five more minutes than yesterday. I'll take it.

Yesterday I ended off talking about tourism here in Manitoba, so I'd like to continue on that, just for a few questions. And it's a little bit broad, but a great opportunity as well.

So I'd like to ask the minister: How has tourism been improving here in Manitoba?

Mr. Pedersen: Travel Manitoba, it's—this is one of—just another one of the really exciting things that's happening in Manitoba, with our 96-4 funding model. I'm sure the member understands that; I won't explain that. Our spending—their budget is—as tourism continues to increase, so does their budget, because it's based on Statistics Canada.

Travel Manitoba has done an exceptional job in targeting—having a number of achievable targets. First of all, they have targeted the international

travel, and that would be primarily—and I won't—it's not a full, complete list, but let's see: China, Europe—again, a lot of that is targeted towards Winnipeg, Churchill but—although we are trying to get these international—that's Australia also, Germany. You know, this is the year of China tourism, so there's emphasis from the federal government on there. So that's the international travel.

The other part of the—it's international and domestic travel, but it's the—what we call the drive-in traffic. We're—they are pushing very hard, Travel Manitoba is pushing very hard in that—Minnesota, Iowa, North, South Dakota, Saskatchewan, northwestern Ontario—for that drive-in traffic.

And like, take Folklorama, for example. There's a lot of drive-in traffic for that; that's one event. What they're doing is really tracking that traffic now so that they know how much is coming in and where they're going to and what events are attractive to them—are attracting them here.

The other thing that Travel Manitoba has done is—I'll see if I can get this right, I think it's the rock—the boulder-rock-pebble idea. So the boulder is Manitoba; the rock is bigger centres, such as Winnipeg, Brandon, you know, the well-known ones, as Churchill, Brandon, et cetera; and then the pebbles are rural Manitoba.

As I said, I was just talking to a fellow from the Interlake. He's really excited about building more tourism in the Interlake. Travel Manitoba has worked with communities. They go in, and I used the example yesterday of Portage La Prairie, where they went in and really had the community look inside themselves to see what they have to offer, and where their shortcomings are, what their strengths are. And then I know I had seen a report on—I think it was PortageOnline—how they were impressed with the number of hits that they had on their website after they released their travel promotion—or their tourist promotion within the Portage la Prairie area.

* (16:40)

So there's lots of great things happening. We just will continue to build on them. We've got great staff, great board of directors that's giving them direction. They're doing strategic planning all the time. There's the Northern Tourism Strategy which is part of the Look North that—again, there's tremendous potential in the North to visit Flin Flon, as one of those communities has a very vibrant art community—arts

community. And how do they promote that? How do they get people to—I know Travel Manitoba's been working with the community of Flin Flon. They did one of those sessions with them, too, as to how to promote them.

And so there's lots of great stuff happening. And as I travel the province one of the things that I quite—I try to say all the time is that Manitobans are way too humble. We have to get out and promote ourselves. We—you can't expect people just to come because we're here. We've got to go out and do some bragging about what we have here, and that's everything from your local community. You know, within your own community, within Winnipeg or our own local communities or where we are in Manitoba, there's lots of good things happening.

Ms. Lamoureux: I do have a question about the northern strategy, but just before I talk about that, you put a lot of influence—or you imply that Travel Manitoba holds a lot of influence. How often does the government or the department itself meet with Travel Manitoba? How often do you guys communicate and keep each other in the loop with what's happening?

Mr. Pedersen: So the deputy minister is part of the—is a member of the board of directors of Travel Manitoba. Staff are—staff meets with them, you know, maybe every six to eight weeks and—but we're in contact. The staff is in contact with Travel Manitoba to make sure—because we've had this northern strategy, the Look North, making sure that Travel Manitoba and the Look North are working in co-ordination.

We—and it's—Travel Manitoba is another one of these S.O.A.s, special operating agencies—sorry—Crown corporation. I stand corrected on that. It's a Crown corporation. So we are not—as government, we are not telling them how to operate in return, because they're doing a great job here. We're looking for them to keep us informed of what's happening and how government can assist them in reaching their milestones that they have a very aggressive \$2.5 billion—\$2 billion by '20—\$2 billion in tourism by 2020. And they feel they can reach that, and so it's government's role as how can we help them achieve that role.

Ms. Lamoureux: One other thing I just wanted to touch on in your first answer was you talked about how communities could be promoting tourism. I'm a very grassroots politician. I believe in that; I truly do. So what would you recommend? What would you

advice or thoughts be on if I were to go into my constituency of Burrows and want to promote tourism here in Manitoba, what would you have me say?

Mr. Pedersen: I would suggest you reach out to Travel Manitoba. And I am very confident that they will be very receptive to helping you or giving you suggestions about how to build tourism within your constituency, within your area of the city or whatever it is. That's—it all helps build a business.

Ms. Lamoureux: You touched on it very briefly, but I wouldn't mind for you to expand on it a bit. Can you provide some statistics on how the northern strategy is increasing tourism in the North?

Mr. Pedersen: For all actual tourism spending, we're relying on Statistics Canada to provide that information. Now the challenge with that is that it's a two-year—it's two years behind. You know, we go back two years to find out what it is. So it—we're confident and Travel Manitoba's confident that it will continue to increase.

We just—we don't have—I can't provide you with numbers today that shows the tourism increased, in 2017, over, you know, just because we don't have that information yet. But, when Stats Canada does bring out that, you can break it down into regions.

So we would be able to then see next year, when the next Stats Can report comes out, we can then look back and break it down into North, comparing the North for how it was in the previous report.

Ms. Lamoureux: Even if it's not numbers, just some sort of indication, something tangible. You guys have been in government for almost two years now, and there's got to be something that you can shed some light on to what has been done up North in regards to tourism for the northern strategy itself in specific.

Mr. Pedersen: I think it's important to understand, too, that we're developing the benchmarks right now for tourism. There—previously there was no benchmark. We knew that there was tourism in Churchill and Flin Flon and, you know, someone—The Pas and whatnot.

* (16:50)

But there was never any benchmark to really say what it was, so we're—through the northern strategy—and we've just released our northern strategy, which—you know, a northern tourism strategy—so, and now, we've also—pardon me, Travel Manitoba has hired a

northern tourism co-ordinator. So now that person can work with—take this strategy that's been developed and then go into the communities—whether it's The Pas, Flin Flon, pick your town in northern Manitoba—and start to develop that tourism strategy for that town.

So I just can't say, yes, we've got a 30 per cent increase in tourism in the North because we've got a Look North. That's—we're starting from, really, from ground zero on this. In terms of tracking it, we know there was tourism, but now we're tracking it—or Travel Manitoba's tracking it much more.

And, you know, there's other things, too, that we've—this memorandum of understanding with the aboriginal tourism—in fact, I think that's called the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada now. So they're working with Travel Manitoba now, too. These things take time to build and—but we're very optimistic that it's—there is a base of tourism there, and let's build on that.

Ms. Lamoureux: Again, I'm not looking specifically for numbers. If you can get numbers, that's great. But I'm thinking about tangible examples. I'm thinking about, as you said, the benchmarkers.

What is the vision? What are some of these ideas? When you say there's been a benchmarker put in place in a specific area, what is that?

Mr. Pedersen: I can give you a copy of the northern tourism strategy for—if you haven't seen it, I can give that to you.

And then, the other thing is, I guess we can probably set it up with Travel Manitoba to explain their—I think it would be very helpful for you if you were to sit down with Travel Manitoba, and when they had a tourism session in The Pas or Flin Flon or Thompson—you know, pick your town, Snow Lake, wherever you want—where they've gone in and they can show you how they have helped develop a tourism strategy for that community.

I think that would be helpful for you to do. I'm not going to try and explain it. They can do it much better for you. And so we can—you know, we'll make sure that you could have that opportunity, too, because we want you to be out there promoting the North as well as Burrows. There's lots—you can come out to my community, too, and help me promote my community too. But, you know, like, we're Manitobans, we're proud of our communities, are proud of our province, so let's get that word out there.

Ms. Lamoureux: I guess I'm just a little bit concerned because we're supposed to be working together within the departments here at the Legislature to convey these messages, and the fact that I'm being relayed back to Travel Manitoba—I don't mind going to them, I'm always open to learning more, but that should be something—these examples should be something that you can talk to us about directly. So it's concerning to me.

I'm going to move on to free trade because I only have seven minutes left.

Which sectors have benefited under our free trade agreement?

Mr. Pedersen: Just to clarify your question, were you talking about just NAFTA—the North American Free Trade Agreement—or are you talking about all free trade agreements?

Ms. Lamoureux: All free trade agreements affecting Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So the question was, which industries have benefited?

They've all benefited from this because you have the ability to trade, and one of our—the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, has been very positive for us, but the unfortunate part of that is it's tended, geographically and trade-wise, we've tended to focus on the US, and when we get into trade difficulties it becomes even more apparent that we need to—if I can call it—spread our wings. Get out there and—the Canadian Free Trade Agreement has broken down the barriers between provinces. There are still some barriers that we're—that there is committee working on within The Canadian Free Trade Agreement. New West Partnership, we have that mobility to move through western Canada with our trade partners there. CETA, the European trade agreement, is opening up a market for 400 million people, and I can tell you back from my farming days many years ago, we didn't even look at Europe for the cattle industry because it just was a wall shut off from us and instead we relied on the US, and we know where that's got us. But we built that market into Asia now, too, and there's a chance to build into Europe.

So—and that's not even going into the manufacturing sectors. There's—our manufacturing is very modern in Manitoba. It's very diversified whether it is industrial, agricultural, or whatever manufacturing sector you want—the aerospace. It all

is dependent on that ability to move within—between countries and between provinces.

Ms. Lamoureux: I'm deciding which question to go with. I kind of want to continue with what you were saying. I'll try and be a little bit more specific. So, all sectors, they cannot be equal all the time and that's part our economy. Sometimes things go up, sometimes things go down. In the past two years which sectors—whether that's manufacturing, maybe it's agriculture—do you feel have been prospering and flourishing here in the province and which sectors would you say, maybe they need a little bit more help or maybe it's just not their time economically.

Mr. Pedersen: Certainly, the agricultural industry has had a number of really good years in terms of both gross product produced, and so it's available for sale. Prices have been relatively good, and that's both in the grains and the livestock. Manufacturing has done well, you know, aircraft parts, buses. So if you have a—it's probably the mining sector that has been the most difficult because of both reduced mining activity in Manitoba over the last number of years. It's a long-term industry and there hasn't been new mines developed, and also it's a commodity and it goes up and down. And since 2008 the mining industry has not—really—the mine commodity market took a severe hit with the 2008 recession and it's really starting to come back now. And as I, you know, I said yesterday there's some really positive things in terms of raw materials for batteries, for this—you know—the electric buses, electric cars; there's—that's a market that's going to grow and we're in a good position in that.

Ms. Lamoureux: All right, now I will switch to the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. Assuming it's going to be implemented, how will this government ensure that our students remain in Manitoba and don't seek opportunity elsewhere?

Mr. Pedersen: The Canadian Free Trade Agreement is in effect now. It's just that we have to do this piece of legislation to make sure that it's harmonized with it, but it is in effect now. This is—it's—goes back to training, and we know that both manufacturing and technology is advancing very rapidly. The Minister of Education—these are questions that you really should focus to the Minister of Education because we've spoken a lot between departments. When we meet with manufacturers, they want to make sure that their training is—that advanced training is happening so that they can turn out the students who

are equipped to go into today and tomorrow's workplace.

Ms. Lamoureux: Yes, I don't know if it has to go to the Education Minister, only because students are a big part of our economy too. But we can make it a little bit broader and just say people in general, Manitobans.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

INFRASTRUCTURE

*(15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): 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 Infrastructure.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): I do, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for being here today. Real exciting to be here for Estimates. This is my first time as the Minister of Infrastructure, and had the opportunity to learn a lot about the department. And I'd like to congratulate my critic, the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), for his appointment to this position. *[interjection]* And he's indicating he's been recycled through this position before as critic, so—anyway, pleased to be part of this process.

I've learned a lot, again, about the department. And, later on, we'll be introducing some of the key officials within the department. But I wouldn't want to start without saying to all of those individuals who work within Manitoba Infrastructure, thank you very much for everything that you do. They've done a fantastic job and always do it with great professionalism. And we appreciate that, from one corner of this province to another, the department of Manitoba Infrastructure has some work to do, or has some role to play. And we appreciate everything that they do for us as a province.

So I would like to continue with my comments in that Manitoba Infrastructure understands that strategic infrastructure investment is fundamental to economic growth. We focus our investments on maintaining the existing highway network with priority on the strategic highway system, flood

protection and with capacity improvements that are important to Manitobans.

The Manitoba government has affirmed our commitment to invest at least \$1 billion annually in 'strategic'—strategic infrastructure in the 2018 budget. As the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has indicated on many occasions, however, in order to do this effectively, we need to make sure that our fiscal house is under control. This means that all government departments have been asked to look at what they are doing and how to make sure that they make the most effective use of available resources.

I'm pleased to say that Manitoba Infrastructure's taking up this challenge and delivering for Manitobans. One of the major initiatives that my department has undertaken is a service delivery review. This process will involve consulting with all our stakeholders: municipalities, First Nations, Metis Federation, construction industry, trucking industry, the general public, amongst others. We're looking for their input to determine what is being done well, what needs to be improved, and what alternatives might be available. This process will be ramping up in the upcoming weeks and months. We look forward to hearing from all our stakeholders. The report and implementation plan is expected to be completed by fall of 2018.

In this context, our government is committed to reducing expenditures and eliminating duplication. For this reason, one of the first acts by our government was to repeal the East Side Road Authority, integrating the work into Manitoba Infrastructure. By doing this, we were able to eliminate the duplication of two entities managing road construction in our province and hand this mandate back to Manitoba Infrastructure. I am pleased to say that significant efficiencies have already been realized, and we look forward to continuing to improve transportation to local communities.

By making effective use of available resources, I am pleased to say that the department is focusing on key priorities for Manitobans. Some of the projects and initiatives that are currently under way include Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlet channels—that would be the channel from Lake Manitoba to Lake Winnipeg—Shoal Lake access road; PTH 59 and 101 interchange project; and flood protection investments at Fairford dam, Shellmouth Dam and Portage Diversion.

At the same time, I am pleased to indicate that the department has also announced a number of new initiatives. Recently the department announced a new roundabout at the intersection of the PTH 2 and PTH 3 intersection. This will be the first roundabout on the provincial highway network and will help to manage the traffic of approximately 10,000 vehicles every day. The roundabout design will be safer. Research shows that roundabouts reduce fatal collisions by nearly 90 per cent and injuries by as much as 76 per cent. Roundabouts are less expensive to maintain than traditional traffic signals.

We have also announced that upcoming consultations to improve safety on Winnipeg's south Perimeter Highway. Last year we announced that we'd be looking at major improvements for the south Perimeter Highway. To facilitate this, the department awarded a contract to a consulting firm to complete a functional study that will allow the department to plan for a new and improved road. The upping-upcoming consultations are part of this process and will help to make the south Perimeter Highway safer, especially as our province continues to grow and prosper.

Another project that we have announced is the replacement of the overpass along the PTH 1A at the Trans-Canada Highway, on the west side of Portage la Prairie or, as some have termed it, the Christmas bridge. If the critic wants to know why it's been referred to as the Christmas bridge, later on I can explain that to him. The structure has been struck by larger vehicles a number of times. This has had significant economic impacts on shipping, on the local residents and the travelling public when the overpass was either closed or reduced to one lane. The replacement project will take the height of the structure into consideration to help to ensure that such accidents are avoided in the future.

