

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
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DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
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FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 17, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

Signed by R. Gall, T. Ong, M. Beatty and many, many others.

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

Waste-Water Ejector Systems

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans are deeply committed to protecting the environment, and they want to be assured that provincial environmental policies are based on sound science.

In early 2009, the provincial government announced that it was reviewing the Onsite Wastewater Management System Regulation under the environmental act.

Affected Manitobans, included property owners and municipal governments, provided considerable feedback to the provincial government on the impact of the proposed changes, only to have their input ignored.

The updated regulation includes a prohibition of installation of new waste-water injectors, elimination of existing waste-water injectors at the time of any property transfer.

Questions have been raised about the lack of scientific basis of these changes, as a Manitoba Conservation official stated in the October 8th, 2009, edition of the *Manitoba Co-operator*, "Have we done a specific study? No."

These regulatory changes will have significant financial impact on all affected Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider immediately replacing the recent changes to the on-site waste-water system regulation under the environmental act on hold until such time that a review can take place to ensure they are based on sound science.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider implementing a prohibition on the waste-water injector systems on a case-by-case basis as determined by the environmental need in ecological sensitive areas.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider offering financial assistance—incentives to affect Manitoba property owners adapt to these regulatory changes.

Submitted on behalf of C. LeBlanc, S. LeBlanc, R. Walsbauer and many other fine Manitobans.

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

Provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And Madam Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by L. Chuckres, I. Slobodin, M. Loden and many, many others.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 229

Government Support

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Firstly, congratulations to all those involved in organizing the Memorial Cup, which got off to a great start in Brandon on Friday, and also all those involved in the Homecoming celebrations over the weekend and the various socials that were organized over the weekend.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another issue of importance—of fundamental importance to all Manitobans is the need for an unbiased and independent Chief Electoral Officer here in Manitoba to oversee elections and ensure that we have elections processes that are run in a completely fair and independent manner.

To that end, Madam Deputy Speaker, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) last week introduced a bill that would ensure that there was substantial support within this House across party lines for the appointment of the next Chief Electoral Officer.

I want to ask the Premier: Has he had a chance to review that bill, and will he encourage his caucus to support it when it comes time for a vote?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The official—*[interjection]* The First Minister. Sorry, I didn't—

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): When it comes to future elections, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a process in place. There's an invitation extended to all members—all parties of the Legislature to participate in that. And we hope everybody would co-operate in picking a new Chief Electoral Officer, so that we can work forward on a consensus decision that would allow us to have all the personnel in place for the coming of the next election.

* (13:40)

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Deputy Speaker, that next election campaign will be under way 16 months from now, and as of today, there's been no progress made toward the appointment of that Chief Electoral Officer to replace the outgoing Chief Electoral Officer. The reality is—they know—is that there are very significant issues regarding the conduct of Elections Manitoba over the past number of years that which continue to be unresolved.

One way of showing a serious commitment on the part of all members toward a transparent and widely supported appointment the next time around will be to support Bill 229, introduced by the member for Steinbach, which would require the support of two thirds of the members of this House, thereby providing assurances to all Manitobans that the next Chief Electoral Officer won't be picked by a committee dominated by NDP members.

Will they support that bill?

Mr. Selinger: The hiring process offers an opportunity for all the parties in the Legislature to participate in it. It seeks a consensus on the person selected to fill that role. A consensus is actually better than a two-thirds majority. It allows everybody to get to a certain level of comfort before somebody is selected.

But in order to achieve that consensus, people have to participate in the process, and there has been an invitation extended to the official opposition to participate in that process. They simply have to pick up on that invitation and they could be part of a decision-making process that will try to satisfy all concerned on who the next Chief Electoral Officer will be.

Mr. McFadyen: The existing committee process, even though the government may say it wishes to achieve consensus, they know that, ultimately, it can come down to a vote dominated by the majority party.

What we're looking for is a mechanism that provides assurances, not just to Manitobans, not to just members of this Legislature, but to the new Chief Electoral Officer who, when appointed, will want to know that they've got broad support from all parties, so that when they begin to undertake their important responsibilities, they'll enter into that position knowing that they've got support from more than one party.

I want to ask the Premier: Why is he so dead set against a single-party approach to appointing the next Chief Electoral Officer when the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), who was described last week by the member for Lord Roberts (Ms. McGifford) as both clever and talented, has introduced such a smart bill for Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, the process extends an invitation to the opposition and

the third party in the House to participate. There's a commitment to work towards a consensus decision. There is great patience on the part of everybody to get the process off the ground.

The members only have to agree to participate, as other parties in the Legislature have, and we can move forward on selecting a new Chief Electoral Officer to complement the existing competent staff that are already there, who are working professionally every day to ensure that elections in Manitoba are run without fear or favour. And we invite the members to get involved and to show their interest in the process so that it can move forward.

However, failing that, there are very competent staff in the Chief Electoral Office right now, and I'm sure that they are more than capable of doing the job, but the ideal situation would be to have a proper hiring process with all members of the Legislature, through their political parties, participating and working towards a consensus.

Health-Care Services Critical Incidents Investigations

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Deputy Speaker, it was disturbing to learn over the weekend that 166 patients had died following critical incidents between October '06 and December '08. It was even more disturbing to learn that 27 patients had died because of mistakes after seeking care in Winnipeg's ERs, so Brian Sinclair was just one of a number, and that is mind-boggling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain how her health-care system has failed so many patients and families.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Madam Deputy Speaker, I can, of course, remind the House that in 2006 we put forward and passed legislation that enshrined in law the reporting of critical incidents. This was supported unanimously by the House, and we know that that particular piece of legislation, at its core, had the value of endeavouring to change the culture of health care, the culture, Madam Deputy Speaker, of a time when pediatric cardiac deaths occurred in this province because errors were made and they were swept under the carpet.

Today in Manitoba, we're working to have a culture of openness where, when errors are made,

they come forward. People feel comfortable talking about it within the context of the law. *[interjection]* Members opposite seem to think that hiding medical error is a hilarious topic. I think when you discuss medical error, you can learn from it and you can grow and have greater patient safety.

Mrs. Driedger: It was this Minister of Health that actually covered up the facts around what happened to Brian Sinclair. Madam Deputy Speaker, one patient died in the ER two hours after arrival because of a delay in reassessment and treatment. After Brian Sinclair had died, there was supposed to be a process in place for reassessment set up.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Was this reassessment process in place, and if it was, how could a patient die, then, if this process was in place? How could a patient die after two hours without being reassessed?

Ms. Oswald: Again, the very existence of the pursuit of critical incidents and the investigations of critical incidents is to change the culture, to change the culture from a blame-and-shame environment where nobody comes forward, nobody speaks up and therefore no learning ever occurs. *[interjection]* Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We know that Paul Thomas reiterated in his 2001 report: There's a need for a new professional ethos in the health field. It would consist of an acceptance of human fallibility and the inevitability of error. It would involve the recognition that learning occurs not only from our successes, but from our mistakes and failures.

If the attitude persists that an error is unacceptable and that the acknowledgement of mistakes is an admission of incompetence—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mrs. Driedger: Madam Deputy Speaker, it was this Minister of Health that actually blamed Brian Sinclair for his own death. She said he didn't go to triage and he didn't do what he should have done to take care of himself.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Dorothy Madden's ER death in 2003 led to an ER review and many recommendations about fixing the ERs. Yet since then, there have been many critical incidents and critical incidents leading to death in Winnipeg's ERs.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Health: How can Manitobans have any confidence or any faith in the recommendations that are going to come out of the Brian Sinclair inquest when, in fact, even from the Dorothy Madden situation, those recommendations haven't seem to have fixed the problem now? Why should we have faith in the inquest from these recommendations?

Ms. Oswald: But again, the recommendations that came forward from Dr. Koshal's report, every single one of them are actively under way in terms—and we're working to move forward on the issue of cardiac. Every single recommendation from the Emergency Care Task Force is either completed or under wear—under way.