We have also recently announced that construction is under way on the final phase of the Winnipeg River Bridge. This bridge is a vital link for the local community and cottage country. We are pleased that we are able to make this investment in supporting tourism.

Earlier this week, I also had the privilege of announcing Alert Ready expansion. This is an expansion of the national public alerting system. We will be leading—we will have leading technology to reach out to Manitobans and anyone in the nearby area to warn of high-risk events. This will allow the public to get notification of emergency alerts,

messages on wireless devices such as cellphones and smartphones. Manitobans will be able to take steps to protect themselves or avoid risk areas like floods or tornadoes.

Another initiative announced in the budget is the establishment of the conservation trust with an initial endowment of \$102 million for climate change.

In addition to these new initiatives, the department is committed to preserving and protecting highway infrastructure to keep the roads throughout Manitoba in good condition. Manitoba Infrastructure will microsurface and chip seal over 900 kilometres of roadway in 2017-2018. These preservation treatments extend the useful life of the highway by as much as 10 years.

In addition to this work, I am also pleased to indicate that our government is moving forward on legislative reform. We have introduced Bill 14, the traffic transportation modernization act in the Legislature. This bill supports our government's commitment to give municipalities a fair say, review Manitoba's boards to eliminate duplication and red tape and to align Manitoba with the New West Partnership.

*(15:10)

Bill 14 eliminates the Highway Traffic Board, along with the board's power to set speed limits on Manitoba's roadways. Going forward, municipalities will set the speed on their roadways under bylaws.

The responsibility for setting speeds on provincial roadways will be moved to Manitoba Infrastructure.

Regulatory guidelines will be developed with input from key stakeholders, like the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

Dissolution of the Highway Traffic Board will also free municipalities, communities, businesses and everyday citizens of Manitoba from the requirement to go to a provincial board for permission to build a driveway or to put up a sign along a provincial roadway.

Mr. Chair, I will close my opening statements by stating Manitoba Infrastructure's meeting our obligation to improve internally so that we can demonstrate better value for money, value for Manitoba, and results that we are proud to accomplish. We're here to connect and protect Manitobans with safe, reliable and sustainable infrastructure.

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

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'd like to begin my opening comments by saying that a lot has changed in the last year with regard to this department, starting with the change of minister. I believe last August there was a change of minister and with that came a change of a deputy minister and other changes in personnel.

And, in addition to that, in just a few short months this government appears to have alienated a lot of its former allies, I would suggest, particularly people in the heavy construction industry. I'm getting their heavy news weekly, on a weekly basis here, and this is a treasure trove of information about all the bad and terrible things this government is doing to the industry.

They, in their March 16th edition alone, they talk about how the government has not lived up to its number of its commitments. These are commitments, you know, that were made by the party before it won the election. And now they see that they, once in office, this government has torched practically everything that they promised.

They promised open, unfettered tenders for public infrastructure projects except in emergency situations. That was a promise. And, as a matter of fact, two or three years ago I remember them raging here when they were in opposition about how terrible it was that sole-source contracts were given. I think even in a flood situation, even in emergency, they had issues, they had complaints about it.

So we are quite shocked to find out that just in a short period of time, in a couple years, here they are doing exactly what they said that we shouldn't have done and that they wouldn't do.

So you can imagine how the heavy construction industry—the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) should be here shortly; I'm sure he will have many things to say about this as well. But the fact of the matter is that we understand—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Rossmere, on a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): As a member with such illustrious experience in this building, it's a shock and a disappointment to hear him reflect on the absence of another member and speculate about the pending presence of that member.

I hope this is not indicative of the member for Elmwood's fading memory or faculties. I'm sure that's not the case but must—I feel compelled to point out that error and ask that you would comment or rule on it.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Rossmere does have a point of order. I would ask the member for Elmwood to not refer to people that are not present.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: If you would continue on with your speech.

Mr. Maloway: That one I totally missed and I have to give him his first point of the year on winning a point of order, an actual point of order.

And so, to get back to the heavy construction industry, they understood that the government told them that there would be tenders for all public infrastructure projects except in emergency situations. And they say that the construction of the access road for the Lake Manitoba-St. Martin outlet project is not an emergency. We all can see that.

In terms of the highways capital investment, they—government promised no less than \$500 million, and here we find in this year's budget, it's only \$350 million. They said the government would not—oh, and get this—the government would not commit to their request for no further sole sourcing of future access road contracts beyond the two contracts already awarded.

Now, the minister likes to point out that he went to The Forks and made this great announcement, and he was asked. He was asked, was this tendered? And—it might have slipped his mind—he said, oh yes, it was tendered. Next day, he backs off, says no, it wasn't tendered; it was a sole-source contract. Then the next day, there was a media interview in the hall where he was, and I happened to hear—listen to the interview. And he was asked, on this 11.3 or 10.3-million-dollar contract, is this going to be the end of the sole sourcing, or is sole source going to continue for the next \$20 million, because there's another, I think, \$30 million in total.

And he said at that time no, only this piece will be sole sourced because this one has

the environmental requirements done. Twenty-four hours later, he's saying, oh no, maybe we're going to sole source beyond the \$10 million.

So I just don't know whether it's just the fact that he's new or exited or what the reason is for flip-flopping on two issues over the span of a couple of days. So, on—and I'm sure that the heavy-construction industry is having a lot of trouble trying to figure out where this government is. So, at the end of the day, what do they do? They put in \$436 million in the budget, not 502 that they promised.

Now, get this: they promised \$502 million consistent funding only—just slightly over a year ago, right? And they—and a year later, they've already reneged on that. Gone is the funding of 502 for four years in a row, and now they're down to three—I think 350 in the last budget.

They also promised investment in core infrastructure at least \$1 billion annually, and now they've played with that term too, and now they're calling it strategic infrastructure, and they're throwing in the health, education—another of these schools that are going to be built—and housing so that the core infrastructure based on the old definition was really only \$624 million.

So you can imagine how concerned the construction industry is when they were operating on the basis of a full-out level of activity under the previous government, and all of a sudden, now they're being throttled and cut down in substantial ways. I guess they're not happy. So they say, in short, none of the commitments that were made have been kept by the government. There's another seven projects that were dropped from the initial schedule. They were released by the current minister in November, and they're told that some of the projects are awaiting the federal commitment to cost-sharing.

With regard to the Lake St. Martin outlet channel, they were told in 2016-17 that it was going to be 90-10 in funding, federal-provincial cost-share. Now it's 50-50, they're told. And up to \$40 million of the access road associated with the project will be sole sourced.

* (15:20)

Well, once again, the minister clearly told one of the reporters that this 11.3—making up two contracts—this 11.3 was going to be sole sourced because the environmental requirements were met, but that was going to be it. No more, he said.

Well, now it's gone up to a total of \$40 million. This despite the industry's objections, the indigenous content—and this is a really good argument that they make. The indigenous content that the minister is hiding behind could be included as a requirement within bid documents via an open, competitive tendering process. That is clearly spelled out by the heavy construction industry. It makes sense. I would make the argument—you know, the minister hides behind the argument, well, you know, we are going to commit, you know, 50 per cent of the contract in Aboriginal involvement in the contract, and we're going to sole source it.

Well, you could do the same thing by having an open tender. You write the tender—and by the way, why stop at 50 per cent? Why not say 55 per cent? I'm prepared to raise that. I'm saying, why are we saying that they get 50 per cent? Why not just raise it to 55 per cent, but do it through the tender. You can do that.

So, you know, there's a lot of people who, you know, are very concerned about this. The contractors in particular up in the Interlake are the people coming to us with these issues. They're the people that drove their equipment down here on budget day and parked it in front of the building for the day, because they're concerned about being left out. They're not saying they—they're not saying that—they just want to have a chance to compete. If they lose, they lose. But when the tabulation sheets came out—which, by the way, it took them two weeks to get these sheets out. Normally, I'm told even—and one hour, sometimes, they're out, always within a day or two. It took them two weeks, it took a question from me in the Legislature, and 24 hours later out came the sheets. So we took the sheets, we gave 'em to the contractors, and guess what the contractors said? They said, my goodness, this thing is 70 per cent overpriced, at a minimum, could even be more. And they were talking to somebody in the department who said, you know, the—we recommended the minister that it not be sole sourced because it's going to cost 40 per cent more.

And the minister overruled them, according to him, but the person not prepared to give their name or anything because they know they're going—there's going to be retribution. But I'm saying, like, even his own department say—

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time has expired. We'd like to thank the critic from the official opposition for those 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 line item 15.1.(a) contained in resolution 15.1.

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

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to introduce for the committee the individuals from the department who are here today: first of all, Bramwell Strain, deputy minister, who, the last time he sat in Estimates at a table was the deputy minister of Education. Some might remember him from his time there; next to him is Ron Weatherburn, is the assistant deputy minister of Engineering and Operations; across the table is Leigh Anne Solmundson Lumbard, who's the assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services; and then we have Ruth Eden, assistant deputy minister, Water Management and Structures; and then we have Jeremy Angus, assistant deputy minister, Emergency Management and Public Safety; and also in the gallery we have my special assistant, who is here as well—Nancy Cooke is here; and there will be a few other individuals from the department. If we need them, we'll call them up and introduce them at that time.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those introductions.

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

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chair, I would suggest that we use the global approach.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the global approach fine by everybody? [*Agreed*]

So it is agreed that we will do the questioning for this department in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister whether he has, in fact, visited the Lake St. Martin outlet channel access road location.

Mr. Schuler: I would like to point out to the member for Elmwood that I have been up there and I have seen it. I've had a tour up there. I have not physically been on the ground. I did it by—from the

air and I did see exactly where the road is going to go and what path it's going to take.

So I have been up there, and I've had a very robust tour of not just where the road will go but where the channel itself should be placed again, keeping in mind it's still in front of an environmental review, but where the proposed channel is going to be dug through. And so I have been up there and had a very good tour.

Mr. Maloway: So I had heard you were up there, in the air, but it looks a little different, I imagine, when you're on—actually on the ground.

Would you agree with that?

Mr. Schuler: Yes. I would point out to the member that he would probably know this from his many years in this building, his Halley's Comet career. He was here for a while and then was gone again and then was back. And one of the things that ministers want to be very careful about is that, yes, they want to see the projects and get a feeling or a sense of the magnitude of the project, but, in the end, there are professionals within the department, within industry, who will actually do the work and it's important that we rely on our department.

I'm sure that was the way it was under their government. I physically don't do the work, neither do I actually give contracts, contrary to what some believe even in question period. It's important for a minister to have the ability to see where the project's going to go, and the ability to travel that entire stretch would not have been physically possible because of conditions and the rest of it.

So we had the opportunity to see the whole project, where it would go, from the air, which was a—very good for myself to be able to see where this project has been going.

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Speaker—or Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We're hearing some phone ringtones. If anybody has their phone on, could they please turn them off?

The member from Rossmere, on a point of order? [*interjection*] No.

Mr. Micklefield: We're hearing some ring tones. I'm wondering if you could ask if anybody has their phone on if they could turn it off.

Is that another point of order? Is that—*[interjection]* Okay. Right. I'm just trying to get my second one in there.

Mr. Chairperson: We've dealt with that.

The member for Elmwood—oh, sorry—the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Schuler: So, again, it's important for ministers and for individual decision-makers to have a view of the project itself. However, one of the things that I'm always very careful about even when there are projects that are under construction, that we don't interfere with the process, we don't get in the way of the work that's being done. There are safety issues that are involved, and so we don't want to put a lot of hardship on the department or a lot of expense on the department.

* (15:30)

And so a fly-over and—had all explained with very good maps and that seemed to be the best way to do it, and I certainly appreciated those that were there and explained to us how this was going to proceed and gave a very good, good overview of the project.

Mr. Maloway: Well, then, the member—the minister would know then that, having flown over there, that there is a number of farms that are going to have to be dealt with when this procedure proceeds.

I'd like to ask the minister then: How many of these farmers have been approached and have had their land purchased?

Mr. Schuler: Because of the nature of the project, not just do we have our review process, there's also a federal environmental review process, and we want to be very respectful.

We do have a plan that we've identified where we would like the channel to be. However, we cannot be prescriptive. For instance, unlike the previous government, who proceeded to build a dam and then decided to go through the process, and we were not going to endeavour to do that.

So the member would probably appreciate where it's a new way of doing business. We're going to go through the environmental process and when that is complete, then we will begin the next phase of setting the path of the channel and where the structures will sit.

Mr. Maloway: Well, then, I'd like to know from the minister: Has he—has any of the farmers—have any of

the farmers been approached by the government as far as presenting up their land for this project?

Mr. Schuler: I first of all would like to advise the committee that on the project itself, we've had three open houses, so there was an opportunity not just for individuals in the area that's impacted, there was also an open house here in the city of Winnipeg so individuals could have input into it.

It is the Crown lands property agency or CLPA that would be in charge of acquiring the land. Individuals would know where the proposed channel is—where it's being planned, but again, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves until we've gone through the proper environmental process, and the proposed plan that was presented is publicly available on our website. If the member would like to have a look at it, it is available there.

So—but again, until it goes through the process—that's something that we've been very clear on. We're going to ensure that it gets all the approvals first before we build, unlike projects under the previous NDP government, where they built them and then tried to get the process under way.

We feel that we want to get the order of this correct.

Mr. Maloway: Well, you know, things don't seem to be right in this situation when you already have left contracts—sole-source contracts—two of them, in fact. And you have the operators moving their equipment onto their site where they're going to be. Matter of fact, they've started brush clearing there a couple weeks ago, now. And one of the contracts is for seven million—\$7.6 million. The other one, with Hartman, is about 3.4.

Both of these sole-source contracts have a situation where the equipment is now being moved on—or, most of it's—I think by now, moved on-site at a time when you have all these farmers—if you drive around the—along the—where the channel's going to go, you have several miles of farms and nobody has been approached by the government.

So you want to talk, Mr. Minister, about how things were done in the wrong order in the past? Like, I don't see how you can have people out digging a channel—which you do—or building a road—which you do—and you haven't consulted any of the farmers. And some of these farmers are going to have to—to get to the other half of their farm, are going to have to go around—I'm not sure whether it's 13 miles, or—it's quite a long way around unless

you're going to build a bridge across the channel—an earlier bridge.

I mean, there—the fact of the matter is that if you go on the site, you would see that there are several options for bridges over the channel, but I think the proposed bridge is quite a number of miles away from where the original farm would be. So, you know, this is going to be a huge inconvenience for farmers having to travel. I mean, they can't cross the channel, they have to go around.

And this minister, this government, this department—as far as I know—has consulted with nobody.

There's no farmer been talked to, let alone had an offer made for their land. I would think, you know, the farmers will be quite concerned that you see—you have a minister flying around up above, and you have Hartman construction and Sigfusson construction moving all these—this equipment, which they were a couple Saturdays ago—onto a site, and nobody's come to you to say, you know, that they're going to buy your farmland. All you know is they're going to dig a channel and you're going to chop your farm in two and you're going to have to go, you know, 15 miles to get around to the other side of your farm.

Do you think that's fair, Mr. Minister? And do you think it's the right way to—the right order to be proceeding?

Mr. Chairperson: While we're waiting for the minister, I'd like to remind the member from Elmwood that questions really should be put through the Chair, not directly to the minister.

I would appreciate that.

*(15:40)

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that this is a very complex project. It's a \$540-million project. It is—it's a remote project. It's going to involve a lot of very, very important engineering. I'd like to point out to committee that the level between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg is 100 feet. So there's quite a drop. And one of the things we have to make very sure about is that we get this right. We don't want to wake up one morning and find out that Lake Manitoba has no water in it because we got it wrong. So the fact that this has a lot going on it and there are a lot of different areas to it—and I would point out the member, if he would like to, he could take a hiking stick and a good pair of hiking boots and some—I

would suggest he would do this in the summer—and take some OFF! and spray it on himself and maybe he would like to walk the whole thing. Probably not the most advisable thing: it would be very strenuous; it could be fairly dangerous. So what we are doing is being very careful with this project.

It is an important project, and I understand that there are a lot of misconceptions, and if the member would like, we could always—and I would make this offer to members of the Manitoba Legislature—if you would like a briefing on a certain project, notify the minister's office and we would be prepared to supply a briefing, because these involve—or may involve, we haven't started this project—but this project, once it proceeds, will involve a lot of money, and because it is so intricate and it involves so many different components, that we would be prepared to sit down, if the critic wanted, to get a briefing.

So I do want to address some of the issues that the member has raised. First of all, all potential landowners—and again, we can only say potential because it is under an environmental review process and we don't ever want to be told that we had made up our mind and that the 'environmental' process was just for show. We are respecting that process, and it does involve a federal component to it as well, so we are absolutely being very careful that we are respecting this environmental process that we're in right now. Having said that, all potential landowners have been spoken to both by CLPA and Manitoba Infrastructure staff: they have their numbers, they've been invited to open houses, they've had the discussion at the open house, they've been talked to. But we cannot make offers until the environmental process is complete.

I'd like to point out that we've also engaged in indigenous consultation, which continues. We've also engaged with the Manitoba Metis Federation. We've had multiple meetings. We have an—a consultation agreement with the Manitoba Metis Federation. In fact, we've met with them as late as January of this year. So the consultations can take place; however, we have to be very careful because we are in the environmental process. We can't get ahead of ourselves.

The piece of road that is currently being worked on right now is a piece of road that currently exists and thus it doesn't get caught up in the environmental process. So anything beyond that, then, would be new build and it gets caught up in the environmental process, and I have some more information for

committee, and again, I want to make sure we get this right.

My time has run out, and I will wait for the next question and then I'll finish my answer.

Mr. Maloway: I would like to tell the minister that I did speak to one of the farmers who was also concerned about the land issues and the wells on his land, and he is not really sure where he's supposed to be going to deal with that issue, but certainly there's—as the minister has recognized, there's more issues here than just purchasing the land and moving the farming operations, if that's their intention. There are water issues as well to the point where the minister will know that the channel actually takes a turn around a lake. Rather than cutting through the lake, it goes around the lake, and it does that supposedly because they don't want to interfere with the water tables, and there's issues with wells and stuff like that.

So, having said all of that, why would the government, why would the minister, why would the department be so determined to have a sole-sourced contract on the rehabilitation of those two roads? Like, what is the—what is their reason that they had to do it right now? That they had to give it to one—well, two contracts, why they had to let them without tender.

This process is going to take quite a while to develop itself. They could have done the right thing. They could have kept their promise that they made in the past, that they would not sole source these contracts.

What would be the harm, what would have been the harm in allowing the other contractors who are interested in bidding on this project to have their bids? What would be the harm in that?

Mr. Schuler: I thank the member for his continued questions. I do want to go back and just clarify some misconceptions. Again, it is a big project. And we want to make sure we have all the facts on the record.

The road, or the contract for the road, and it is one section, is all road that we own and it is not going through anybody's farm. We want to be very clear. It is a road that currently does exist. It is going to be a road that accesses the second channel. So the channel that will go from Lake St. Martin into Lake Winnipeg; that's where that road is going to service that particular channel.

So all's what we are doing is a road that exists right now, we have given two contracts. It's one road. One section. Two contracts. And it is to rehabilitate a section of road that we currently own.

So I just want to be very clear: We are not going on any farmland. We are not clearing any new land. This isn't new build. This is what we have already, and we are refurbishing what we already have.

I would like to point out to members opposite that our department is very aware and very respectful of the agricultural cycle. And that will be taken into consideration as well.

In so far the member also raised lakes and wells. And he mentioned where someone should go if they're concerned about their well, and that is the environmental process. They would have been advised of that. They should go to an environment process, and out of that will come recommendations to the department on the channel and what we should watch out for and how the channel should be placed. That's what an environmental review process is all about.

So, if he knows of individuals that have concerns, they should contact—they can contact our department and we will explain to them when the environmental review process hearings, where and when, and when they take place. And if they have—they can also make a submission, if they have a particular concern, because that really is what that process is all about: if they're concerned about a particular well or a lake.

I want to make it very clear to the committee that I do not involve myself, and neither does the leadership of my department, we do not involve ourselves in that part and go out and start pounding in stakes where we think things should be. That is actually done—those concerns go to the Clean Environment Commission, and we will get feedback from them. They will give us some direction on that. Certainly, we kind of set where we would like to see the channel go; again, the Clean Environment Commission then will give us reflections on that.

And, again, to be very clear: We are not building any roads on any farmer's fields as exists right now, and neither are we on any First Nations lands. This is a road that exists already.

* (15:50)

The member then asked: Why are we proceeding with this project? I would point out to committee,

more than 50 years ago this channel was already discussed—more than. And we always say 50 years ago, just to make it easy. But it's actually more than 50 years ago this project had been discussed.

If that project had been built 50 years ago, or 40 years ago, or 30 years ago, if it had been built then we could have mitigated an incredible expense out of the 2011 flood. Not just the human tragedy—the loss, the personal loss, that channel would have saved a lot of heartache and it would have saved hundreds of millions of dollars.

Our government is committed to this. Previous government talked and talked and talked, and we are prepared to proceed.

Mr. Maloway: The fact of the matter is that the actual channel is what is going to cut through the farmland. That's what's going to happen, and the farmers have not been dealt with yet as far as, you know, getting their land paid for and their land expropriated to actually build the channel.

What the minister is doing on a hurry-up basis is he is working on, as he said, two roads. And the first road given to Glen Hartman Construction—without competition—is the—is a \$3.4-million contract. And they're out there right now clearing brush off the road and bringing in their crusher and doing what they're going to do. That one is the first road.

The second, more substantial road which was given to Sigfusson Northern, and that's contract—by the way—6857, I think the other one is 6856, yes, they're one apart—given to Sigfusson Northern is a total of \$7.6 million. And that is for the second part of the road. He's right about that. And they, too, have equipment out there right now.

All I'm saying is why the rush to get this 7.6 million and 3.4 million of existing road improved? Why the rush to do that without a tender, when you haven't even dealt with your farms that are going to be cut in half by the channel? And there's miles and miles and miles of farms that you have to deal with.

So what is the problem? How long does it take to tender a project? Like, it takes a few weeks, take a few months? What, a few years? At that—the snail's pace that this project is proceeding, you could have tendered this thing over and over again. Like, there is—this does not pass the smell test, that you could not tender these two little road projects.

Mr. Schuler: I think we should all consider ourselves very, very fortunate that the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) was not sitting at the Cabinet or in the caucus—Premier Duff Roblin, he might've been in the Chamber—but thank goodness—thank goodness—he wasn't involved in the Duff Roblin government. Because there would've been the member for Elmwood after the 1950 flood which devastated the city of Winnipeg, which caused unbelievable harm to our city—he'd have been sitting at caucus because, evidently, that's where he would've been. He would've been saying, but, Premier Roblin, what's the rush? We have lots of time. He would've done that year one of the government. He would've walked into the premier's office, slammed his fist on Premier Roblin's desk and said, what's the rush? And the year two he would've marched into Premier Roblin's office and he would've said, what's the rush? And year three and year five and year ten. And under the guidance and advice of the member for Elmwood, Duff Roblin's ditch would have never, never have been built, and the city of Winnipeg would've been flooded over and over and over again. And the member for Elmwood, after every flood, would stand there and say, but what's the rush?

Well, I'll point it out to the member for Elmwood what the rush is. These floods are devastating on people's lives.

I would like to read for the member some statistics: Dauphin River First Nation, 231 evacuees; Lake St. Martin evacuees, 1,296; Little Saskatchewan, 424 evacuees; Pinaymootang, 11 evacuees, for a total of 1,962 evacuees.

I would say to committee, straight up, I believe there is 1,962 reasons alone off of that list why we should proceed, and I don't agree and I don't buy the member for Elmwood's argument, what's the rush, because I would suggest to him, and I would suggest to committee, there is a great rush and the fact for 17 years, other than his little junket to Ottawa, he sat here in this Chamber and advised his government, what's the rush? Well, Mr. Chair, I would suggest it's time we proceed and stop—stop—listening to the member for Elmwood.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): I'd like to thank the member for Elmwood to allow me the opportunity to ask a few questions.

I'd like to give the opportunity to the minister to—you know, people make mistakes—to simply agree that the sole-source contract for Lake St. Martin was

a mistake and that it won't happen again and going forward, contracts will be done in accordance with the New West Partnership Agreement, the Agreement on Internal Trade signed in 1994, and done in an open, transparent manner consistent with the expectations of stakeholders such as the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association. If the minister can simply, without equivocating, just say a mistake was made, it won't happen again, and let's move forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: Well I'd like to thank the member for the question because certainly it allows our government to be very clear that in everything we're going to do we're going to do it in an open and transparent way.

We heard the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) talk about that it took normally one hour to get something onto a website. I'd like to point out to him that I don't think we ever did see the Tiger Dam contract ever put on any website. In fact, they were told to, they were pushed to, and if you want to see a murky, mucky process, you need look no further than the Tiger Dam process. In fact, I would point out to the member for Elmwood—well, why am I telling him this stuff? He was intimately involved in all of that that was going on. I don't know if he supported Steve Ashton and his just single-handedly giving contracts to friends and supporters. I don't know if the member for Elmwood supported that or not, but we know that that led to the rebellion that obsessed this province and stagnated the province for many years.

So I want to tell the member for Assiniboine very clearly that we will have a very open process. We announced the project in a very open process. The member for Elmwood—I don't get kudos often from the member for Elmwood, but he gave us kudos just at this table, and he said within two weeks those documents were on the website, and I know that all members are absolutely excited about that.

*(16:00)

Can you imagine two weeks people get access to documents when we're still sitting and waiting for the member for Elmwood to table the documents from the Tiger Dams? By the way, Tiger Dams—I might add—that are faulty, but somehow the member for Elmwood wanted to go out and give a single-source contract for faulty equipment. And that's fine, but he should have done that—the member

for Elmwood and his government should have done that in an open, transparent way.

We are still waiting—and I say this to the member for Elmwood through you, Mr. Chair—we are still waiting for those documents to be made public. Why doesn't he make those public? We're not—two weeks? Oh my goodness; it took two weeks to get the proper documents out into the general public. We've waited 17 years for some documents from the NDP, and we still haven't seen them. We still haven't—17 years we haven't seen anything.

And I take the accolades—we don't get them often from the member for Elmwood—I take the accolades from him on this one, that within two weeks our government got those documents onto the website. And that shows our—open and transparent government that we are.

But I would point out to members opposite that there are individuals who—no fault of their own—lost their family photos, lost their heirlooms, lost their furniture, lost where their house was situated. They lost everything. And yes, they're getting new homes, but they're getting new homes in a new subdivision. So not even the street's the same—that familiar rock outcropping or section of trees that when we all drive home, we sort of follow. You know? The landmarks. It's all going to be new. Houses are all going to be new. The things that make a house a home won't be there.

And to say that somehow it was unworthy to give hope to communities that when they return home, that there would be work, that they could engage, there would be a reason to go back, I think, is unfortunate that the member for Elmwood puts that kind of comment on the record.

Mr. Fletcher: I gave the minister an opportunity to say—you know, apologize, say it was a mistake—a huge, open door to allow this to be in the past. But the minister has chosen not to take that path. In fact, the minister is trying to talk out the time with raising issues that are completely irrelevant to this.

And he might—the minister, I think, is probably right about the Tiger Dams, and the expectation of Manitobans of the previous government was very low. The expectation of Manitobans for a new government is very high. And comparing this government to that government is—it's actually disrespectful for the people who are in this government, people who voted for this government,

people who fund the political party that this government supposedly represents.

People in the Conservative movement—Tories—support free trade. Free trade. We're going through the NAFTA negotiations right now. Brian Mulroney—PC prime minister—brought forward the original free-trade agreement, the Liberals brought forward an enhancement to that, and it now is universally accepted.

Mr. Chair, I have in front of me the Agreement on Internal Trade, signed in 1994. And the sole-source contracting that occurred is in violation of that agreement. I have the consolidated version of that agreement, 2011, in front of me. The sole-source contracting provisions—or the sole-source contracting that this government conducted is in violation of articles 101, 201, 405—or 404, 501. The New West Partnership, article 14—well, basically the whole agreement, which this government signed—and I think it was going to sign it on November 17th, 2016, but they haven't followed through on it.

You believe in free trade or you don't. And if you believe in free trade, you need to follow the rules of the agreements that you sign. Because if Manitoba does what they did on a sole-source contract, you can bet the other provinces that we've signed this agreement with—Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC—could use the same method. And that defeats the entire purpose of the agreement. Conservatives believe that the larger the market, the greater the opportunity for everyone. And quite frankly, sole-source contracting, if everyone did that, that harms Manitoba.

Manitoba's economy is not as big as the other ones. Let's not take away those opportunities. Why is the minister defending the indefensible and not supporting the agreements which have been signed?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for Assiniboine, and we all suffered through the dark NDP days when the clear dislike for any kind of free trade agreement—in fact, it was the current leader of the NDP, the Leader of the Opposition, who signed the Leap Manifesto, which is absolutely and inherently hostile to any kind of a free trade agreement. And I just wonder if the member for Elmwood signed it as well. Maybe he signed it in that lemon juice so it showed in front of his boss that he supported the boss, but then it disappeared afterwards; I'm not too sure. Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) is a long-time politician and has

learned some of these ways of doing things, but our government was very pleased—very pleased—and I know the member for Assiniboine was also very pleased when we signed the New West Partnership.

It was something that should have been done. We should have been the original negotiators on that when the initial deal was negotiated. I would like to state for committee—our Premier (Mr. Pallister) has stated it on numerous occasions, whether it's the New West Partnership or the pan-Canadian free trade agreement, we are the province that has the least objections of anybody else. We always side on the side of—come down on the side of trade and commerce.

Where the member for Assiniboine didn't read far enough into the document is that, exempted from the New West Partnership and basically any free trade agreement, whether it be national or international, is that they allow for special consideration for First Nations or for indigenous engagement. And that is always something that is protected. It's in the free trade agreement; it's in the New West Partnership. It's something that I'm sure Gary Doer would have agreed to one hundred per cent. And I'm sure if he was still the leader, we would find a far more moderate approach. You know, things have changed considerably over at the NDP. I—the balance and moderation seems to have disappeared, and now we have very hardline Leap Manifesto leadership taking place at the NDP.

* (16:10)

I would point out that these agreements were signed with the Interlake tribal council and the Lake St. Martin First Nation and their joint ventures. They—it was signed with them, and I don't know if the member for Elmwood is saying that they shouldn't have these contracts, that them and their joint ventures shouldn't be part of this, and we will certainly send his words to them and perhaps they would like to sit down with the member for Elmwood and tell him otherwise.

I would point out to the member for Elmwood that this is one of those special circumstances. I would like to read onto the record that Dauphin River, out of 231 evacuees, by June of 2018 all evacuees will return home. Isn't that just fantastic news?

Out of the 2,000—sorry, out of the 1,296 evacuees from Lake St. Martin, 470 to begin returning home as of January 2018. There again,

what great news. Finally, they get to move out of hotels and apartments and many of them are living with families in very crowded conditions. They get to go home, start to re-establish their life, start to make a new house into a home.