Furthermore, Madam Deputy Speaker, the member opposite can say the same old things that she wants to say about the Sinclair inquest, the outcome of which she seems to have already presupposed, but I might remind her that it was her own leader that stood up in this House immediately after the tragedy of Brian Sinclair and blamed the front-line nurses. That's where the blaming occurred, which is in direct contravention to an open culture that Paul Thomas insists we need to have.

Manitoba Housing Authority Fire Safety Inspection Certificates

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Deputy Speaker, residents in Manitoba Housing already feel unsafe due to the high crime rate in Manitoba Housing complexes. The residents of Manitoba Housing deserve to feel safe.

Through a FIPPA request, we have learned that there are 59 fire inspection certificates that have expired in Manitoba Housing complexes. This leaves residents not only at risk of becoming a victim of crime, but also of having their belongings and their lives threatened by fire.

Can the minister explain: Why is she putting the lives and belongings of residents of Manitoba Housing at risk?

* (13:50)

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Safety is No. 1 when it comes to our tenants at Manitoba Housing. That's why we have worked with community groups and talked about safety measures that need to happen. That's why we have developed security initiatives such as ensuring that there are card-swipe locks. We

have deadbolts put in in all the facilities. We're continuing to work with the community. We have increased the number of security staff. We have Citizens on Patrol in a number of our—for our tenants, and we'll continue to work with them as we move forward and ensure the safety of our tenants.

Mr. Schuler: But I don't think the minister was listening to the question because that certainly wasn't the answer. When the housing—when the Minister for Housing was asked about fire safety certificates at Manitoba Housing during Estimates, she said, and I quote: ". . . they've all been tested. The fire safety plans are in order." Unquote.

Can the minister explain why she misled the House and why she misled Manitobans on fire safety compliance in Manitoba Housing? Compliance is what she is responsible for.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We continue to work with all of our tenant groups. We have a strong fire safety co-ordination strategy that is in place. We have a fire safety co-ordinator that has been meeting with tenants across this province and working with staff to ensure that they have the information that they need. We are working together to develop those plans, and we have developed those plans and ensure that we continue to test the equipment and ensure that safety—fire safety and safety of the persons living in our complexes are assured.

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to quote from the FIPPA request: As of February 22, 2010, Manitoba Housing had 22 inspection certificates that had expired in the previous 60 days.

Where is that insofar as the minister's safety policy? The minister is putting the lives and property of Manitoba Housing residents at risk. She is responsible for Manitoba Housing, and she is responsible for ensuring that fire safety provisions are in order. Rather than admitting her mistake in Estimates and fixing the problem, she decided to mislead Manitobans with her answer and do nothing about this serious issue.

Why has she failed Manitoba Housing residents and when will she fix this problem?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I need to assure all members of this House and all Manitobans that we continue to work with all of our tenants in Manitoba Housing, as well as our sponsor groups, as well, to ensure that there are fire safety plans. We have developed a strong strategy. We have a fire safety co-ordinator on staff that is going throughout the province and talking

with tenants and staff as well and ensuring that they know what needs to happen as far as a plan and testing the equipment. We continue to work on this, and we will assure the safety of all Manitoba Housing residents.

Correctional Facilities Overcrowding Concerns

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): This weekend there was another incident at a Manitoba jail involving an uprising of inmates and, thankfully, to the good work of those at the BCC, the correctional centre in Brandon and the Brandon police, there was nothing more serious happened to those within the facility, yet these incidents happen more and more often in Manitoba. In fact, the head of the association representing the guards in Manitoba prisons says that the current state of overcrowding will result in a serious injury of someone working in a prison or some sort of a serious incident. Even with the expansions that are under way we understand there will be hundreds more people in our prison system than the rate of capacity.

Does the minister agree with those who are representing prison guards that it's only a matter of time before a tragic accident happens because of overcrowding in Manitoba prisons?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Indeed, there was an incident in Brandon this weekend, and I think that we can all in this House commend the good work of our correctional officers in managing that situation and ensuring that the event ended quietly without any injury to persons.

I would point out to the member opposite that that very facility is undergoing an 80-bed expansion. There's been a lot of work between the union and management to make sure that building is expanded as quickly as it can happen, and the hope is that those beds will be ready later on this fall. Just one of many investments we have made since 1999 and we are continuing to make across Manitoba at adding capacity to the justice system, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: And if the expansion were done today, it would still house more prisoners than its rate of capacity. Right across the system that's true, and there are more things happening, Madam Deputy Speaker. The mandatory minimum sentencing drug legislation introduced in Ottawa, the legislation regarding restriction of conditional sentences, are all

going to put upward of pressure on our prison system, these long-awaited changes. Yet, this minister, nor his predecessor, neither of them ever did a study to see what the impact would be of these changes from Ottawa. They are woefully unprepared.

Will he acknowledge today that he's sitting on a prison powder keg and that all the upward pressure on these systems is going to result in a serious incident, putting at risk those who are working in the prison system and all Manitobans, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Let me explain to the members opposite that, since 1999, this government has effectively added another jail, the size of Headingley jail to the system, 238 beds at Headingley Correctional Centre, eight beds at the Dauphin Correctional Centre, 172 beds at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not stopping there. This year, alone, there are shovels in the ground to add capacity approximately equivalent to adding a new Milner Ridge Correctional Centre to Manitoba's correctional system: 40 at The Pas Correctional Centre, 64 at Milner Ridge, 80 at the Brandon Correctional Centre, 65 as the new women's jail comes on line, and 40 at the Agassiz Youth Centre to make certain that our jail system continues to have capacity for those who do have to be incarcerated.

So we've made investments. And they've opposed every single one of them, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: And we'll continue to oppose underfunding of our justice system—do not meet their needs, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The prison overcrowding system is just going to get worse and worse, and this NDP government has no plan. Well, you know, maybe they do have a plan, because they announced—the minister has said in concurrence—Estimates last week that he was not opposed to going hat in hand to the federal government for asking for money for increased prison facilities, Madam Deputy Speaker. Maybe we shouldn't be surprised, because during his aborted leadership campaign, before he got the 3 a.m. phone call to get out of the race to keep the minister—the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) from becoming the leader, he said then that his economic plan for the province—his economic plan was to go to Ottawa hat in hand.

Is that his plan for prison? Is he going to go to Ottawa, put on his beggar suit and extend the hand, and say, give us more money?

Mr. Swan: Actually, I can tell the member from Steinbach—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Thank you. I'm just going to ask all members for some decorum in the House.

The honourable Minister of Justice has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Yes, thank you. Well, I can tell the member opposite what I've been doing. I've been meeting with western ministers on talking about how we can improve the justice system in Canada. And I will table for the House the press release from the meeting I had with the ministers from British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan to speak with one strong voice, not just a loud voice—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I'm going to ask all members for co-operation. I am having some trouble hearing people in the House.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Thank you. So I'll provide this to the member. He can read that over. Then he can perhaps explain to Manitobans why he's voted against every single police officer that are making sure more dangerous criminals are put away, why he's opposed every increase we've given to Crown attorneys and support staff to make sure there's appropriate sentences, and he can also talk about why he's opposed to us hiring 67 new correction officers in 2010, 111 in 2009 and—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Rural Health-Care Services Ambulance Services

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Southeastern and southern Manitoba has been neglected by this Minister of Health and this NDP government for many years. The minister has shown complete disrespect for the past. First, she closed 17 rural ERs. Then, she regulated a volunteer ambulance out of business and refused to pay the outstanding bill for many years. Finally, after much pressure and threaten of a lawsuit, she made a deal to pay some but not all and interest.

Why do the residents of Emerson and Dominion City area have to wait up to an hour for an ambulance to arrive when their loved ones are sick or in need?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can inform the member that, indeed, since 1999, we've replaced the entire aging fleet of ambulances—160 ambulances. We also announced the addition of 13 additional ambulances, bringing the fleet to 173. We've invested half a million dollars to fit all provincial ambulances with GPS. We've announced \$5 million to buy 39 new and replacement ambulances. We've invested in funding interfacility transfers, something the members opposite wouldn't touch. And this is just on emergency medical services alone.

*(14:00)

I'll be thrilled to have the opportunity of another 45 seconds to talk about what else we've done in rural Manitoba for health care.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Deputy Speaker, this rhetoric comes from a minister that has six spin doctors and no real doctors to put out to save people like Brian Sinclair.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Health, by her standards, has said that a longer than a 30-minute wait for an ambulance is unacceptable. The residents of Dominion City, Ridgeville, Greenridge, Roseau River First Nations and surrounding areas, wait much longer than that.

The R.M. of Franklin has offered this minister a building to facilitate the ambulance service. Will the minister commit today to the establishment of an ambulance service in the area? And why is it that this NDP government can find \$105 million for a stadium in Winnipeg but they can't provide an ambulance service in southern Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, thank you very much. I'm glad to be back.

I can also let the member know that we have invested \$5 million to upgrade ambulances across rural Manitoba, including Neepawa, Kinosota Trails, Morden-Winkler, Oak Bluff, Carman, The Pas, Killarney, Swan River, Minnedosa, Rivers, Ste. Anne's, Gypsumville, The Pas, Steinbach, Lunder, Ashern, and Dauphin. Two stations on the way in Arborg and West St. Paul.

I can also let the member know that in addition to building infrastructure with our emergency

medical system, we've been working to bring more paramedics to the work force. In addition to that, we built the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre to improve response time, Madam Deputy Speaker. We're going to work with all of our regional health authorities in prioritizing EMS stations, and we're going to continue to build in rural Manitoba.

Child Fatality (Thompson) Child and Family Services Involvement

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Over the weekend we heard of the tragic death of a 6-week-old baby girl in Thompson as a result of blunt-force trauma.

Can the Minister of Family Services indicate whether this infant or the family had any involvement with the Child and Family Services system?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, it's odd to have a discussion about a particular case and one that's under a police investigation on the floor of the Legislature, but I think it's fair, in light of the legislation and the public interest, to advise the House that the inquiries this morning indicated that that was not a child who was in care.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I thank the minister for that answer.

I would just like to ask him, as a follow-up, whether he is aware whether there were any other children in the family and has Child and Family Services become involved in any way.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I've been advised that the local authorities are taking the appropriate action. There are protocols in place when a tragedy like this happens.

I really have put on the record, though, these are tragedies that are so hard on immediate family and, I think, the whole Manitoba community. And it's a time for us to reflect on our role as adults and in protecting our children.

As the member for River Heights raised last week, there are far too many children that are in need of protection and not just in this province, but certainly this is what we are here to govern for.

I certainly want to put on the record my condolences to the family and to the friends that would be affected by this loss. Thank you.

Child and Family Services Children in Care Increase

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, the number of children in care in Manitoba has skyrocketed to more than 8,600, an increase of 30 percent since 2006, an increase of more than 60 percent since 1999, yet the minister dismissed this as just reflective of trends across North America.

I challenge the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his government to name another province that has anywhere near the same proportion of children in care as Manitoba. Manitoba has nearly double the number of children in care as Saskatchewan, and on a per capita basis we are more than three times higher than most other provinces.

I ask the Premier to admit there is a big problem in this province in the way he runs Child and Family Services. What is he going to do about it?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): First of all, we have to admit that there is unacceptable levels of breakdown in our families across this province and beyond. And when we have the number of children in care, in the range of 8,000 children last year, that approximates the size of one of Manitoba's cities, it's tragic.

And that is why we have to do things differently, and that is why we are working particularly with our federal counterparts for on-reserve help, because it is underfunded. There are two tiers of child welfare in Manitoba.

I will conclude my remarks, though, by warning the member that if he is comparing Manitoba to Saskatchewan, we keep children in care in Manitoba two years longer than the province of Saskatchewan. He should do his research.

Mr. Gerrard: Most other provinces realize that it's sensible to have children in care as little and as few as possible. You know, while this minister is putting 60 percent more children in care, British Columbia has, over the last 10 years, put 20 percent fewer kids in care.

We have almost the same number of children in care in Manitoba as Alberta does, and Alberta has about three times our population. Alberta provides enhanced services for families and they are able to help families stay together and prevent more than 80 percent of their at-risk kids from being brought into care in the first place.

The Premier and his government have failed, and it's time the government admitted the problem and told us what they're going to do about it.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As the minister has said, there is a serious issue with children in care, which is why this government has moved forward not only with devolution of child welfare to have a system that serves children both on and off reserve, with services that can extend in both places, but it is also why we have put money forward for the prevention component of child welfare, to work right at the community level to prevent children coming into care.

And I'm happy to report that in our discussions with the federal government, they have decided this year in their budget to join us in that initiative. We had initially put the money in the budget last year; the federal government wasn't able to do that. This year, they have indicated they will put their money forward and we can have better funding to do the kind of prevention work, up-front work, that will help children and families stay out of care. And we will move forward on that in partnership with our First Nations authorities as well as the federal government.

Brian Sinclair Death Inquest Status

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, in September 2008 Brian Sinclair died in an emergency room after waiting 34 hours. And every day we get hundreds of Manitobans that go into our emergency services throughout the provinces, and one needs to recognize the number—the high number—of critical incidents reports that are taking place.

And I would suggest to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that lives could have been saved if we would be able to learn some of the things that could come out of an inquest in regards to the Brian Sinclair tragedy.

My question to the Minister of Justice is: Why is it that a police investigation is holding up this government from having the public inquest? Exactly what it is—what can the Minister of Justice tell us that the police is investigating to prevent the inquest when we need to know and learn from that particular tragedy?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Yes, well, I'll remind the member for Inkster again, in case he wasn't listening

the other week, that the provincial court judge who is in charge of the inquest will determine setting and scheduling those times.

The member from Inkster is correct. There has been some suggestion made that there should be a police investigation. The police are doing some additional work, and till it's completed, I don't expect the provincial court judge will want to go ahead and commence the inquest.

So the member can put the question out there. I'm telling him the fact that the provincial court judge will have control over when that's scheduled and that that cannot yet happen as long as that investigation is ongoing. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Fertility Treatments Tax Credit

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Madam Deputy Speaker, Manitoba continues to be a leader on maternal care. With investments in a new birthing centre, a new women's hospital and our investments in publicly funded midwifery services in mind, can the Minister of Health give us details of an announcement today of great interest to people and couples facing fertility challenges?

*(14:10)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm very happy to announce that today during Canadian Infertility Awareness Week that Manitoba became only the second province in Canada to bring a fertility tax credit to help women and families with the costs associated with treatment for infertility.

We know that it's estimated that one in six couples struggle with issues concerning infertility, and this tax credit will be—will offer equal to 40 percent of fertility treatment costs paid to an accredited clinic in Manitoba, which will also apply to the cost of prescription drugs. We know that a tax credit is not going to be an automatic solution to these issues, but it is going to assist with the financial burden so that couples can fulfil their dreams.

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba Youth Program Funding Decrease

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Madam Deputy Speaker, last week the government announced that they would be hiking the fines imposed on people who provide alcohol to minors. Yet, in Estimates two weeks ago, the Minister of Healthy Living admitted that the budget for AFM school-based programs have

been cut and that schools will have to pitch in more if they want services to help prevent alcohol abuse and addictions among students, not to mention wait times for detox and addiction treatments are dangerously long.

Why is the NDP addiction strategy to do everything except put the supports in place to prevent and treat addictions?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'd like to correct the member. We did not cut the programs. The programs are exactly where they were last year. In fact, we're looking at ways to enhance programs to the youth system and so what we're doing is looking at enhanced programs as far as prevention. We've increased the different programs for treatment. We're looking after treatment support. We're looking at intake, centralizing intake. But we're looking at expanding the system from right across the province.

So we have put 9.4 percent increase in this budget, and you, the members opposite, are voting against the 9.4 percent increase.

Mrs. Rowat: Madam Deputy Speaker, he's saying the funding as it was before. Well, actually, there's a moratorium on school-based programs; so I rest my case.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the minister is aware that this is cold comfort to those Manitobans whose loved ones are suffering from addictions. Manitobans aren't fooled by this minister's rhetoric. They know that increasing fines for supplying alcohol to a minor isn't a real strategy to combat youth addictions.