I don't know why the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) and the NDP leader are against that. Little Saskatchewan, out of 324 evacuees 100 people have returned home, and out of Pinaymootang, out of 11 evacuees all evacuees to return home by October 2018. There's the good news story. There's what we should be talking about, not the negativity of the NDP and the MLA for Elmwood. We should be talking about all the positive things that are taking place and not being so negative about these really good news stories.

Mr. Fletcher: Mr. Chair, I'd like to first ask the minister to call the riding name correctly. It's Assiniboia. It's not what the minister is saying, and Assiniboia is a historic term that means a lot to First Nation, Metis and people—and, you know, it goes right back to the district of Assiniboia, and let's just get that right. To do so is not very respectful. I can understand making a mistake, but I don't think the minister was doing that.

In regard to the minister's comment about the New West Partnership and the agreement on internal trade, I have it right in front of me. Tell us, which article are you referring to? Which exemption are you referring to? What allows for a sole-source contract—even with Aboriginal parties, because, by extension, you're excluding every other Aboriginal group in Western Canada. That's where your logic goes, and it creates a barrier that is against articles 101, 102, 204, 404, 504 and go on. So bring it up. Let's hear it.

Now, Mr. Chair, I'd like to say that I would prefer that the minister would respond in about the same—even double the time that I asked the questions, so my 90-second questions earlier don't require a five-minute reply.

Now, when I'm done here, the minister is not going to say it's article XXX; he's going to equivocate; he's going to point things out that have nothing to do with what I'm talking about, and I—he has a battery of civil servants here to help him and I'm sure they're going to point out a section, but I'll just pre-empt that.

Minister, by asking or by protecting the sole-source agreement and not apologizing, not

saying it won't happen again, it is completely plausible that the government has left itself open for tort litigation by stakeholders, and this is especially true given the responses of his colleague, the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Pedersen), the other day, on Bill 3, when similar questions came up on procurement.

These two ministers of the Crown have demonstrated through their answers and their past actions that they have not done their homework, they will not say sorry when there is a mistake, they will deflect, they will blame, but they won't bring themselves up to the standard that the people of Manitoba expect and—the membership of the PC Party of Manitoba—in fact, the members of any political party.

Mr. Chair, we can do better. I wish the government would do better. It would save a lot of taxpayer money and improve the Canadian economy and the Manitoba economy. Follow the agreements.

Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I think it's important, because we're getting far into the weeds here, that I would read from the Guidelines to the Procurement Obligations of Domestic and International Trade Agreements. This is the New West Partnership, February 2014, page 12, and it's X, exceptions or qualifications. (1) There are three types of exceptions or qualifications to the procurement obligations of the trade agreements—bullet—full exceptions: procurements that are themselves fully excluded from the trade agreements with no need to provide any additional criteria; second bullet—qualified exceptions: procurements of particular goods or services which may be excluded in some cases where such procurements are not being used to discriminate between suppliers or to protect suppliers; and—third bullet—legitimate objectives: procurements being undertaken in order to pursue certain legitimate objectives. Additional criteria must be met before utilizing such exceptions. Procuring entities should refer to the attached schedules for other exceptions or qualifications specific to each of the trade agreements. In addition, any procurement which falls below the applicable thresholds will not be subject to any of the obligations of the trade agreements. (2) The trade agreements do not apply to any procurements (a) relating to Aboriginal peoples; or (b) of 'treasury' services.

It is right there in ink. It's all right there. I would like to point out that—I believe it's article 800 in the

Canada free trade agreement allows exceptions for measures adopted with respect to Aboriginal people. Also, in part V(A)(1)(a) under New West Partnership has similar wording.

We are—whether it's here or if it—if you would look under the Manitoba Hydro procurement, it also exempts Manitoba Hydro when they're engaging with Aboriginal or First Nation procurement processes. So, again, we want to be very careful that we have the facts on the record, that we lay them out very clearly, and that's what we endeavour to do here. And, actually, it'd probably be very healthy to have this discussion, to have this conversation, but we wanted to make sure that we put that on the record for all committee members, so that now, as we move forward, we know that there is no contravention of any trade agreement, that we are fully within the rights of the agreements to do so.

* (16:20)

We've also laid out very clearly that there is a human—all human beings at this table, all of us—that there is a human reason why we did this. We listed out by First Nation the kind of devastation, the numbers of people that were affected. This isn't one home, and this isn't some water in the basement. This is where their life, for all intents and purposes, was wiped out. That beautiful little blanket that the babies used to be brought home in, that old picture, it's those paintings that somebody might have painted from generations past; all of those important artifacts are gone.

And to provide for new communities and then say we're also going to give you hope that you're returning home, and that there will be work to do, that there's going to be commerce going on. These are brand new communities. Communities that have existed for thousands of years are now brand new communities.

And there is a compelling argument to make for the decision that was made with our First Nations, the Interlake tribal council, the Lake St. Martin First Nation and their joint ventures.

Mr. Fletcher: Wow. The facts are here. I have in hard copy the New West Partnership Agreement, the Agreement on Internal Trade 1994, and the consolidated rules of 2011, unlike the minister who was just simply handed an iPad with a web page to answer or thinking he was answering the question.

The fact is that even using the logic of those exemptions, you are excluding every other

organization that has joint ventures with Aboriginal communities—every single one of them. And you're preventing a competitive bid process. Competition. Because that's the other part of these agreements, all of them, is that they can, and they must be publicly tendered if they are publicly funded. Publicly tendered. There's no excuse for sole-source contracting.

And go ahead, try and defend it under the dispute mechanisms and Manitoba will lose. And Manitoba will lose because sole-source procurement is not consistent with the objectives of the agreements, nor is the excuse that was provided by the minister consistent with helping Aboriginal communities as a whole.

And who loses in all this? It's the taxpayer, and it is the people who need that service. There's no accountability. There has been no transparency. So even if you accept all those arguments, it still is wrong.

As Conservatives, we believe in open, transparent processes, particularly when it comes to publically funded material. So, on one hand, the minister is protectionist, and then on the other makes claims that are not substantiated by the actual action of the minister and therefore on behalf of the government.

And it's not like this is an isolated incident. Just two days ago on Bill 3, the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Pedersen) also could not answer this question. With the NDP, he was protectionist. Answering my question—which he never did—he was—they just never answer because there is no answer. That's why it would have been best for the government to simply say there was a mistake, it won't happen again.

The Heavy Construction Association, of which I have many articles from them and the media in general, have condemned the government, saying that this is—Chris Lorenc from the Heavy Construction Association says this is not the way—Mr. Speaker, what is that, anyway?

Mr. Chairperson: That is a one-minute warning that your time has got one minute left.

Mr. Fletcher: Okay. I thought you were surrendering there or something with the white tag.

Okay. So the minister has refused to answer the question. His colleague has refused to answer the

question. It is in violation of the spirit and the intent and the written word of all these agreements.

And by the way, other provinces, if they do this, they should be—and have signed these agreements—they should be held to account too, but we're—how can Manitoba hold other provinces—

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Schuler: Well, and what's so important at committee is that individuals get to ask questions that they may or may not know the answers to, that might have bought into some urban myth, and it's actually a really good place to come and ask questions and get facts and have a debate and I certainly appreciate the time I've had with the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway). I always tell him that when he gets up in question period it's like Christmas for Manitoba Infrastructure.

And it's great to have the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) present. And we've already moved him from it's in contravention of the New West Partnership to—well, now he disagrees with the New West Partnership, but we're moving him along. We're getting him to the point where he understands that those exemptions are allowed and they do allow for indigenous engagement, as they should.

I'd like to point out to all members—and the member for Elmwood would remember and a few others maybe at this table would remember this—back in 2011, Lake Manitoba—the normal range is 810.5 to a high of 812.5 feet. Keep that number in mind, between 810 and 812 feet. We ended up getting a lot of moisture coming down the Assiniboine and there was a conscientious decision to divert a lot of that water into Lake Manitoba. It was a decision that was made to protect the city of Winnipeg. The lake went up to—from 812, normal—went as high at 817.1 feet between July 20th and July 25th. That's when it actually peaked out, but as it was ramping up it was on May the 8th, 2011—it was Mother's Day, and I remember this. I was part of it, unlike—maybe others weren't quite as engaged.

Friends of mine had a—have a cottage. They had a place on Twin Beaches and we had gone out the week before. It was just that beginning of May, and we went to sandbag and unfortunately there weren't enough sandbags. They hadn't been delivered to their cottage yet, and Mr. Chair, it wouldn't have made a difference. We had a couple carloads of individuals and it wouldn't have made a difference. What came on that weekend was 'undescrivable' and individuals

who were out there, who lived through it, it was of epic proportions. A storm hit and what it did—there were cottages on either side of our friends' cottage, that there was nothing left. They never did find pieces.

* (16:30)

It wouldn't have mattered how much you sandbagged; it just wouldn't have made a difference. It wiped out cottages, destroyed homes, destroyed farmland. And, again, there's a hundred-foot drop between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg. The lake finally got so full it just let go and it flooded all of these First Nations communities.

That's the history behind this. They did not flood themselves. It wasn't because of something they had done. This was a conscientious decision to save the member for Assiniboia's house, the member for Elmwood, the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), the member for St. Paul—all of us that live in the city of Winnipeg and surrounding communities. It was a conscious decision by government.

Now these individuals are going home, and to give them some hope the member for Elmwood says that's not necessary. It was necessary to give a single-source contract on Tiger Dams, on tubes to friends and supporters because that was good. But to give it to First Nations and their partners, to help them out as they go home to have hope—that's not good. That's the NDP position, evidently. The member for Elmwood—his position, he believes that wasn't good. Tiger Dams for friends, single source—yes, all good. All good. But, when it goes to First Nations, all bad. And we disagree.

Mr. Fletcher: If the minister would like to discuss hydrology, I say bring it on. My engineering thesis was on hydrology. And lakes—quote, unquote—as the minister says—being full—well, I'm not sure it's the lake that is full in this context.

Mr. Chair, the issue is the sole-source contracting and the intersection of that with trade agreements. I'd like to remind the minister that I was the federal minister responsible for infrastructure for Manitoba, Saskatchewan and a huge swath of Canada, and put together, along with Denis Lebel—Honourable Denis Lebel—the Building Canada Fund, which was \$40 billion plus another forty, \$50 billion of stimulus money. I know that—trade agreements very well, and the interprovincial nature of these things.

The minister, if he was on-fully briefed, he would have answered that the internal trade agreement signed in 1994 and the New West Partnership—what the New West Partnership does is reinforces and fills some of the loopholes of the 1994 agreement.

Having said that, sole-source contracting with Aboriginal—even if the—everything was correct, every—all the intentions were pure, is not on because you're violating all the other joint ventures with Aboriginal communities. You are not spending public funds in an open and transparent manner. And, from a Conservative point of view, making the market smaller or trying to get under the radar with certain procurements—that always comes back to bite you over time because Conservatives generally believe in capitalism.

Now, the NDP will approach us from a different way, dealing with other kinds of labour issues and so on, but from a Conservative perspective, sole-source contracting is wrong. From these—from the New West Partnership Agreement, along with the other agreements, it's wrong. It's wrong with—it's not in the intent with Bill 3, which this government's trying to bring forward, and, for the minister to deflect, deny, does not make it correct.

The record is clear, and this'll be my last opportunity to speak. It's okay to make a mistake. That happens. It's the cover-up that gets you every time.

Mr. Chair, will the minister simply apologize; say that there was a mistake; that it won't happen again; future contracts will be tendered public, transparent and efficiently paid and services received? Will the minister simply do that so we can all move forward?

Because if the minister doesn't, then we have to question everything—everything—about procurement in this province, and that is probably not something we want to do. And member brought up Hydro. That is a big concern, and perhaps that will be the next conversation, is sole-procurement by Crown corporations such as Hydro.

Will the minister participate in that discussion, or will he dodge? We'll see. Just apologize. Don't cover up. Stand up. Be counted. Be a Conservative.

Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: One of the things I'd like to point out to members is that when we govern, we want to

make sure that we get good value for the public money. And the process that was undertaken of—the department did a very good job in comparing it to other tenders that had gone out. And they received a very, very good value for the money that's being expended.

In fact, I would compliment the department in the work that they're doing. We are consistently coming in well under-budget. I'd like to point out the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), particularly the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), that the Freedom Road, which was earmarked as being \$54 million when the member for Elmwood was the *grise éminence*, the big adviser of the NDP, it was supposed to be a \$54-million project, and, under our government, we're delivering it under \$30 million. And we have a department that is smart, is articulate, has been given a mandate to protect the best interests of the public.

Now, when the member for Elmwood was, again, the big adviser to the NDP, and they built Wuskwatim, for instance, \$800-million dam—sorry, \$1-billion dam—oh no, no, no, wrong—\$1.2-billion dam—no, no—\$1.4-billion dam. They finally tapped out at it. So that's how the NDP looks out after the public. They have a dam; they build an \$800-million dam for \$1.4 billion.

And you have a new government that builds a road that the NDP said was going to be \$54 million for \$30 million. And it just shows you how our government has tasked the department to go out and test the market. They did a very good job in this situation—very, very good job. They got good prices.

Now the member for Elmwood is a construction estimator. You know, he could barely hold on—well, he didn't hold on to his job in Ottawa; he couldn't even make it as MP. But now he's an estimator. You know, the member for Elmwood's talents never cease to amaze committee. I mean, he just has—he's a lawyer, constitutional lawyer, then he's a construction estimator, and then like Halley's Comet, for a brief moment, he's a Member of Parliament.

An Honourable Member: Man of many talents.

* (16:40)

Mr. Schuler: He's a man of so many talents.

You know what? He's a jack of all trades; the problem is he's a master of none.

So I would suggest to members opposite that we listen to the advice given to us by the department who work in this field on a continuous basis, who tested it against what the market was delivering. The math has been done; it is very good math and they got very good pricing.

Now, I know that there's that wonderful ad from our mutual good friend—the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) and I—Dave Kean, where he talks about cheaper than free. And we have now people saying, you know, we could've built it cheaper than free. Okay, we're going to test that. In short order, there's all kinds of tenders that have gone out on MERX, and we will see if we can get it cheaper than free. In the meantime, I will stand behind and I will trust the professionals in Manitoba Infrastructure and the great job that they've done. They've gotten a good contract. They've gotten it for a good price. I will stand behind the professionals in my department, and I will listen to them all day long before I will listen even for 15 seconds to the member from Assiniboia or the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) because I will trust the professionals and not the jack of all trades.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I accept the next speaker, I'd like to remind everyone that when somebody has the floor I'd appreciate it that the noise level in here be kept down so we could all hear them. And any comments that are made should be coming through the Chair.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): So I got two questions. What I want to ask from the minister is that I've already asked the Premier (Mr. Pallister) these, and he said specifically to ask the minister responsible.

So, in this first question, I'd like to ask about more First Nation opportunities, namely the east-side roads, the Wasagamack airstrip and the Berens River bridge. So the east-side roads, I met with Pedersen in June or July. He said there is going to be a five-year plan for the development of those roads and that it would be tabled in October. So October came and went. November came and went. I could go on. I still haven't heard anything regarding further construction of those roads. Wasagamack is still waiting for some sort of movement on their—on getting support for their airstrip. They've already started building it on their own with their own band funds, but, of course, there's regulations that need to be in place if it's going to be a public space.

And Berens River First Nation, they have been approved to get a bridge, and they were asked to choose a spot, and so they submitted where they want their bridge to be, and now they're hearing that, no, we're going to disregard what you're saying and we're going to put it where we want.