The recent Youth Health Survey Report showed, once again, that youth binge drinking is on the rise and what does this—what's the NDP answer: hold a summit and increase fines.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when is the Minister of Healthy Living going to stop with the political posturing and come up with a real strategy to combat youth addictions?

Mr. Rondeau: Madam Deputy Speaker, a real strategy is reaching out to over 60 schools to have AFM workers delivering programs across the province. That's what we're doing.

What else are we doing? We are working with other youth organizations to provide information for young people. We're also looking at support for communities. We're looking at addictions supports.

We are working towards detox centres. We're working towards a centralized intake for all youth programs so that we have an advocate that will help individuals navigate the entire addictions service and, Madam Deputy Speaker, we're continuing to add more support for adult addictions, more support for prevention, and 9.4—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Pine Falls Hospital Expansion Project Status

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Deputy Speaker, on December 2nd, 2008, the Minister of Health announced that she planned a \$7-million expansion of the Pine Falls hospital.

So I ask the Minister of Health: When is it going to begin?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is important work under way with the regional health authority and with the local First Nations. I think one of the most important things about the health centre at Pine Falls is that it will be Manitoba's first traditional healing centre in addition to a traditional healing centre. Work is under way in the planning and functional planning of that facility, and they'll be shovels in the ground upcoming.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, the residents of Powerview-Pine Falls are concerned because they've heard nothing from this government with regard to the expansion for the last 18 months. They are concerned because the government also postponed the construction of a high school in Winkler.

So I ask the Minister of Health: When will construction begin?

Ms. Oswald: As I explained to the member, we are moving forward on the project in Pine Falls. It will be the first, in Manitoba, traditional healing centre and—as well as a provider of western medicine. This work is ongoing. There's a range of services.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I'm just going to ask the co-operation of all honourable members. We—could we just have some decorum in the House.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. The work is ongoing in the regional health

authority in addition to consultation with First Nations, who are a critical voice and a critical source of knowledge in the development of this first-in-Manitoba facility.

Rural Bus Services Consultation Meetings

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Many Manitobans rely on bus transportation services for a variety of reasons, such as getting to and from medical appointments, conducting business, shipping freight or visiting family and friends.

This NDP government has scheduled public meetings on bus service to rural and northern Manitoba, but guess what? There is not one meeting south of the Trans-Canada Highway. My understanding is that bus service is important for all Manitobans, not just those that live in the north of Trans-Canada Highway.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can the minister explain why there's not one meeting or workshop south of the Trans-Canada Highway?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Madam Deputy Speaker, you would have thought that the member opposite would've stood in his place and at least said something positive about the fact it's this government that stepped in to make sure that we didn't see an immediate cessation of bus service across northern Manitoba.

We are, through a service contract with Greyhound, ensuring that we maintain those routes. The purpose, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the meetings throughout the province is to not only take the existing routes and try and maintain as much bus service as possible but to work with communities to expand that.

I was in Estimates; I welcomed the member's feedback at that time. I'll look forward to meeting with him—any Manitobans—Madam Deputy Speaker.

Once again, it's this government that's taken the initiative to save bus service in rural and northern Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: I would've expected the minister to consult with those south of the Trans-Canada Highway anytime, all the time, on the issues such as—as important as the bus service for all communities in Manitoba.

Public feedback is vital to developing strategies to ensure that people need service options to access it. It is more important for those people to be heard, all of Manitobans to be heard.

So I ask the minister: Will he apologize today for this oversight, book meetings in Winnipeg, book them in rural Manitoba, let all voices be heard here in this province for all Manitobans, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ashton: Madam Deputy Speaker, members opposite should never lecture anyone about representing the whole province, because it's their leader who, in the last election, threatened to cut highways expenditures in northern Manitoba. He'd applied it, by the way, as north of Riding Mountain.

This is a government that is doing more all across Manitoba, and I want to indicate some of those bus routes that are being saved are, indeed, in southern Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We represent the entire province. That member, once again, hasn't gotten up and congratulated this government for working with Manitobans to save bus service. That's the real issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Concordia Hip and Knee Institute

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to speak of the new Concordia Hip and Knee Institute which helps bring much relief to Manitobans with ailing joints.

The Concordia Hip and Knee Institute which opened last June is a world-class centre dedicated to research and education in joint replacement. Located in an impressive new building on the corner of Concordia Avenue and Molson Street, this \$8.8-million facility will help our province stay a leader in innovative hip and knee replacement research. The institute features high-tech equipment that will help researchers study worn-out joint implants and develop longer lasting ones, thus providing a better way to relieve pain and suffering for thousands of people from Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

* (14:20)

Beyond its value as an innovative research facility, the institute will directly affect the lives of many Manitobans by greatly improving the quality

of health care provided to hip and knee patients. It is an integrated facility that provides rehabilitation treatment and consultations before and after surgery. Patients first come to the institute for a prehabilitation program to optimize their health before surgery and return for post-operative follow-up through a high efficiency clinic. All of them receive the finest care from our doctors and nurses, all the while enjoying the institute's brand new facilities.

The Hip and Knee Institute still requires additional equipment to reach its full potential. I had the pleasure of attending the Concordia Foundation annual fundraising gala and dinner this spring and saw all the work put into supporting the institute. Many donors and volunteers are actively raising more funds for the Concordia Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to preserving high-quality health and wellness services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the Concordia Foundation's board of directors for all their hard work. They are an exceptional team who have volunteered their leadership in many ways: President Dr. Thomas Turgeon, Vice-President Elizabeth Wall and all of the board members. Thank you.

Charleswood Rotary Club 25th Anniversary

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate the Charleswood Rotary on their 25th anniversary. I am grateful to be an honorary member of the Charleswood Rotary and was delighted to participate in the 25th anniversary celebration held on April 12th at the Charleswood Legion.

The Charleswood Rotary Club is one of the newer clubs in the district, having started in 1985. There are six remaining charter members: Ken Buckingham; John Inglis, charter president; Magnus Johnson; Dave Morris; Ed Werbowski; and Gord Zacharias. It is a busy club that places great emphasis on fellowship and participation.

Community activities for the club include joint custodianship of the largest urban green space in North America, the Assiniboine Forest. The club has organized more than \$250,000 in donations and grants for the forest over the last 10 years, including the very successful boardwalk project, which raised more than \$35,000 to make the forest more accessible. More recently, they spearheaded a project to improve the curb appeal of the entrance to the forest. Virtually every member of the club has put

sweat equity into the forest as well as selling souvenir boards for the walk. The resulting partnerships with three schools, horse and pet owners associations and the City of Winnipeg, along with corporate sponsors, have made the club a well-known force in Charleswood.

Every year the club has also hosted an exchange student, as well as sent students to other countries. Another youth activity is the sponsorship of the city's only Rotaract club, a group of young people very active in the Winnipeg community. Their projects include supporting the Boys and Girls Club and Icarus, a make-a-wish program for children who are HIV positive.

The Charleswood club has always considered partnerships of great value, especially for a small club with less than 40 members. The club has helped other clubs with their fundraising events, which has enhanced productivity and fellowship. Another valuable partnership is with Westgrove School, the Westgrove Literacy Project and the Westgrove Healthful Happening snack program. The club's main fundraising activities are an annual lobster dinner at which members normally serve about 500 people. The annual garage sale and coupon book sale are other smaller functions.

A small, young club, the Charleswood Rotary club is fully engaged in making rotary work. With several members on the district council, the future holds promise for continued service above self.

I would like to congratulate the members of the Charleswood Rotary club on 25 years of service to the community and wish them the best in their next 25 years. They are an amazing group who give so much to others and, on behalf of Charleswood, I want to say thank you.

International Day Against Homophobia

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to alert members and Manitobans to the fact that today is marked across the world as the International Day Against Homophobia.

As enshrined by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our province's Human Rights Code, all members of our community have the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. However, all too often the reality does not live up to the vision of our jurisprudence. Still, today in 2010, too many of our colleagues, friends and family are met with hostility and

intolerance by those constrained by fear and narrow-mindedness.

The International Day Against Homophobia has proud Canadian roots. Initiated by Fondation Émergence, a Montréal-based advocacy group in 2003, the event was quickly taken up across Canada. This year, events in Belgium, France and the United Kingdom will add to those taking place from coast to coast to coast in Canada. In Winnipeg today, lunches, presentations and forums are being held by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Civil Service Commission and the GLBT employees. At the Rainbow Resource Centre this afternoon, a rally will be held to raise awareness about homophobia and sport, which is the theme of this year's event.

Though all are invited to raise awareness about the victims of homophobia, the day's tone is equally a celebration of the strides made towards the empowerment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities as well as a celebration of the contributions made by these individuals and groups to our nation, provinces, cities and towns.

I would encourage members of this House and Manitobans in general to use today to reflect on the scourge of homophobia and ways in which we can bind together in furtherance of tolerance, openness and acceptance. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dorothy Braun

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): On April 22nd at a Manitoba Hydro Celebration Banquet which took place during the annual Capturing Opportunities Conference in Brandon, Dorothy Braun of Altona was selected as a provincial winner for the Outstanding Community Leadership award.

This award recognizes individuals who have made significant and notable contributions for the betterment of their community or region, who have served as a catalyst for positive action, and exhibit the highest standards of community leadership, dedication, ability and innovation.

In 2007, Dorothy was selected as the Altona Citizen of the Year in recognition of her many contributions to various organizations in the community. Dorothy was instrumental in helping to make the Regional alternate Education Centre in Altona a reality and was a founding member of the Rhineland Area Food Bank. Dorothy is also the chairperson of the healthy living coalition, central region, and the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative.

She serves on the Altona and Area Family Resource Centre board, creating and assessing programs according to budget outlines, co-ordinating child-care needs, volunteering and advertising, and providing a yearly outlook for all programs running. Dorothy strongly believes in promoting the four-pillar philosophy of the centre, which includes physical health and well-being, healthy nutrition, literacy and learning, and positive parenting.

In co-operation with the RHA's central Healthy Living Together program in Altona and in co-operation with the Rhineland Area Food Bank and the Altona United Church, Dorothy's involvement in the development of the community kitchen program was—has helped promote nutritional food choices, allowing women to network and create menus to encourage healthy eating.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I invite all honourable members to join me in congratulating and thanking Dorothy for her countless contributions to our community. Thank you.

Fred Douglas Foundation Humanitarian Awards

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Deputy Speaker, acts of goodwill and caring inspire and create lasting relationships that can bridge generational gaps. On May 12, the Fred Douglas Foundation held their annual Humanitarian Awards Gala at Canad Inns Polo Park, honouring several individuals who have touched the lives of seniors through their volunteerism or professional work.

The Fred Douglas Society was founded by Reverend Dr. Fred Douglas, who believed in quality housing and care for Winnipeg seniors. Beginning in 1952, his vision was realized through ever-improving facilities such as a personal care home, apartment suites, hostel units and supportive housing.

Proper housing is but one necessity for our province's seniors. Companionship, a caring, friendly face and an ear to listen also brighten people's lives, and it is heartening that those who make a difference in the lives of others are recognized. I would like to take a moment to recognize this year's recipients.

The Love of Caring Award went to Bill Docking of Teulon, who demonstrated his commitment to improving the lives of seniors through his participation in hospital boards, CancerCare and the chair of the seniors coalition, and by co-founding a transportation service for seniors.

Judy McKelvey won the Art of Caring Award for her dedication to the quality of life of seniors through her professional life and her passion for bringing innovative programs and services to seniors.

The Learning by Caring Award was given to student Sara Ayalew, who has committed much of her time volunteering with seniors and has demonstrated compassion and respect.

Finally, the Award of Merit was granted to Sparling United Church for their involvement, vision, pioneering spirit and innovative programs that focus on seniors.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the time these individuals have spent volunteering and/or working with seniors have shown—has indeed been appreciated. I ask that all members join me in congratulating them on their awards and thanking them for their contributions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Madam Deputy Speaker, a couple of things in government business today.

First of all, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Thursday, May the 20th, at 6 p.m., to consider annual reports from Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2003, including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election, June 3rd, 2003; the year ending December 31st, 2006; the year ending December 31, 2007, including the conduct of the 39th Provincial General Election, May 22nd, 2007; and the year ending December 31st, 2008.

*(14:30)

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Thursday, May 20th, at 6 p.m., to consider annual reports from Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2003, including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election, June 3rd, 2003; the year ending December 31st, 2006; the year ending December 31st, 2007, including the conduct of the 39th Provincial General Election, May 22nd, 2007; and the year ending December 31st, 2008.

The Government House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Blaikie: This time I'd like to announce that the House will proceed now to the concurrence—further debate on concurrence with the Estimates, and, at the same time, I'd like to seek leave in order to have the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) added to the roster today amongst those ministers who will be available for questioning in Estimates. That's today instead of tomorrow, Madam Deputy Speaker, where he was initially listed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for the Minister for Family Services to appear in concurrence today and to not appear tomorrow? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

The House will now dissolve into committee of concurrence—of supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The committee has before it consideration—for consideration the motion concurring in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2010.

On May 13th, 2010, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Hawranik) tabled the following list of ministers of the Crown who may be called for questioning in debate on concurrence motions: the honourable First Minister (Mr. Selinger), the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and the Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Mackintosh).

These ministers will be questioned concurrently.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I would just like to indicate to the minister that we're still receiving considerable concerns from child-care facilities that are in shared space, many of those within schools, within our province, that are extremely concerned about some of the time lines and the implications and the workability of the new locked-door policy that was placed on all facilities on very short notice.

And I guess I would just ask for some clarification from the minister around what his expectations are. Now, I know that the act was proclaimed and the regulations have come into force,

and the minister has indicated that there will be a time frame allowed for child-care facilities to come into compliance, but that their plans have to be submitted. What is the expectation of the minister and the department? When will those plans have to be submitted, and how detailed will they have to be?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Over the next year we'll be developing the regulation which will put into practice, then, the expectation with regard to the locked-door policy. Over the course of time between now and next spring, we'll look to see what the necessary exceptions should be to the policy and what mitigation options can still move towards a greater reduction of risk when the children are inside during, you know, the normal program hours.

In terms of the plan that's been requested, we've asked them to ask the child-care facilities to advise us what—basically, what the barriers will be, then, to a locked-door policy in their facilities. And some are expressing some concern when they are in shared facilities, like schools, in terms of whether there would be a requirement to have a locked door on the immediate parts of the building where child care is located as opposed to, perhaps, more peripheral security for the main doors of the school. Those are questions that we'll have to address.

So the idea is, by June—and there's a flexible time there, and there's no consequences for them being late, and we'll work with the child-care centres to develop their plans if they can't all be ready for the next little while. But the main idea is to find out what kind of barriers to a locked-door policy exist, and what ideas they have to overcome that or to mitigate that.

So, again, what's critical is there be flexibility, and my sense is that there should be some communication. Again, I think that even though the original note had gone out clarifying that there was no requirements until about a year from now—or April of 2011—we're just going to, I think, clarify for greater certainty to child-care centres what the expectations are around the interim plans and notices about the barriers to the locked-door policy—just to clarify it and just to remind them that if, in fact, there are barriers and it can't be done, then we're going to make sure that there are clear exceptions in the legislation. And also, let them know, of course, that if there are costs that will be involved, that the Province will help.

So those are some of the concerns and, as I say, we—it's important that we learn as we go here. We're—this is new territory in the country, and we're really building on the experience of many child-care centres in Manitoba that have put in place very effective locked-door policies, and that have worked well and that parents have supported. So it's a matter of building on that one while recognizing that, in some shared facilities, we have to be more flexible.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chair, and, I guess, the question for me—or the question I would like to ask right now is, how many facilities have come forward with their plans, and what are the cost implications that the minister has received to date from facilities that—and how many facilities? I guess the first question will be, how many facilities have met the deadline? And, I guess—I believe the deadline is June 1st, so maybe we're not quite there yet. Was it June 1st that all facilities were to have their locked-door policy plans into government? That will be my first question; then I'll ask another one subsequent to that.

* (14:50)

Mr. Mackintosh: We've asked them to provide, as I say, the—some information about their plans by June 1st. To say there are no sanctions if they don't do that, if they're not in—well, we'll just continue to work with the child-care facilities. We have the child-care co-ordinators available to help as well as some safety specialists. And so I think it's good to have that kind of dialogue.