And that's all through your office, so if you can address each one of those in my first question.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister would like to take—oh, sorry, the honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Schuler: I was wondering if committee would allow us to take a two- to three-minute break. The department's going to look for the answers in the meantime. And if I could just take a very quick break, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Is everybody in agreement?
[Agreed]

An Honourable Member: And we'll come back with that answer.

Mr. Chairperson: We'll break for two minutes.

The committee recessed at 4:44 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:50 p.m.

* (16:50)

Mr. Chairperson: We will now resume debate on the Department of Infrastructure.

Mr. Schuler: There's always a danger when you start telling stories about road trips, and I want to thank the member for having been out there, that was a great road trip out to Berens River and announcing the highway.

And again, this is now to my own peril, I just want to tell you, I—we went up there and they had bannock. And bannock here in the city is fantastic, but it's even that little bit better when you're out in the reserve. It was phenomenal. Hot, fresh, great jam.

And, before I had any, I decided I'd go wash my hands, and next to the sink was a container of soap, so I started to wash my hands with soap and said to my deputy, oh, think I'm washing my hands with cooking oil. And the soap was by the flour for some reason. So anyway, we figured that one out and then had some bannock with that really good jam.

And I decided I wanted to have a cup of tea, and next to it sugar, and I always like a little of tea in my—a little bit of sugar in my hot tea. And I sugared it a little bit and tasted it, and that's the best salted tea I ever had. I said, okay you guys, you just did this all to mess me up, didn't you.

And the sugar was over by the flour.

So we had a great time. And had an opportunity to sit with some of the elders and get some really good insight, and the kind of advice that you don't get when you just rush in and rush out. And we were sitting and the elders sat and gave some very pointed life advice, and appreciate that very much, loved being out there.

I do want to answer the three questions. First of all, the east-side road authority and a lot of the considerations, that is still under negotiations with the federal government. We're trying to engage with them on continuous cost share. That is under discussion.

The Wasagamack airport, we are focusing on getting the road done first. So that is where we are with that.

And then also we have to continue to have our discussion with the federal government and the First Nations. And that's the discussion.

As far as the Berens River bridge, because it is on First Nations land, that would be all INAC. We have no idea what is going on there, but that would be an INAC discussion you would have to turn to. Maybe you would know one or two federal Liberal members of Parliament and you might want to have a chat with them and see where that's at, and why the bridge is being moved.

I mean, there's probably a good explanation and I'm sure the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who in amongst all of the other things, freelances as an engineer, I'm sure he could probably give you some engineering advice as well out of his insurance business and all the other facets of life that he seems to be involved in. So perhaps he could give you some engineering advice on that as well.

But I hope that answers those three questions. I want to tell the member, it was a really great time being up there. Really enjoyed my time there.

Ms. Klassen: And yes, I will definitely—now that I got the door shut here, I can go to my federal cousins.

The other question I have is: Can the minister table the environmental assessment documents, or a process used to build the winter access route into Churchill? Some First Nations are wanting to generate land-use planning strategies and the turnaround time for Churchill's road was so nice and quick. So we want the same expedited service so that—so we'd like to know how that was done.

Mr. Schuler: First of all, it was not a road, it was a trail, and thus it came under sustainable development, and my department had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Maloway: The minister has managed to burn up as much time as possible here in this afternoon, but perhaps in the next few minutes if I could get from him, I'd like to get a staff listing and an organizational chart because I know there was some changes made to the department last August. And there's a new deputy, and there were some other changes as well. I'd like to get the whole list of changes of who's new, who's not here anymore. You don't have to do it today. This is just, you know—in a few days it will be fine.

And—[interjection] Oh, yes. Well, the next one will take a long time—so.

Mr. Schuler: I want to suggest to the critic that he goes and gets Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, Manitoba Infrastructure, and, if he goes to page 10, he will find there is there is the org chart, and nothing has changed since this was printed.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to also ask the minister for the status of this internal review that he is conducting of the department. I'd like to know: who's on it; when's it due; well, who's doing it, I guess; who's—when's it due; and how many jobs does he plan to—or will be lost as a result of this review? Is there any estimate as to how many? And, yes, if I can get those answers.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, I'll already start because we do want to get this answer in today. This is internally led. There is a steering committee made up of Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and the MTA. We'll get all the rest of the names that are on that committee shortly. Consultations are ongoing. We'll be doing consultations with various public organizations in May and June. Internally, we'll be doing consultations also in May and June. Summary review and recommendations—we hope by fall that some kind of report will be coming to the minister.

Again, this will be engaging not just with stakeholder groups but AMM. And there are a lot of individuals that want to be consulted.

So the steering committee is AMM, KAP, MTA and Manitoba chamber—yes, and, again, we want to be consulting, and we plan on consulting with the chambers et cetera. So hope that answers the member's questions.

Mr. Maloway: Now, we only have a couple more minutes, so perhaps given that—maybe we'll be back in Estimates again tomorrow—next sitting day or maybe sooner than later, perhaps we could save a lot of time. Minister doesn't have to make these 10-minute travelogue speeches that he's been making here.

We want to talk about the non—the untendered contracts. Maybe he could check this out a little more and get some answers for us. I mean, we know, we've been up there, we've driven the roads, we've seen what's on the ground there. And the competitors to the people—the people that would have entered bids, you know, have looked at these tabulation sheets and say that they're like, 70 per cent over-priced—minimum.

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): While I'm awaiting my staff—assuming that I still have some—I'll just quickly on the record put some information on that was relation to the last question by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) on Snow Lake and the doctor issues within Snow Lake.

So certainly we recognize that one of the physicians in Snow Lake has tendered their resignation. There are—has been work with the northern regional health authority in terms of actively securing a permanent replacement for the

individual who's resigned. And they're looking at ways to fill any service gaps that might exist.

I do understand that the northern regional health authority will be attending a meeting with the mayor and the council of Snow Lake and the newly established Snow Lake health care task force. That meeting is scheduled to take place on April 16th and there'll be representatives from the NRHA board there, as well.

So that's just by way of update for the member for River Heights, who had asked that question right at the end of Estimates yesterday, I believe.

Mr. Chairperson: I guess while your staff is getting ready, if the minister can introduce his staff as they're sitting down.

Mr. Goertzen: So, as with yesterday, we have Dan Skwarchuck, Bernadette Preun, and new to the table is Beth Beaupre, assistant deputy minister. I think I indicated to my friend from Minto that, if he's looking to engage in a question—line-up questioning regarding the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, that we'll certainly re-invite Réal Cloutier back to the table.

Mr. Chairperson: If the official opposition want—critic wants to introduce his staff member.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Well, we have Emily Coutts joining us again on the floor of the Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate the efforts that the minister and I can make. We understand in the Chamber, when there's only three health staff from the department and all the health authorities, it can become a bit of a shuffle. So I will do my best to try and keep my questions away from the RHA today, and we'll see where it goes in what I expect will be a few more days of Estimates.

I do want to go back to talking about the special drug program, which is where we were at shortly before I ceded the floor to the member for River Heights yesterday. We—the minister said yesterday that there will be an additional cost now for Pharmacare because the individuals will be coming off the special drug program.

Can the minister give an estimate at how much the department expects to save in this fiscal year from ending the special drug program and having, we presume, a majority of those people enroll in the regular Pharmacare program?

Mr. Goertzen: I've been wrong before. The member will probably remember many of the times that I was wrong in the Chamber. I don't believe that I said that there would be an additional cost to Pharmacare, or if I did I certainly wouldn't have quantified it.

I don't think we know exactly what the savings will be under the special drug program because we didn't know specifically what individuals were making. As you know, the Pharmacare program is an income-based program and so it would only be an estimate because we wouldn't have known what those on the special drug program—because that was an income based—would have been earning and of course what their earning is in relation to their deductible.

So, for example, if an individual has a deductible of \$11,000 they would have to be earning in the range of 189 to 190 thousand dollars as a family and the deductibles can be as low as, I think, \$100, depending on the income. So, if a family is making, again, 190-or-so thousand dollars a year, they would have a deductible of \$11,000, but I don't believe we know exactly who is on the income scale for the special drug program because we don't monitor that.

So any estimates of savings would be simply that. They would be an estimate. My understanding, though, is that it would be less than a million dollars we would expect to be saving from the change in the special drug program.

It's not—it was never geared to be an issue of saving money, not to suggest that, you know, less than a million dollars, whatever that is, and even if it's several hundred thousands of dollars, not suggesting that's not important or a small amount of money, but in the context of health, in scale, it might not be what might—some might think it would be. It was really an issue of equity and ensuring that we didn't have the vast majority of people with the same condition taking the same drugs having a different coverage and a different program than a smaller number of people.

So the savings, in health terms, is relatively modest because it wasn't about savings.

* (15:10)

Mr. Swan: With that being said, I expect, knowing what I do about the process, that Treasury Board has had a number of discussions with Health about a number of changes and what the impact there would be.

I'd ask the minister to ask his department to have a look and if there is actually any documentation prepared that would suggest how much money the government intends to save from cancelling the special drug program I would ask that he provide it to me.

Mr. Goertzen: As I indicated to the member, it's less than a million dollars. I think officials in my department are indicating that the estimate would be about \$900,000 and again, we can't quantify it specifically in that we wouldn't know the incomes for all those who are on the special drug program.

By way of example, though, if an individual had an \$11,000 deductible, that would mean that their family income would be about 189 to 190 thousand dollars because it's an income-based program.

For those who are in much lower categories, their deductible could be as low as \$100, and so it would range in terms of the savings, depending on the deductibles. Remember, if we're talking in particular about cystic fibrosis, those drugs are of such a cost that an individual would hit their deductible very quickly and then, of course, all of the coverage or all the cost is covered after that.

So by far, the great, great percentage of the costs of the drugs is covered, and that's really the beauty of the Pharmacare program in Manitoba, is that it's income based, and so it's equitable in that way, and for those who have illnesses that are particularly financially catastrophic because of the cost of the drugs, they can be assured that the vast, vast, majority of their income—or, of their drugs would be covered.

Mr. Swan: I understand with respect to individuals in Manitoba living with cystic fibrosis, the special drug program actually provided things like vitamins and enzymes which aren't covered under the Pharmacare program.

Is the minister aware of that?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised from officials that, under the special drug program, only drugs that are on the formulary would be covered under—would have been covered under the special drug program. And so, no, there shouldn't be non-prescription vitamins covered.

But, if the member has information that some vitamins were covered, they would have been covered in error, and they shouldn't have been covered.

Mr. Swan: Yes, you know, yesterday and other times in this House and in the public, the minister has tried to paint the ending of the special drug program as a matter of fairness and equity.

Is it fairness and equity that only about 51 of the 1,100 affected individuals—namely, those with cystic fibrosis—are getting any kind of relief under this government's plan?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think it's more than simply painting it as equity.

If the member were to meet with the vast majority of people with diabetes who, under the Pharmacare program, I believe, you know, well in excess of 90 per cent who are on Pharmacare, not the special drug program, who have diabetes. And for those with cystic fibrosis, I understand 75 per cent of those with cystic fibrosis in Manitoba were on the Pharmacare program and not the special drug program.

If you were to meet with those Manitobans and try to explain to them why individuals living in the same province, maybe in the same town, perhaps on the same street, maybe in the same apartment building, with the same illness, taking the same drugs, had a different program covering them, I think you might have a different understanding of what fairness and equity is, because it certainly was not equitable that individuals who were dealing with the same challenges, taking the same drugs, had different coverage in Manitoba.

Some in the NDP might consider that two-tier. I certainly would at least consider it inequitable.

Mr. Swan: The question is why the minister—I suppose he's directed his department to make a special allowance for 50 of the 1,100 people, but not that same allowance for the other 1,050 people being affected by the end of the special drug plan.

Can the minister just tell us why?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. I met with individuals from the cystic fibrosis community, along with the cystic fibrosis association. They raised—you know, of course they raised the issue about the ending of the program, generally, as other groups did—Diabetes Association and others who were advocating for the small—or, for the relatively small—for the diabetes—

in particular—group of individuals who were under the special drug program as compared to the rest of Manitobans.

And as an aside—not that I'll go onto too many asides—but it is interesting that the member opposite, who sat in Cabinet for the NDP, never once when he was in government said that those people living with cystic fibrosis and under the Pharmacare program were somehow unable to pay their deductible, that the program was unfair, that this was a hardship for those under the Pharmacare program.

*(15:20)

He never indicated when he was in government that the 98 per cent of individuals with diabetes in Manitoba who were under the Pharmacare program that it was unfair, that they were under a hardship. He never lobbied to change it, I don't think. He never brought forward a bill. I don't believe he ever spoke to any of his Health minister colleagues that we should move everyone into the special drug program. He thought it was entirely equitable. In fact, his leader said—his former leader Gary Doer—said that it was comprehensive and that it was fair, and so it's strange now that suddenly, after all those years in government, he finds that it's difficult for people with those challenges, and I recognize those challenges, would never try to diminish them, but the Pharmacare program is intended to ensure that those challenges are lessened. And for those with cystic fibrosis, the vast majority of their medication will be paid for.

If you have a difficult time working, as some will, and may not be earning income, your deductible can be as low as \$100, I understand. If you're fortunate enough to still be able to make \$200,000, then true, like other Manitobans, your deductible might be 10 to 12 thousand dollars, but that is what the program is intended to be. It is intended to be equitable.

In terms of those with cystic fibrosis, when I met with them, they indicated that they may have a difficult time getting their prescriptions refilled in time before April 1st because of the nature of the drugs that they're taking and certainly, this was backed up by officials, that you know, the drugs are significant and that they are certainly lifesaving, of course, and that those concerns were not unfounded. So there was an extension provided so that they could have the prescriptions refilled.

It doesn't change the deductible, of course, it just simply compresses it. So, in six months, when they

move to the Pharmacare program, their deductible still remains the same, it's still under their—it's still under the same income level, but it compresses it for a shorter time frame, which means that it's still going to be paid. It just gives those individuals more time in terms of the refilling of those prescriptions which they were concerned about.

Mr. Swan: The minister only met with the families living with cystic fibrosis after they came down to the Legislature because they couldn't get the department or the minister to listen.

I've got a letter from Andrea Kwasnicki from Diabetes Canada, dated February 15, 2018, to the minister raising some of the same concerns and requesting a meeting. Has that meeting now happened with Diabetes Canada?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't believe that we had the same concerns raised in terms of the—both the nature of the drugs but also the ability to refill prescriptions, but certainly, I know that the nature of the drugs being taken by those with cystic fibrosis would be different and differential, and so, for those with cystic fibrosis, it seemed like a reasonable approach.

Now, maybe the member disagrees. Maybe he feels that we shouldn't have made the extension and he should put that on the record. I'm not going to change the decision, of course, I think it's the right thing to do, but if he feels that we shouldn't have made the extension and that those with cystic fibrosis should have struggled to have those prescriptions refilled, then I would welcome him to put that on the record.

The reality is, of course, that for those living with cystic fibrosis the nature of their drugs are significantly different. They are dealing with specialists in the province of Manitoba so that can make it more difficult to get in to see those doctors and—than those maybe dealing with other diseases.

So it was a reasonable consideration, but I take it at heart that the member doesn't agree, that he feels we should not have given that extension. He feels that those living with cystic fibrosis should have just, I guess, been on their own to try to get those refills and if they wouldn't have been able to refill, well, I gather he doesn't—it doesn't bother him, but it bothered me and I'm glad we made the decision.

Mr. Swan: Well, it's only day two of Estimates and the minister is just out in the weeds suggesting things which are not the case.