The other part of the information that we will be getting in, of course, in the weeks ahead, will be a sense as to how many are already in the position to have full locked doors. Like I say, my experience has been that, by and large, child-care facilities have locked doors already. It's often just a matter of activating the lock when the children are in for normal program hours. And where the facilities, though, are co-located, we can look at how they can enhance their visitor-access controls.

Well, and so I—just to conclude, and I think this is where the member was going, is that there won't be any effect on licensing for—until next year. April 1st, 2011, is the stated time line that we would like to have a locked-door policy developed by and a regulation in place. And, if there are child-care centres that have plans, then, for—to pursue locked-door policies because it is practical and doable, then we can develop the strategy in terms of how the licence can be or would be provisional, perhaps, with regard to certain plans that are under

way. Or it may be that the regulation is written with this clear exemptions at the start, so that the licence would not be impacted by way of unnecessary exemption. But the definition of a locked door may differ depending on the practicalities of getting it done.

I have heard, for example, from one location, where they looked at it from several different ways and just thought it was very difficult, without some significant investments and changing some configurations, to have a locked door specifically on the child-care centre itself. But there still are some checks and balances and safety protocols that are in place in the school. So it may suffice once the specialists or the co-ordinators have looked at the situation with the child-care centre, that that would be compliant with a locked-door policy in the end, depending, of course, on how the exemptions are written.

So we'll learn from the experience. We'll learn from the information and feedback and from the barriers that are listed and then we'll get a sense, over the coming months, of the costs that would be required based on each place. But, you know, every child-care centre is very different.

Mrs. Mitchelson: One of the issues that has been raised with me is the whole issue of safety charters that have been implemented, I believe, in all schools across the province, and all schools were required to have a safety charter to protect the safety of children.

Now, great concern that the Department of Family Services moved ahead in isolation of working with the Department of Education or the school divisions on the safety charters that have already been implemented and why we would need to have a different safety charter in a school than what has been accepted by government through the safety charters that exist presently in schools right across the province. And concern that there's overlap—there's duplication—that one department isn't talking to the other, one arm of government doesn't know what the other arm is doing and why would we need something different for child-care facilities that are in schools.

So I'm just wondering if the minister could explain to me what discussion was had. Did they not look at the safety charters that have been implemented by all schools and all school divisions across the province? Did they not look at that, and use some common sense in their decision around moving forward with the heavy hand of the

Department of Family Services, when Education already has something in place?

Could the minister indicate what discussions were had and why, in fact, the process and the safety charter that's in place, and accepted by one department of government, is not good enough for another department?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yeah, I'm sure that, in fact, there have been discussions and discussions will continue. And they'll continue on what is the most important basis, and that is the local basis because every configuration will require some different considerations when child-care centres are located in schools.

Some child-care centres are located in schools in a way that has an entirely separate entrance to the child-care facility and has different washroom facilities and so on. And some of those—and I'm aware of some of those. I've been to them recently. I'm aware—have locked-door policies and have had for some time.

There are other child-care centres located in schools where they are essentially in a room in the school. And there may be the ability to lock a room, but then there are issues about, you know, washroom use and so on that has to be accommodated. So that's one of the issues that will be looked at.

But the Safe Schools Charter, while recognizing visitor access control, you know, does have somewhat of a different population, and we're mindful of that. Where, for example, there's infant care in a child-care facility, we would like to make sure that there are plans in place—and that's specific to that population. So the populations may not always be the very same.

But the other concern in schools is that we would want to be assured that the visitor access controls would be in effect on the off-hours, because the child-care centres almost always operate on different hours than the school, generally. And during the holiday periods, especially during the summer, there are very different considerations at play there.

So those are some of the issues that we'll be looking at. And it may well be that, in particular schools, the Safe Schools Charter will be sufficient because there are checks and balances and—but I think, too, while the whole initiative has to be flexible, and in terms of its application, it can't be status quo either. We want to see everyone turning

their mind to how they can better enhance visitor access control during normal program hours.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the minister still hasn't answered: Was there any discussion?

I mean, he says it may well be that the safety charter that's in place in the school might be okay for child-care facilities. Was that dialogue and discussion not held before the minister moved ahead with his plans and his direction to child-care facilities? Was any of that discussion held with his counterpart, the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), or with officials in both departments, because it's my understanding that his safety charter for child-care facilities was not even discussed, that officials in the Department of Education had no idea what was coming down on the safety charter for child cares?

So can the minister explain to me why there was no discussion at all, why they were caught off guard in the Department of Education, why one department doesn't talk to the other before these kinds of decisions get made?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I've been assured that there were discussions, but what's important here is a consideration of the individual citing the particular child-care centres. It's not a high-level approach that is required here because every child-care centre is different. And that is why there has to be the examination of each plan and, in some cases, it might not be a school. It may be other landlords or other facilities, like community centres or churches, that are engaged. So that is why the focus here is on developing a local approach based on the particular needs and the configuration of a particular child-care centre.

* (15:00)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chair, I won't go on too much longer but it's not only the child-care facilities but it's the parents who have their children attending child-care facilities that are expressing real concern about the time and energy and effort that child-care workers are having to put into some of the requests that have been made by this minister's department at—under his direction.

And they have had confidence in their child-care facility and have shopped around and found the right place for their children, and have looked for places that put the safety and security of their children first before they enrol them in a child-care facility. And they're wanting to see the child-care workers in the system focussing their energy and their attention on

caring for the children rather than having to put time and energy and effort into a locked-door policy, in some instances that was never discussed and was sort of sprung on them at the last minute by this minister and his department.

And some of the concerns that parents have are concerns—first and foremost, they want their children safe and they always have had that in mind. And many of them, and many child-care facilities—I would say the vast majority—have put the safety of children first and foremost when they're opening and conducting their affairs in their facilities. But parents have the concern that the heavy hand of this government and this department are making the facilities into prison-like institutions. I've heard that comment from parents.

And they're looking at policies or direction that's been given by this minister that says some of them are unattainable, unrealistic and unnecessary, and these are parents that are talking. This isn't child-care workers in the system. These are parents that are saying they want the child-care facility that is looking after their children to be able to put their energies and efforts into the priority care of their children and not focus on some of the rules and regulations that seem to be very—taking a very heavy-handed approach by this government.

So I would hope that when the minister is looking at this over the next year that he wouldn't be expecting child-care facilities to focus all of their energies and efforts on meeting, sometimes, unrealistic objectives at the expense of caring for the children that are under their watch. So I'm hopeful that the minister will take that into account and not place the unrealistic expectations that will harm the care of children more than help.

And he did indicate, in one of his previous answers, that there were some safety specialists in the department that were working with child-care facilities. Are these new positions? Were they positions that were part of a staff component in the Department of Family Services where there's some contract people hired? Who are these safety specialists and what are their qualifications?

Mr. Mackintosh: The safety specialists have been working tirelessly to provide the assistance for developing the safety charter and have been helping the child-care co-ordinators that are all given regional assignments.

So there—are three specialists that are in place that have brought tremendous efforts to bear to make sure the safety charter was put together and developed with the child-care centres and are available, in addition, though, to the child-care co-ordinators that exist all across the province and the department generally.

The job of caring for the children necessarily involves a priority on safety. Safety always has to be the most fundamental consideration when caring for children, and so it is our view that a lot more had to be done in Manitoba to reduce the risk of harm to children in child-care facilities, which is why the charter was introduced and has been fleshed out now in terms of the codes of conduct and safety plans that have been developed all across the facilities.

So we see it as a fundamental role where the charter is an important reminder of the importance of safety of children, and while we recognize that sometimes adults have to be inconvenienced from time to time to assure the children of safety—and the parents—that is part of the job of child-care centres and many others in society. But the child-care centres have been wonderful in Manitoba in terms of responding to the safety charter, the legislation and the need to develop the codes and plans, and have been at the forefront of making sure that it's going to go to work for children.