What we've maintained is the special drug program should not have been cancelled by this government on short notice at all.

The question I asked the minister was about a letter from Diabetes Canada from Andrea Kwasnicki, who's the regional director for Manitoba and Nunavut, on February 15, 2018, respectfully requesting a meeting with the minister to discuss the ending of the special drug plan.

Did the minister meet with Diabetes Canada?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I don't really think it's in the weeds to—you know, to be talking about an important issue of why—the member asked why we made the extension for those with cystic fibrosis. I was very direct and relevant in answering that question and if the member didn't hear it and I acknowledged yesterday the acoustics in this wonderful beautiful Chamber, as gorgeous as it is, are sometimes difficult to hear in this particular environment. I would repeat that for those living with cystic fibrosis, it can be difficult in terms of the refilling of their prescriptions or dealing with specialists, that that can be a challenge in terms of getting those prescriptions. They raised that as a specific concern.

They raised other issues. I will acknowledge that they would've preferred that the change not happen. I'm sure that's true for those living with diabetes; I understand that. I endeavour to explain to the member that the change is about equity. I've indicated to him that the cost savings, while, you know, I don't want to minimize the \$900,000, but in the context of health, it's a relatively modest amount in terms of the cost savings, so it really was about equity.

I certainly believe that it was the right thing to do for those who are living with cystic fibrosis. I believe that it was about fairness for the vast majority of people who are on the Pharmacare program and were unable to access the special drug program because the rules—it wasn't fair for them.

But I am glad for those who will now be on the Pharmacare program, that the vast majority of the cost of drugs, particularly for those with cystic fibrosis, will be covered. It'll be income-based. It'll be fair. I agree with Gary Doer that it is the most comprehensive and fair program that exists in Manitoba—or sorry, in Canada—or certainly is at least one of the most comprehensive and fair programs.

So I'm certainly four-squared with Gary Doer on that assertion, and I'm glad that it's there for all

Manitobans. But I take the member's point. He doesn't feel that we should've extended this for cystic fibrosis patients. I gather that he then brought them here to the Legislature, I don't know for what reason, I guess maybe for—just for the sake of question period, and didn't want us to really listen to their concerns.

That disappoints me because I like the member. I'm quite fond of him. And so it surprises me that that's the case for those living with cystic fibrosis. But I'm glad that we made the decision, but I fully understand that he's disappointed that we extended it for those living with cystic fibrosis.

Mr. Swan: Did the minister meet with Diabetes Canada following their request to meet with the minister in their letter of February 15, 2018?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I've had meetings, of course, with diabetes of Canada. I've had a number of meetings with them. I think that they actually hold the—if memory serves me correctly, because I know that there are a few—they hold receptions here in the Legislature, often very informative. I'm sure the member has attended those, maybe even spoke with them; I can't recall.

But we've had great discussions. We have a good relationship with Diabetes Canada. I think that that'll continue, and we work with them when it—talking about the appropriate prescribing of diabetic test strips. And I know that was an issue last year where the—not this member; he wasn't the critic at the time—but, you know, the—he talked about what he thought was a concern of a reduction of coverage for diabetic testing strips.

What didn't get the kind of coverage that I think it probably deserved was that what the Province went to was the standard that the diabetic association of Canada recommended. They published a standard in terms of coverage when it comes to the diabetics testing strip. They set the standard based on evidence, and we followed their guidance and went to their standard. In fact, we went to the same standard that every other province has because every other province follows, I understand, the Diabetes Canada recommendations for the support of diabetic testing strips. So—of the blood-testing strips.

So, you know, I think it was a good decision. We had good discussions with the association at that time, a good relationship, look forward to meeting them in the future and look forward to having them

here in the Legislature whenever they have their particular day here.

Mr. Swan: Today, my leader asked about some information that we received through a freedom of information request. It's an internal list of frequently asked questions and answers that I expect the department gives to people calling in who are upset about the end of the special drug program.

And, as my leader pointed out today, one of the answers is to be given—is to tell people to contact their pharmacy to determine if they can offer an instalment program independent of the deductible instalment payment plan for Pharmacare, i.e., run a tab.

* (15:30)

Has the minister instructed his department to find out how many pharmacies in Manitoba will simply be prepared to run a tab for people who are having trouble paying for their medication?

Mr. Goertzen: I understand that there is a deductible instalment payment program for Pharmacare that allows Manitobans to have their deductible paid on an instalment basis. They have to be enrolled with the Pharmacare program. They have to be eligible for the program. There's an application process and then there's a pre-authorization process. I think that that program has been in place for more than a decade, or certainly before we came into government. So that program is in place to help those who are—have a challenge with their deductible for a variety of reasons. If the member is opposed to that instalment program, I'd welcome his advice on that.

Mr. Swan: The minister should be aware that that program is only available if eligible drug costs over a 30-day period are equal to or above 20 per cent of an individual's average monthly adjusted family income. So there will be people, now, having to come up with a considerable amount of money until they use up their deductible and his department's advice is for people to negotiate with the pharmacy and run a tab. The question is whether the minister, or anybody in his department, have spoken with pharmacists to find out whether that's even going to be possible for the majority of people in this position.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I mean, the Pharmacare program has been there for many, many years. It's not new to our government, as much as I might want to, like, take credit for a program that I think is a good program, one that Gary Doer said was

comprehensive and that was fair and that was an equitable program. But there's been a number of different programs in place under Pharmacare for a number of different years to help individuals, when it comes to the payment of their deductible. I mean, the member says, well, you know, it's a challenge for people to come up with the deductible. I don't remember in the 14 or so years that I spent in opposition, I don't ever remember once the member raising that as a concern. Or any member of his party raising it as concern that individuals had a challenge with the deductible. In fact, I remember there were yearly increases to the deductible based, I think, on CPI, based on inflation. That remains the same, it's basically tied to inflation, which, I guess, then mirrors the Canada Pension Plan and OAS, which are tied inflation as well. But the member never raised a concern at that time about individuals having a hard time meeting their deductibles. So, if he believes that that's the case now, that individuals are having a challenge raising their deductible, I wonder how many people he didn't raise that concern for, when he was in government.

I tend to think, actually, to give the member credit, that he found the Pharmacare program to be fair and comprehensive and equitable when he was a member of the government. Now that he's on opposition, of course, he has to try to raise concerns about it. And I understand that, I understand the role of opposition better than the member does, because I spent more time there than he has, although I wish him many, many years in opposition. But I do know that he wouldn't have raised those concerns, I think, for that very reason, because he would've felt that it was a fair and equitable program and he would've been right then. He just might be taking a different tack now because he finds himself on a different side of the Chamber.

Mr. Swan: This afternoon, the minister wants to make light of serious questions that are being brought to us by people, 1,100 Manitobans, that are now being cut off a drug program they've been relying upon for more than 20 years, which is not something that happened when our government was in power.

And the question I'm asking the minister is about the very answers that he's telling people in his department to give to people, which is if they're finding a difficulty, go down to their pharmacy and try and negotiate to run a tab.

And the question I've asked is whether he or anybody in his department have spoken to the pharmacists' association, have spoken to any of the retailers to see whether that's even something that pharmacists are prepared to do, and I'd like an answer to that question because it is important for people—the almost—the 1,100 Manitobans who are now facing hardship as of April 1st because of his decision to cut the special drug program.

Mr. Goertzen: You know, Mr. Chairperson, I don't know if that's the same advice that had been provided over the last 20 years for individuals who are phoning that particular help-line for those—because it might not be just for the special drug program.

And there—I'm sure there are many Manitobans who have concerns about different payments of different things at different times. That would be not untrue for Hydro payments, that wouldn't be untrue for a variety of payments that come into government. It may well be that that's the same advice that's been provided for 20 years to those who are phoning when it comes to the issue of the deductible.

What I do know, Mr. Chairperson, is that the deductible is considered fair, is income-tested. It's considered—the Pharmacare program—as to be one of the leading programs in all of Canada. It was considered that by Gary Doer. I guess it would—probably considered that by Greg Selinger, although I don't have it on Hansard, but I don't ever remember him expressing concern about it at that time.

I would assume that Theresa Oswald felt the same about the Pharmacare program. My guess is that Dave Chomiak felt the same about the Pharmacare program because I never heard him say any different. Tim Sale, I think, would have supported the Pharmacare program. Sharon Blady, I imagine, would have supported the Pharmacare program. And Erin Selby would have committed to support the Pharmacare program.

It seems to me that the only person who doesn't now support Pharmacare in Manitoba is the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), and I think that that's regrettable. If he doesn't believe that the Pharmacare program is a worthy program—if that's something that—if they were ever to regain power in Manitoba, that they'd be looking to eliminate the Pharmacare program, I think that would be a concern for all Manitobans.

But we support Pharmacare, as did Gary Doer and every other leader of the NDP in modern history, and we'll continue to support it.

Mr. Swan: Well, the member may think that not answering a basic question and carrying on like that is acceptable. I don't think the 1,100 Manitobans that are impacted are going to find those answers very acceptable, but I'll—I'm not going to get anything else from the minister on this point, so I'll move on to something new.

We know that there are major changes happening for Manitobans who suffer from sleep apnea which take effect later on this month. Has the funding for sleep apnea machines and equipment and supplies—has that been covered by the department itself or by the individual health authorities where Manitobans reside?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, and just further, I understand that pharmacists in Manitoba actually advertise their deductible plans. And so, you know, it might not just be something that is happening in terms of advice from those who are phoning in to the department. That may have been the advice that's been provided over the last two decades, including under the NDP, but I understand from officials that pharmacists actually advertise this as—I guess, as part of their, maybe, their business model, because pharmacists are still businesses.

So, you know, if the member opposite thinks that individuals speaking about a particular issue on the phone to Manitobans about something that's being advertised by pharmacists, I'm not sure why that would be a concern.

Mr. Swan: Yes, the question was about sleep apnea.

Who—which entity has been paying the cost of peoples' machines, as well as equipment and supplies? Is it the department directly, or is it the health authorities?

* (15:40)

Mr. Goertzen: I know that the member opposite didn't perhaps like the last answer to the previous question, but I do want to re-emphasize that pharmacists—to my understanding—are actually advertising deductible programs as a manner of, I guess—don't want to say drumming up business, but making it known to Manitobans that their services are available at their particular pharmacist.

So the suggestion that those who are trying to help Manitobans on the phone—good, honest, and

hard-working civil servants, trying to help individuals where they can, where they see a need—that they shouldn't talk about something that's being advertised by pharmacists themselves seems awful strange to me. I'm not sure why the member would want that to be hidden.

But, regardless, his question on sleep apnea. The—my understanding is that the sleep apnea program has been administered by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority even though it is a provincial program and that it's funded by the Department of Health. So the administrative end of it falls to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the funding element of it falls to the department.

I'm pleased to see that the program remains one of the most generous in all of Canada. Mr. Chairperson. I know that while any change can sometimes be difficult, there are also many who expressed gratitude that the program was still among the most generous. You'd be hard pressed to find another province that contributes as much to the sleep apnea equipment, in particular machines that can range up to \$2,000.

I understand then—that Manitoba—I think that that's certainly a good thing for Manitoba and for Manitobans, and we're glad to have one of the most generous programs in Canada.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for a response. I will defer questions on determination of the change to that program when we deal more directly with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority estimates, likely next week.

One of the entities which is funded by the government dealing with health, is the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety. Is that funded directly by the Department Health, or is that funded by somewhere else in government?

Mr. Goertzen: There is a special purchase agreement, an SPA, with the Manitoba Institute for Public Safety. It is funded directly through the department, and my understanding is that the funding is slightly higher than \$600,000 a year.

Mr. Swan: Could the minister, with the help of his staff, point me to where in the Estimates book in which appropriation it would lodged?

Mr. Goertzen: Officials have found the page. It's page 91, and it's appropriation 21-5D (2).

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, I was a step behind the minister's staff. Which page and which section are we talking about?

Mr. Goertzen: No apology necessary; I've been a step behind my staff for more than two years now.

So, it's page 91, which is sub-appropriation 21-5D.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I'm sorry. I'm looking at page 91. I see Acute, Tertiary and Specialty Care, and all I see is Salaries and Employee Benefits and then below that, Other Expenditures, including Other Operating.

Is that where the funding comes from?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes.

Mr. Swan: I understand that notice has been given by the department to the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety, that they can face some substantial decreases in the amount of funding from the government in the years to come. Is that correct?

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding is that the funding, year over year, is the same in this supplementary budget information that it has been in past years.

But, I mean, it does raise an interesting point. I think that there are—is greater opportunity for—it raises two interesting points. There's greater opportunity, I think, to have members more engaged in patient safety. I think the vast majority of funding—maybe 90 per cent, maybe more—to MIPS comes from government. But there's a variety of different entities that are helped, I think, by MIPS, or at least should see themselves as helped by patient safety. And I think trying to engage them more broadly to be involved in supporting MIPS or patient safety in general, I think, is important.

So I'm not aware of the specific information the member might be referring to, in terms of notification, I do think it's important to have organizations who benefit from patient safety more engaged—and I don't just mean on the funding element, although that's a part of it—but to be more engaged in the organization generally. And I think, for MIPS, that's something that they would like. They've talked about having—because I've been to some of their annual meetings, and they've talked about the need to have their membership more engaged. They've talked about the need to raise more funding from their memberships, so I don't think that anything that I'm saying is misaligned from things that they've said previously.

But, in terms of this particular Estimates process, there's not been a funding change.

Mr. Swan: All right. I thank the minister for that. And I was looking at the last annual report which is online. The minister's number regarding the percentage of their funding coming from the provincial government is just about right. For the year ended March 31st, 2017, MIPS received \$617,600 from the Province of Manitoba, small amount of investment income, increased revenue from memberships and then some increased income from grants and other sources.

Just to be clear, then, can the minister just confirm that the MIPS budget, the revenue they received from the Province of Manitoba for the year ended March 31, 2018, was the same, \$617,600, and the amount that's allocated for MIPS in the current fiscal year that we've just begun is also \$617,600?

Mr. Goertzen: It's at least \$617,000. It might be slightly north of that in talking to our financial—chief financial officer, Mr. Skwarchuk. So, yes, so the funding remains the same, but I don't want to leave the point that I do think that it would be good for MIPS—and I know that they believe the same—to have more support from their membership, and I don't just mean financial support. I also mean, you know, more specific engagement because that's, you know, how the—an entity like MIPS gains strength and gains more influence, whether it's MIPS or an entity like it.

* (15:50)

Having membership engaged in that way is important. It shows the value of the organization and it adds a value to the organization.

So, yes, the funding is the same but I—if there's been communication from officials that suggests that there should be more engagement financially and otherwise from membership, that's something I would support.

Mr. Swan: And I, you know, I appreciate having a bit of a philosophical discussion on this because I do believe the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety is important. It's been around for about 14 years now. I would agree that there, perhaps, may be additional ways they can reach out to get more engagement of other groups and continue doing even more of the good work.

If the minister's confirming that their budget will remain the same or their revenue from the government remains the same, then I think that's

fine, we can move on to some other areas. I share with the minister a hope that the institute will continue to do good work and make patients in Manitoba safer.

Mr. Goertzen: Well I, again, I think we have reached some agreement on the desire to have membership more engaged and to play a bigger role when it comes to patient safety.

You know, like a lot of things, you know, there's no change within the budget this year, but when it comes to patient safety I think it's an evolving issue, and when MIPS was created, I think more than 20 years ago, how patient safety was viewed within the health-care system was quite different. You know, now we have a lot of other things that maybe didn't exist at that time, how critical incidences are reporting—reported, the learning from those CIs is different. There are national institutions to deal with patient safety.

I think, embedded within the health-care system itself, there's far more attention paid to patient safety, and so, you know, MIPS has provided good service and good information on a variety of different issues in the past, but I don't, personally—wouldn't want to say that we should never look at patient safety again and that how we're doing patient safety in Manitoba is perfect and that it shouldn't be looked at differently. I think that Shared Health will give us a new opportunity to see if we're doing it in a way that's providing the value that we'd like it to provide, that it's across the system, that it's tied into national efforts and that the environment isn't such that, you know, after 20-some years I wouldn't want to say anything shouldn't be looked at again.

So, patient safety—yes, absolutely we should continue to strive for better patient safety. That shouldn't involve patient experiences within that patient safety, but the environment for patient safety is radically different than it was 20 years ago, and if there are ways to improve patient safety and to better align patient safety within the system, I'm all ears to hear what those suggestions might be.

Mr. Swan: Can the minister undertake to provide a list of the ministerial appointments that are now sitting on the board of the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety?

Mr. Goertzen: I believe that if the member goes to the website of the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety, the board of directors will be found there

under the about us section of the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety's website.

Does that satisfy the member's question?

Mr. Swan: Well, it satisfies my question if it's current. That's all.

If the minister wants to undertake to advise me that is current, that's good enough. If there are any changes in what's listed on the website, if the minister could just let me know with respect to the ministerial appointments, that's fine.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, we can reach out to MIPS and just ensure that their website is current. Sure.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that, and just to change gears a little bit with Ms. Beaupre in the House, I would like to ask some questions generally about staffing within Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living.

We know from page 15 of the Estimates book that there are 746.45 FTEs within the Department of Health. We know, of course, that many, many more Manitobans work in health care. Of course, most of them working for regional health authorities or for other entities. I just want to focus on those who are actually employees of the department.

So this is maybe a strange question and not one that I expect anyone to have on their fingertips right now. How many of those 746.45 FTEs are for positions listed outside of the city of Winnipeg?

Mr. Goertzen: Not a strange question, I think it's a good question.

I remember actually when the member was the minister of Justice I asked him to explain The Limitations of Actions Act once. Now that was a strange question, I think, that sort of came out left field when he was Attorney General. So he's got a long way to go before he matches any of the questions that I asked in Justice.

My understanding is that the only employees that would exist outside of the city of Winnipeg would be those that work at the Selkirk Mental Health Centre, and I think we're just endeavouring to get the exact number that that is, but if he wants to pivot to the next question, I'll—I can add that into an answer coming down the road.

Mr. Swan: Fair enough, and I do thank the minister for that initial answer.

We know that just because there's a full-time employee allotment listed, that doesn't mean there's that many people in the positions at the present time. So I would ask: As of April 1st—first day of the fiscal year, which is just behind us—I'd like to know how many vacancies there are in each of the listed headings set out on page 15 of the supplemental Estimates book.

* (16:00)

Mr. Goertzen: So we don't have the number of vacancies broken down per appropriation; I think we can probably endeavour to get that in the next—over the weekend. Yes. But the total number, the aggregate number is 123.15 FTE vacancies.

Mr. Swan: Thank the minister for that undertaking. We'll look forward to getting more of a breakdown after the weekend; that seems quite reasonable.

Is there currently any written policy regarding the filling of vacancies or, perhaps put it the other way, leaving vacancies open that is imposed by the minister or by treasury board or by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or anybody else?

Mr. Goertzen: I understand from officials that there isn't a policy on the number of FTEs that need to remain vacant. Certainly, you know, we're cognizant of the significant restructuring that is happening in Health at this time. The member will know that Shared Health, which began as a legal entity recently, and understands the restructuring that is happening within the health-care system more broadly certainly has caused us to be cautious in terms of filling positions, because we want to sort of see where positions should be best aligned, whether they exist within the Department of Health, or whether they should exist within Shared Health, for example.

And so, you know, we have been as a government, as officials, been very careful in the filling of positions or maybe holding positions to sort of determine once realignment is complete at Shared Health where positions should actually be held.

We have made a commitment as a government, both in terms of management reductions—the member will know that from media reports that applied both within the Department of Health and it applied within regional health authorities, as well as in addition to other entities. And so that's a significant undertaking. That's important in terms of expenditure management. That is important in terms of sustainability.

So, yes, there's been reductions when it comes to the management trim over the last year. The—yes, there've been vacancies as we look to ensure that FTEs are aligned and in the right places, but there's not a specific policy on the number of FTEs that need to remain vacant.

Mr. Swan: A quick calculation suggests that the 123.15 vacancies is almost one sixth of all of the positions in the Department of Health, Seniors and Active living, which is substantial.

The minister tells us that his department is being—I believe the word was cautious and careful with respect to holding positions open. Is there, then, a direction that, if a position comes open, that it's not to be filled until we know what's happening with shared health services? Or—how has the minister communicated that to the department—when positions which exist are to be filled?

Mr. Goertzen: There's not a policy in place per se, no. But, certainly, in my discussions with my officials—and, in particular, with our deputy minister, Karen Herd, who'll be joining us at this table next week—she's on other duties today and yesterday.

You know, we have regular meetings, as the member will know. Meetings between ministers and deputy ministers. And, you know, we as a government have been clear that we want to ensure that we're not growing the system in a way that is simply for the sake of growth, that we want to have alignment to be appropriate.

And so the message has certainly been clear from the government. Not through a particular policy on the number of FTEs that remain—need to remain open. But, certainly, in terms of the desire not to grow the system for the sake of growth, but to make sure that we have the right alignment within the system. So that message is conveyed obviously between myself and the deputy minister.

In addition to that, I'm—as minister, I approve each of the hirings within the department through signature. And that ensures that—to the best of my ability, it ensures that there's proper alignment when there are hirings. And there certainly are hirings within the system, but that is done both for alignment and for cost management.

Mr. Swan: Well, the minister's put on the record that there's been a reduction in managerial positions over the past year.

I look at page 15 of the supplemental Estimates, I look at the FTEs for 2017-18—for the year just ended. It was 753.45. This year, for the upcoming year the prescribed FTEs are 746.45, which is a reduction of seven.

Is the minister saying that those seven positions are the ministerial positions that had been cut, or is there something that I'm missing about other ministerial positions being cut by the government over the past year?

*(16:10)

Mr. Goertzen: So, going back to a previous question that officials have identified, we need to give some clarification to the member, and so I will apologize for any confusion that we may have instituted.

The 746.45 FTEs would not include Selkirk Mental Health. Those are held under the Health Services Insurance Fund. We are determining the number of employees at the health—at the Selkirk Mental Health, and we will come back after the weekend with a specific number of the 746.45, which may be held outside of Winnipeg because some of them might be, like, in a northern nursing station. So I want to bring clarity where we failed to give clarity to the member opposite, but we'll ensure that he has that clarity when we return after the weekend.

In terms of the seven positions that he's referring to, that is a result of the management reductions, the management streamlining, the streamlining that is happening across government.

Mr. Swan: All right, I will look forward to, then, getting clarification.

Then, the 123.15 FTE vacancies, does the department believe that that includes or doesn't include the Selkirk Mental Health Centre?

Mr. Goertzen: So I'm trying to answer two questions at once. Officials indicate that in the 123.15 vacancies, that does not include Selkirk Mental Health. However, to answer the previous question, the member asked how many FTEs are held at Selkirk Mental Health. There are, if my understanding from officials, 540.5 FTEs at Selkirk Mental Health.

Mr. Swan: And does the minister have—or will he undertake, more likely, to provide the number of vacancies at the Selkirk Mental Health Centre? And,

again, let's use April 1st, because it is the first day of the fiscal year that's just passed.

Mr. Goertzen: So the most recent we have on Selkirk Mental Health is January 22nd of this year, which there were 37.2 positions vacant, but we can endeavour to see if there are more recent numbers, and if there are, we could provide them after the weekend.

Mr. Swan: Thank the minister for that undertaking.

Again, I'm concerned with the clarification, which I appreciate. I am concerned about what is a very high vacancy rate within the department. Perhaps just to give some perspective, could the department also provide what was the vacancy rate a year ago, on April 1st, 2017, because that will help us understand a bit more of the scope of the caution and the care that the department seems to be exercising in not filling positions.

Mr. Goertzen: We don't have last year's vacancy rate. We'd have to go back, I think, to the Civil Service Commissioner or someone to try to determine whether that can be calculated. I don't mind trying to do that for the member. I don't want to overpromise. I don't think it's a concern to provide that. I'm not sure, it may have even been asked in last year's Estimates by colleague from Concordia, but we'll endeavour to see if that information is available.

You know, I get the point. You know, are we being cautious? We are, as we go through the realignment, we're being—but we're being cautious in two different ways. I mean I think for many years, you know, the health-care system, it grew—not without cause for some time, but maybe not always without—or, with explanation. And so, you know, we're certainly being careful to ensure that where there's growth needed and additional FTEs needed that those are provided, but also that, you know, there's a reason for it.

In addition to that, with the realignment and restructuring happening in the system, we want to, you know, be appropriately placing those FTEs so that there doesn't have to be a grand change down the road, and so we think that's important too. You know, so there are vacancies there.

Within my office I think we have about a 22 per cent vacancy rate as well. So you know, even within the Minister of Health's office, we ensure that resources are being used well. That means probably that there's lots of additional hours for people who

are working in my office and I'd say yes, that's true, that within the department there's people who work, you know, some long hours doing difficult jobs. That's why I have great admiration for them and everybody who's working in the health-care system. I think that echoes comments made by the member himself yesterday. Not an easy job, regardless of what the hours are, because it can be an emotional job.

But certainly we endeavour to be efficient, to be smart, to look at alignment in the future and to ensure that we're not, you know, boxing ourselves in in a certain way now when we're going to look at configuration being something different down the road. But that—certainly are the two driving factors when it comes to the vacancy rate as it relates to this year.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for his undertaking to do his best to obtain those figures which will be helpful and, not surprisingly, may lead to more questions.

I do want to turn this to something that's already come up in a number of the minister's answers today. The minister won't be surprised to know that I would like to talk about the new entity known as Shared Health Services. The mission, as I understand it, is to provide centralized clinical and business services for the regional health authorities.

Can the minister give myself and the House, I guess, a status update on where things are now at? The new entity went live on April 1st. We all appreciate that only certain components or certain areas have been moved into that entity. We understand there are going to be other entities that are going to be rolled in, I suppose, over the next year, or perhaps even longer.

Can the minister give us a snapshot—again, we're just days after the start of the fiscal year—can the minister give us a snapshot of where shared services Manitoba is at right now?

Mr. Goertzen: I do appreciate the question from the member from Minto. I'm quite excited about Shared Health. You know, as excited as a minister can get about an entity, but I think it's important in the restructuring of health in Manitoba.

We call it Shared Health in Manitoba. It goes by different names in different provinces, but most of the provinces, we realize, after analyzing our system in compared to others, have an entity that really brings together services that are across individual

provinces in a way there can be alignment and in a way there can be information sharing and in a way there can be clinical leadership.

One of the things that I was troubled by, I suppose, after becoming Minister of Health and getting a bit of a bearing of the department—and that took a while, and I'm still getting a bearing of the department, some would say, I'm sure—is that there are so many of the parts of the system that didn't talk to each other and that didn't communicate with each other.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

That the RHAs, while they were all doing, you know, the best that they could within their own individual areas, they really weren't necessarily speaking to each other. And that there wasn't necessarily clinical standards for certain things across an entire system. And that while much of the expertise resided in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, by nature of its size and its capacity as a result of that, its clinical capacity, that that wasn't always being shared around the province, in other cities in the province, or in other rural areas of the province.

And so, in looking at other jurisdictions—Saskatchewan being one but not the only one—we realize that what we truly lacked was a provincial entity. And I'll give Dr. Brock Wright, who is the CEO of Shared Health—now officially, although now some time ago—credit, because, you know, he had a particular vision in terms of having an entity like this, along with others in the department, that would reach across the province. And, in a province as relatively small as Manitoba, certainly in population if not geography, that there was a lot of advantages to having an entity that provided guidance and provided organization and planning, right across the province. So the mantra was, really, we're going to deliver services locally, but we're going to plan provincially.

I remember Dr. Brock Wright came to my office one day—seems like many years ago, but it was probably only several months ago—and went to the drawing board that we have there and spent about an hour and a half without sort of breathing in between speaking, drawing his vision of certain things in terms of shared health. And I remember asking him at the end of that presentation, you know, it seems like you've been working on this for several weeks, and he said I've actually been working on it for

20 years, this is something that we've needed in Manitoba for a very long time.

So we're excited about Shared Health. It has taken over now the corporate entity of Diagnostic Services Manitoba, DSM, so it has the legal entity of DSM now officially. Brock Wright is instilled as its CEO officially, and there will be announcements I expect this month in terms of the clinical leads and the other leads within Shared Health Manitoba. So the member will be interested in that, and I expect that that will be within a few weeks.

But I also want to say clearly on the record that we've made a commitment that while we're setting up a next entity it's not just going to be grow the system by the amount of that entity, that the footprint within Health won't grow as a result of Shared Health Manitoba. That those pieces that are moving from regions like the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority into Shared Health Manitoba, there will be no net increase, there's simply moving of a structure,

But the member's right, this is going to happen over a year or more, because this is a significant change. We're moving things like the Health Sciences Centre—not as a physical entity moving it, but moving it in terms of where it's located within the health-care system in terms of entities—into Shared Health Manitoba as a recognition that it is the triage—the trauma hospital, I should say—for all of Manitoba. And so that will happen over next few years, but the member will hear the specific leads in the next few weeks.

Mr. Swan: So as of right now, Shared Health Services Manitoba—or Shared Health, we can call it—right now, it's only Diagnostic Services Manitoba that has now been rolled into that entity?

Mr. Goertzen: That's correct, and thank you, Madam Chairperson. The commitment of government wasn't to create a new legal entity, it was to use the corporate shell of Diagnostic Services Manitoba. So it is assumed that diagnostic services will be under Shared Health, but the corporate entity is in fact the old corporate entity of DSM.

So there's not been an addition to the system in terms of organizations.

Mr. Swan: This like The Limitation of Actions Act all over again.

Just to be clear then, there will remain to the outside eye an entity still that looks like Diagnostic

Services Manitoba, but we agree that it's now under the umbrella of Shared Health?

Mr. Goertzen: So the member will know that to achieve this new legal entity, we filed articles of amendment for the DSM corporation, so it's a new corporate entity called Shared Health, and Diagnostic Services will be a part of—will be under Shared Health.

Mr. Swan: All right. So just to put it in different terms, there's a new box and the name of the box is Shared Health Services Manitoba. And right now in the box the only thing that's in there is what used to be known as Diagnostic Services Manitoba. But the minister's telling us, and we accept, there's going to be more things put into the box over the next year or more than a year. Is that fair?

Mr. Goertzen: Well it's fair, but it just seems far less exciting than I imagined it to be.

So the box is called Shared Health, not Shared Health Services Manitoba. But yes, the box is entitled Shared Health and diagnostic services is now within the box, as well, the Health Sciences Centre and other things as we transition more things into the box.

* (16:30)

But, if you look across the entire health-care system, there are no more boxes than there were before. We've capped the number of boxes in Health.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister.

Now, Diagnostic Services of Manitoba, now Shared Health, there was actually a difference in who was providing a lot of the services of DSM in Manitoba, so a difference between the city of Winnipeg and rural areas.