Now, when the member says that the locked-door policy was sprung on the facilities at the last minute, there's a full year—there's more than a year of time—to put together the final regulations and the approaches in the different facilities depending on the local configurations.

So it's not a heavy hand whatsoever; in fact, quite the opposite. We will work collegially with the child-care facilities and nonetheless recognize that, you know, when you have a neighbourhood with several child-care centres and all of them have locked doors and visitor access control, and some have had that for many, many years, it's important that you, then, answer the question, well, why are some facilities not doing more to guard against unwanted visitors? And so I think it's important that when we have the development of best standards within the province and we've seen this develop organically, that we move at some point to a standard that parents can expect right across the system.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

We've heard the strongest support for the safety charter and this policy from parents themselves who feel relieved that better efforts are being taken to protect their children when they're in the child-care facility. At the same time we want to continue to embrace and encourage use of outdoor spaces whether it's the playground or other public facilities. The locked-door policy is just a very swift and relatively inexpensive way to add some added security. As I say, when I look at child-care facilities across this province, since the majority have locks already on their doors, just making sure that the locks are activated when the kids are inside during program hours, that's a way to enhance safety. That is only one part, though, of what is a multifaceted approach to greater child safety in child care, and we'll continue to look at other enhancements over the years.

This is an enhancement that was discovered as important over the course of the development of the charter and the feedback that we got from child-care centres, and we'll continue to take advice from practice and how we can move forward to enhance other applications of the charter.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Did—could the minister answer whether the safety specialists were additional staff resources to the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I certainly know that they were—it's added expertise to the child-care office, so that there is someone available that is intimately knowledgeable in the areas of, you know, the charter, and in terms of the staff years, I can get that information to the member.

*(15:10)

Mrs. Mitchelson: I would just ask the minister when he's getting that information whether he could provide for me the names, the salaries, are they full-time positions that were added to the department, or are they on contract or term positions for a period of time, and what the qualifications of those people were and how they were hired.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I can provide that information to the member.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I'd like to ask a few questions on Employment and Income Assistance and I'm wondering if the minister—I know that the regulation was changed just on April 21st of this year—and I wonder if the minister could indicate to me what amendments this order has, and what implications it

will have for Employment and Income Assistance clients. Have the rates increased at all?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, the regulation was amended to reflect the several changes that have happened, particularly under the Rewarding Work initiative in EIA over the last little while. And there were a number of new initiatives there: the Rewarding Work, you know, the job allowance, the volunteer benefit. So it was really codifying the new initiatives under the umbrella of Rewarding Work.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate what the average monthly caseload of Manitobans receiving EIA was for 2009-2010?

Mr. Mackintosh: I have with me a note that speaks to caseloads, and if it doesn't—if the time periods aren't what the member is seeking information about, she can let me know, obviously. But there have been some increases to the caseloads, although less pronounced here than other provinces. And I have a note that says from November '08 to November '09, the caseload increased 7.5. What we're seeing in Saskatchewan, up 8.5; B.C., 14.8; Alberta, 18.1; Ontario, 11.8.

So there has been some recent increase due to the recession, but over the last decade many on EIA were able to find employment and, as well, the caseload was reduced. And, I think, over the last decade we can see some pronounced improvements in the number of Manitobans requiring social assistance.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And in 2008-2009, the average monthly caseload was 31,137—I have a note and, I guess, I might just ask whether the minister, then, has the numbers. He gave me a percentage, but what's the number, the average monthly caseload?

Mr. Mackintosh: The '09-10, I have a caseload of 33,233. That's representing, still, over 10 years of—a reduction of 5.8 percent.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate to me how many individuals received or found employment through the Rewarding Work program?

Mr. Mackintosh: My—I can obtain more information on that. I've seen a better breakdown, but I can just do an overview here.

We've got a number of different approaches. First of all, the Job Connections initiative was to reduce the workload of some of the EIA workers so that they can focus more on some of the barriers that

individuals, particularly, in that case, single parents have in accessing the labour market. And that has received very, very favourable response. Of course, it is an investment, and, as I recall, I think about 15-17 individuals that have that job and that is making a difference for that population on EIA.

As well, there's been about 18 initiatives for persons with disabilities to assist them get off of welfare and into work, and that includes everything from earning exemptions being increased, a new initiative that allows longer periods of education and training plans. And, for example, historically, EIA only allowed individuals to receive EIA benefits while attending training or education for up to six months, and the Get Ready initiative has allowed, on a case-by-case basis, persons to access training and education to two years and, in some cases, single parents for more than two years.

The marketAbilities team is like Job Connections and it's to provide more intensive specialized services, but the population there are persons with disabilities on income assistance. And we've now increased the staff complement from three to five there, and we're—now we're doing some service in the Interlake or central regions.

The marketAbilities Fund, as well, was to fund initiatives that will help people with disabilities get employment by way of some local initiatives that are innovative, recognizing that we needed to do more outside of the city of Winnipeg. So we had, for example, the Almost New store in Dauphin that was funded and individuals there were able to access paid work.

The Rewarding Work volunteer benefit, as well, is put in place for those Manitobans with disabilities on EIA to help offset the cost associated with volunteering, but also to encourage and incent volunteerism enabling them to get accustomed to, you know, the workaday and, as well, I think, recognizes the important role that they have when they're volunteering.

The member has raised earlier questions about the awareness campaign and the importance of trying to change attitudes as well as the actual physical barriers that are in place. There's been some enhancements to vocational rehabilitation staffing in the Eastman region, and I don't have the numbers here in terms of the added individuals that will be serviced by that. I could obtain that.

* (15:20)

We have a Rapid Re-Enrolment Policy so that EIA participants with disabilities whose case is closed because of employment aren't subject to a medical eligibility reassessment if they apply for EIA benefits.

We have a—some enhancements of \$105 a month with regard to persons with disabilities to help address the additional cost of living with the disability in the community. Of course, the caregiver tax credit for EIA participants is important where the primary caregivers are—well, for primary caregivers of spouses, relatives, neighbours or friends.

The liquid asset exemptions enhancement has increased to \$4,000 for a single applicant up to a household maximum of \$16,000. There's an exemption for the new RDSP, the Registered Disability Savings Plan. So the RDSP assets and withdrawals by EIA participants with disabilities will be exempt from financial consideration.

There's a new Get Started! one-time payment to offset unexpected employment expenses that may arise when EIA participants leave income assistance to start employment, and in that category persons with disabilities receive \$325.

The Rewarding Work Health Plan extended non-insured health benefits including prescription drug, dental and optical for all persons who leave EIA for work for a period of up to two years.

And then, of course, we've enhanced the Manitoba Shelter Benefit for persons living in non-subsidized rental housing. EIA participants with disabilities are eligible for \$50 per month and persons with disabilities not receiving EIA may receive a maximum benefit of \$210 a month.

I just will add that the underlying philosophy and public policy objective that is at—in play here is a recognition that there are—there have been perverse incentives put in place in our welfare system, so that we heard, for example, from single parents the observation that there's a disincentive in place for going to work. When you get to the new job, you're paid, of course, according to your job description, not according to how many children you have, and so that their needs, when it comes to optical and dental care, for example, are no longer paid for. And, as a result, that's why the Rewarding Work Health Plan was put in place.

But it's called the welfare wall and the federal government has recognized it as well. Minister Flaherty has introduced the Working Income Tax

Benefit that complements what Manitoba is doing to ensure that there's a message to those on welfare—and a clear message that work has to pay more than welfare because, in some cases, that hasn't been the case. But we also recognize that sometimes there's a fear of those on welfare about going to work and by introducing these changes under the Rewarding Work strategy, we hope to bring about a substantive change where the advantages of work are then clear to those who are on welfare.

So some of this will take time and some of it we have seen produce faster results. Of course, the challenge of operating Rewarding Work in an economic downturn has its additional challenges.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Acting Chairperson—but I'm not sure that I heard an answer to how many individuals have been employed as a result of Rewarding Work.

And I heard the minister say something about 15 to 17 individuals who, I believe, were single parents. And what—over what time frame, and how many other individuals other than those with disabilities would have—are working today as a result of the Rewarding Work initiative?