Can the minister just describe that, and is the intention that all of those similar services, both inside and outside the city of Winnipeg, are all going to be brought into Shared Health. Is that right?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm hoping I'm going to answer the question that the member was actually asking and not the question that I wish he would have asked.

So, currently, the imaging is happening province-wide except for in Winnipeg and in Brandon, but, as we transition with Shared Health, the imaging will all be coming functionally under Shared Health.

Mr. Swan: All right. So, for example, the imaging, then, that takes place at St. Boniface Hospital or Brandon general hospital or Seven Oaks, even though it's being conducted in those facilities, that would be a service being supplied under the Shared Health umbrella.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes.

Mr. Swan: All right. Now, the minister made a point, which we accepted, the purpose of doing that is not to make the footprint bigger in 10—in terms of adding positions or adding bureaucracy. One of the things that we're tasked by Manitobans is to make sure that this move does not make the footprint smaller in terms of providing services to Manitobans who require them.

So, if I can just get the minister to confirm that every single person that was employed by Diagnostic Services Manitoba, on March 31st, has been brought along and is now employed by the new entity Shared Health as of April 1st.

Mr. Goertzen: The specific answer to the question is yes, but I want to make a general point that I don't view my role as Minister of Health to ensure that the system never grows any bigger or never grows or becomes any smaller. My role is to ensure that the right services are provided in the right places for the right people with the right number of people.

I don't view health care as an—as an economic development model. Although I recognize that it has an impact on the economy, and being from rural Manitoba, I recognize that, in particular, that often the issue of health care becomes tied in to the issue of economic development in a community, but that my specific role isn't to develop the economy through growing the health-care system. My role as Minister of Health is to ensure that the right services are provided by the right number of people and, to the best of our ability, in the right places. So I don't want to—so, yes, the people who were employed with DSM on March 31st are employed with DSM, I understand, on April 1st in the transition over. But I wouldn't want to say to the member that there'll never be any changes in the health-care system within individual entities either getting bigger or smaller.

Mr. Swan: No, I think that's a fair answer by the minister, although the minister does understand that when a community loses health-care services, that can have an impact on that community, both in terms of losing the particular job that might be there but

also on the attractiveness of that community for other families to move, for businesses to be attracted. So I accept what the minister's saying, but I will not let him off the hook to say that cuts to services in various communities don't have an impact, because we know that they do.

Can the minister just tell us, then, what benefit he believes, on the subject of imaging—the services now that had been provided by Diagnostic Services Manitoba that we know are now provided, I presume, but the regional health authorities in Winnipeg and Brandon, what does he see as being the efficiencies or the benefits of bringing all of the imaging services in Manitoba into Shared Health?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Chairperson, I don't want to suggest that, you know, changes in health care don't have an impact on communities from an economic perspective or even an emotional perspective or a community pride perspective. They absolutely do. And, having lived in rural Manitoba essentially my entire life and in—although the community I live in now is bigger than it was 15 years ago, I essentially have grown up in a small town and lived in a small town. And I know that, whether it's health care or the post office or an RCMP station or an MPI office, I recognize that when things aren't in communities, that does have an impact that goes beyond the actual service that was provided.

I think my point was that when decisions are made in terms of the delivery of health care and how best to deliver health care, we can't look at health care as an economic development model or we might build, you know, a 250-bed hospital on every street corner. We'd never be able to staff it, you know, but one could argue that that would be good for the economy, but that's not necessarily good for the health-care system.

So, you know, we need to be—in the same way that you wouldn't look at Manitoba Hydro, necessarily, by just building dams through the—for the pure benefit of construction and hope that that would boost the economy, there has to be a longer term vision in terms of what those dams are going to do and what they're going to generate, which, one might say, was lacking under the previous government. But now I'm really off the beaten track of Health Estimates.

In terms of bringing the imaging together under Shared Health Services, or Shared Health, our expectation would be that it'll provide more consistency in terms of service, more consistency in

terms of standards and, in particular—and I think this is important—the appropriateness of imaging, of those different services. So, you know, the member's heard, I know, of choose wisely and our efforts to ensure that people are getting the service they need but aren't getting the services that they don't need and sometimes can cause more harm than benefit.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I've read studies and I've heard authors speak about the fact that up to 25 per cent of imaging that happens in Canada—it was a Canadian author—can sometimes be unnecessary and that some of those procedures can be invasive, and those procedures can cause more harm than good.

And so ensuring that there's a common standard of appropriateness as well is important. The member might immediately think that that is a cost-saving exercise, but I really think that's, in many ways, going back to his former question, a patient safety exercise as well by making sure people are getting the right services and getting the right type of procedures done. So we expect that there will be benefits from a consistency of service, a consistency of standard and an appropriateness of the service as well.

* (16:40)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I thank the minister for his comments on Snow Lake and the situation there, which you made at the beginning of the—of this Estimates.

One of the things which I think is pretty important, in terms of physician recruitment and planning, is that there be a plan to have physicians there long term and not just for locums to fill in. And so I was pleased to hear that the minister had indicated that there was a plan for a long-term physician at Snow Lake. And that is really what is needed.

What I noted, in talking with people from a number of communities, is that there's quite a variety or a—varied success in recruiting and retaining doctors. That, for example, Swan River has done quite well, but communities like The Pas and Flin Flon and Snow Lake are struggling.

I would like to—the minister to clarify his views on what his perspective is on the role of the people who are involved in the local municipality and in community groups in helping in this process of physician recruitment and retention?

Mr. Goertzen: It's a good question for the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)—not to lay value on his previous questions, but this one in particular is a good question, I think, because, you know, how communities are involved is critical.

Now I think it's important that there is involvement across the system. You know, we learn from things that go well and don't go well. The regional health authorities do—I think Shared Health will have a renewed role in the issue of doctor recruitment and learning from what's working across the province, and sharing that information, perhaps helping through the gathering of that information.

But communities do play a significant role. The member knows, being a doctor himself, that you can't force people to practise in certain communities. You can't force somebody to be in a community long term. There can sometimes be contractual obligations, but, ultimately, doctors have the ability—particularly because they're in high demand—to practise, not just anywhere in the province but anywhere in Canada. And, in some instances, depending on the countries, in any country in the world.

So, you know, that is a challenge for sure. And I've certainly heard from many communities, including my home community, about those challenges. So local communities have a particular role, I believe, in looking at attracting doctors who are going to see it as beneficial to be in those communities, whether that's the nature of the practice that they're going to be involved with, and having those discussions about the nature of the practice.

They—you know, they have a particular role in ensuring that doctors who are coming in feel not just welcomed in the practice of medicine but welcomed in the community. I mean, we all make decisions about where we're going to live, to a large extent, based not just on our occupation but on the community themselves.

And I've talked to international medical graduates, in particular, who've come from different countries. Sometimes they go into small communities, and it's a very different world than where they may have come from. There might be, you know, significant cultural differences, faith differences, many differences that can make it difficult to keep a doctor.

Now I'm from rural Manitoba, so I always think it's the best place to live. But not everybody has the

same views that I do on that or anything else. But, you know, coming from a country that might be entirely different—or a part of our country that might be entirely different—into a rural community causes its own challenges. And anything that local communities can do to alleviate those challenges, either on the practice side or on the practical side, the life side, is certainly going to mean that they're going to have more success. If a person grows up in that community and is looking to come back, well, obviously a lot of that falls away because, you know, I think the best opportunity that local communities or areas have of keeping doctors, or when those doctors have a history in those areas, that just makes sense, but that's not always practical. So, when doctors are coming from other areas of the country or the world, it is certainly a big part that communities are able to break down some of those barriers that might exist from a family situation or from a lifestyle situation.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for his comments, and I think it's particularly important that communities do have a role. Part of the reason for raising that is that I heard from some community members that they were being told by their regional health authority that the doctor recruitment was a regional health authority issue and the community should stay out of it completely. That's not my view, and I'm glad that the minister has put it—his view clearly on the table.

My next question actually has three parts to it which are linked but somewhat separate. The first part is related to a Flin Flon situation where there seems to be a problem in the communication between the eHealth system of Saskatchewan and the comparable ability or access to medical records here in Manitoba, and if the minister would undertake to at least have a look at that situation in Flin Flon, because physicians cover many patients in Creighton, which is just across the border from Flin Flon, and that it's important that they have access to the eHealth information about those patients from Saskatchewan.

Second, and a linked question, because it really talks in part to the information technology aspect, is that when I was in The Pas there was a resident there who was sent to Winnipeg for an appointment only to arrive in Winnipeg to find the doctor was on vacation. He wasted 18 hours spent travelling. There was a waste of \$3,000 in transportation costs, and all this was completely unnecessary actually because the problem could easily have been handled over Telehealth and so I think that it is important that we

move forward in a much more effective way on Telehealth because it has the benefit of people getting more health care locally and eventually helping people in terms of time and in the system in terms of costs.

And the third point relates to the tracking system for referrals to specialists. I have been asked on more than one occasion why the health—Manitoba Health doesn't operate a system like Canada Post and FedEx where it's very easy to find out, in their case where your parcel is, but in a resident's case for Manitoba where their referral is, and I wonder what the minister is doing in terms of such a tracking system for specialist referrals so that people can find out where they are at any given point in time.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for those observations and questions.

So, on the issue particularly of Flin Flon, we'll have department officials take a look at that and respond back to the member next week, I believe—or will endeavour to respond back to the member next week.

The issue of Telehealth appointments driving from The Pas to Winnipeg and then finding out a doctor is on vacation—well, I don't know the specifics of it, so I'm not going to—I assume it is as the member has presented, I have no reason to believe otherwise, but it's hard for me to comment on a situation I really don't know the details of.

The general premise of that, though, is an important point that I think is—goes to the—one of the reasons of Shared Health and trying to break down some of those barriers that exist between regional health authorities. Like, I was saying to the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) before, one of the things that concerned me and surprised me when I became Minister of Health is really how much in isolation the Winnipeg regional health—or, the regional health authorities worked and didn't have the kinds of communications that I might have expected between them. And I don't think that was because they chose not to; it's simply how the system developed. And there just lacked that communication between having shared health. To look at the system as a whole and the planning of health care provincially but the delivering of it locally, I think, will help with some of those issues.

* (16:50)

I'm not Pollyannaing. You know, it's a big health-care system. There are thousands and

thousands of employees. There are thousands of visits a day. There are hundreds of different scenarios every day. Will there be mistakes made in the health-care system? There will. I'd love to be able to promise the member that those mistakes will go away with the creation of Shared Health or anything else; that's just not the case. It's a human system, and there will be human mistakes and human errors within that system for as long as me and the member are here in the Legislature, and long after we've left this place.

But he's right in that there has to be work to ensure that's minimized. I think the Shared Health will help that in breaking down some of those barriers. And, when it comes to technology and telehealth, I'm not as familiar with the tracking system either with Canada Post or FedEx or other systems. But I do think that that kind of technology is something that will be better tested through an entity like Shared Health when it's looking across the province and looking at how services are flowing between regional health authorities, as opposed to simply within regional health authorities.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, now, I'm next going to ask about three sort of critical groups of health-care professionals.

One is peer support workers, who have potentially a very important role in mental health. Two is we have a deficit, very clearly, in psychologists in Manitoba, and what the minister's plan is. And three: to date, it seems to me very important that we have an approach to integrating nurse practitioners into our provincial health-care system. But I haven't heard the minister's plans for that, and I would be very interested in what they are.

Mr. Goertzen: You know, so, on the issue of nurse practitioners—you know, one of the things that we have mandated Shared Health to do is to do a better job of looking at the scope of practice for not just nurse practitioners but for all those who are working within the health-care system.

I can tell you that the most common request that I get from each of the different associations representing the different health-care providers—nurses, doctors, allied professionals—is related to scope of practice, you know. And often, you know, they're advocating that their scope of practice be increased, but sometimes they're advocating that others in the professions don't have their scope of practice increased. So there's an element of

competition, as—I might say within the practice. The member will know that, being a doctor himself.

What I've asked from Shared Health is that we have a plan that looks at it more comprehensively not simply as one-offs between different professions, to see what does the system need and who are the people within the system who can deliver that. So that's not limited to places like Westman, where, you know, there was discussion within the wait times task force about paramedicine and what role—increased role could paramedics play; looking at the scope and practice of nurse practitioners—where could they play a greater role within the delivery of health care, both in Winnipeg but in rural Manitoba. I mean, that will be a mandate—is a mandate specifically of Shared Health: to try to align the need with the areas of practice that individuals can provide within the health-care system.

On the issue of peer support and psychological services, you know, certainly they've been identified. I think Dr. Peachey identified the issue of psychological services and the need in Manitoba. Peer support has been raised to me in different ways from different advocates within the system and the need—or the desire to have them—peer support on the mental health side, particularly in emergency rooms, you know, if discussions continue on that. The member will know that there is a number of different discussions happening, not the least of which are the bilateral—not the least of which is the bilateral agreement with the federal government. And while that plane hasn't landed, certainly the issue of peer support is not a stranger to those discussions.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has talked about sort of central planning and local delivery of services and having health-care teams which function well locally is tremendously important.

One of the key people in local, rural community health-care teams is the pharmacist, and yet some of the changes that the minister has made have actually cut the local pharmacist off the health-care scene as it applies to patients in—or individuals who are in personal care homes.

And so I wonder if this is an oversight or, you know, what the minister's plans are in this respect.

Mr. Goertzen: I do very greatly value the role of pharmacists in Manitoba. We've had good discussions with pharmacists. I think that, you know, when it comes to—my understanding is sort of per capita the number of pharmacists in Manitoba

compared to other jurisdictions, we do very well; we rank very high in terms of the number of pharmacists that we have in our province, which probably speaks to the ability for them to work and serve in the province of Manitoba, speak well of that, the fact that we have, from my understanding, a high ratio of pharmacists compared to population.

There may be a couple of things the member's speaking to. The one issue is the pan-Canadian agreement to have a reduction in the cost of certain generic drugs, generic drugs that are highly prescribed in Manitoba. That would result in a savings of about \$11 million in Manitoba. That money is essentially all being reinvested in new drugs, in higher cost drugs in the Pharmacare program.

You know, I have heard some concerns from pharmacists in relation to that. The reality is, you know, what goes in negotiation that happened nationally resulted in a reduction of costs of some generic drugs. I'm not sure that the solution to that is just simply overcharging Manitobans for drugs. I mean, we—I think it was important that we sign on to the reduction of costs for those drugs for Manitobans. To do otherwise we'd have probably had the member rightfully standing in his place in question period and saying why are you overcharging people for drugs in Manitoba.

So—but those savings are being reinvested in drugs and so—in more high-class drugs which are coming onto the formulary, so that's positive, I think. Both are positive. On the one end there's a reduction of costs for Manitobans; on the other end there are drugs that are needed for certain illnesses that are coming online.

The member may also be alluding to the issue of contracting. He'll know, I—you know, a tender went out for that particular service. I don't get into the middle of tenders. I think I remember the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) standing and bemoaning the NDP's role in the Tiger Dam scandal when it came to the lack of tendering and then the interference of a minister in the relation to that particular product being served. He would have been well to stand up and criticize me if I jumped in the middle of a tender process to try to direct the result of it. I did not do that.

The company that won the tender has been providing that service in Manitoba for quite a while in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, I understand, and also in the Interlake regional health authority, and I believe that that contract had been awarded under Dave Chomiak when he was the Health minister.

So I'm not sure if the member is asking me not to pass savings onto consumers or seniors, in many cases, for drugs. I'm not sure if he was asking me that I should have jumped in the middle of try to gerrymander a tendering process. I'm certainly not prepared to gerrymander a tendering process nor have seniors pay more than they need to for their drugs.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

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