Mr. Mackintosh: In terms of those who have been assisted by the new initiatives, I can provide that with a breakdown by initiative. But I don't have that note with me because, as I recall, there's been some analysis of those that are getting helped by the number of different initiatives, which, of course, is very important to then use to gauge whether these initiatives should continue indefinitely or whether they should be strengthened or tweaked in any way.

Mrs. Mitchelson: How are outcomes measured? Do we have indication of people moving completely off of EIA and into the work force? And how do we monitor to see whether those people continue to work or whether they come back onto EIA?

Mr. Mackintosh: An example of the impact of these changes will vary according to the objective of each initiative. For example, the initiative to allow people to get more substantive education and training has, as its objective, more meaningful work and, hopefully, no later re-entry onto welfare because what is—the recipient has found a good and meaningful job. So the measure of that is the number of individuals who are taking the educational opportunities that that initiative affords. But, as well, the volunteer benefit will have numbers in terms of the take-up there and we can certainly provide those for the member.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister doesn't have any indication of how many people are actually employed as a result. He indicated that some are doing more training. He indicated that some are volunteering. How many individuals are actually employed as a result of the Rewarding Work initiative?

Mr. Mackintosh: I want to get the update on numbers and we can provide those to the member on a timely basis.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I'm wondering if the minister could just explain for me, one more time, the process that was followed in the review of the death of Gage Guimond, because we have the minister on record with several different accounts of the story and I still don't have any clear understanding of what happened.

Now, I know that in the instances of some other deaths within the system, this minister maybe wasn't in this office at the time, but he was in the office of the Minister of Family Services when Gage Guimond died. So I've asked enough questions over the last couple of years that the minister should have—be up to speed, should be briefed, and he should be able to explain to me what process kicked in, in his department, when Gage Guimond died.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I think we had canvassed this, but I'll just reiterate what the process was—is that, under the authority's legislation, there can be a review by the relevant child welfare authority, and, in that case, it was the Southern Authority, which, very quickly, after the tragedy, launched a review and it looked at a number of different components.

* (15:30)

First of all, a case management review for which Andrew Koster and Alice McEwan-Morris—or Morris-McEwan—were designated to conduct. As well, the authority launched an operational review of the operations of the agency which was Sagkeeng, and so it was a fairly broad review that was launched, and that was the review, then, that was reported publicly in July of 2008.

Mrs. Mitchelson: What role did the department play in that review?

Mr. Mackintosh: I know the branch would have been—would have had a role providing some information and any other assistance that the authority sought, and, as well, I know there was a

role—at least, initially—sought from the Children's Advocate.

I think the member had asked questions about this last time, and I think it was the Children's Advocate that had played a role to co-ordinate the child—the case management review, and that role continued until the Children Advocate withdrew, and then the case management review just continued with Mr. Koster and Alice McEwan-Morris.

And so I believe there were collegial efforts by the branch, but the review was conducted by the Southern Authority, it's my understanding.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And the minister committed to me last time we had some discussion around this issue, that he would get the information to me on when the external reviewers were hired, who hired them, what the cost of that was and what the terms of reference were. Has he got that information for me today?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yeah, I don't have that information today, but I know the department had been asked to prepare that and get some information to the member on a timely basis.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And can I ask what the minister means by timely? How soon can I expect that information?

Mr. Mackintosh: I don't want to make a presumption that the department will know the date that the contractors were brought on. I—but I have to check on that because if there has—there may have to be a request of the Office of the Children's Advocate if that was the office that hired them, but, hopefully, we have that information within the branch.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I think I've got some conflicting information on the record, because the minister most recently has indicated to me that the Child Advocate hired the external reviewers. He is on record saying that the Southern Authority hired the external reviewers. Who was it?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, it's my recollection, subject to any correction, that the Children's Advocate had been asked to do the case management review. So, presumably, then, it was the Children's Advocate that would have retained the two contractors.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I do have some comments that the minister put on the record, and I just have to find the date and the place. I have one more question I want to get on the record here—just a minute.

Yeah, the minister indicated, and I just can't seem to find it here on the record, that there were other pieces of the Gage Guimond review that were contracted out. Can he indicate to me—yes, I've found it.

He said there are other parts, I understand, that were contracted out, particular tasks. And that was on April 23rd of this year. Could he indicate to me what other parts of the review were contracted out and what the tasks would have been for those contracts?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'd have to look at the record again. I don't have an independent memory of what the—of other contractors, but I can let the member know.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks. I'd just like to ask the minister if he, when he's compiling that information, if he would indicate who got those contracts, who contracted them, the date of the contracts and the cost of the contracts.

Mr. Mackintosh: Will do.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Acting Chairperson, and I do have several questions for the Minister of Finance this afternoon. The first one I'd like to ask if the Minister of Finance could confirm that Bill 31 does not contain any new taxes that are—I—that are not identified in the 2010 budget.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Altemeyer): Perhaps I might ask the honourable member for Tuxedo to repeat her question.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. Could the Minister of Finance just confirm that Bill 31 does not contain any new taxes that are not already identified in the 2010 budget?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Bill 31 contains only those increases in taxes that were outlined in the budget and the balance, the majority of the bill, is making technical adjustments to things that departments have found out over—as they administer the acts and various bills have been brought into line.

So—but those, the things that are—that were announced are what is in the bill.

Mrs. Stefanson: And just to clarify, that means that there are—there's nothing outside of that; that, yes, those could be contained in there, but there's nothing

outside of that in terms of taxation. There are no new taxes then.

Ms. Wowchuk: The bill contains only the taxes that were announced in the budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just one more question with respect to Bill 31: Can the minister explain why the compliance role for the small business venture capital tax credit has moved to an independent administrator from the Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson)?

Ms. Wowchuk: I've provided the member with a full briefing with a side-by-side explanation of each one of those things, and if I could remember correctly, this was just to streamline with others. But I could—I haven't got that book with me, and I could look at it again and provide her with the answer.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yeah, and it was just—yeah, again, just—it was just something that obviously there was a change here, and I was just wondering what that—what may have been the reason to move it from the compliance role from the minister to a new independent administrator.

* (15:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: All of these recommendations come from staff as they're looking at how the acts are implemented and how various things are implemented. And I would get—I would want—if it would okay, I would look at that again and give the answer back to the member.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and that would be very helpful if she could talk to her staff and get the answers for these questions. That would be helpful.

I just wanted to move into—there were obviously some assumptions that were made for based—for the basis of the five-year economic plan as tabled in the budget by this minister. And I'm wondering if the minister could indicate what the assumptions are for the next four, five years—well, that takes us through to 2014, for the Canadian dollar. What assumptions were used for the Canadian dollar with respect to the numbers that are used in the projections in this budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: All of the assumptions are based on projections that are given to us by financial institutes, by money managers, and information that we get from the federal government and those are the assumptions that are used as we put this budget together.

Mrs. Stefanson: But what are the assumptions for the Canadian dollar with respect to this budget? What have the—what are the assumptions, the actual numbers that have been used for the basis of the numbers that are in this book?

Ms. Wowchuk: They're—they—the assumptions are that the—there is assumptions that the dollar will remain at a reasonable level but there are—the assumptions are that it will remain at pretty much a level that it has been—that it is now, and there could be some decline in the dollar.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I guess I would just like to clarify what reasonable levels would be. Is that at current levels? Is that on par with the U.S. dollar? Is that at 90 cents? Is it \$1.05? What are the projections that have been used for the basis of the numbers that are used for the projections based on the five-year economic plan as outlined in the budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: The assumptions right—will vary from—as we—but the assumptions that we're making right now in this budget is that the dollar will stay at about the same level that it is. There may be a slight variation but as we project for the first year and then there could be—those assumptions vary as there will be a different number as we move into next year, but we're assuming that the dollar will stay at about the level that it is—as it has been in the last year.

Mrs. Stefanson: What were the projections for interest rates over the next five years as well?

Ms. Wowchuk: The interest rates are—about where we would be borrowing our money—right now, we're projecting that to be around 5 percent.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is that for the next five years that—is the minister, then, indicating that interest rates will stay the same as they are today? Is that what she's saying?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's the assumptions we have right now. As the economy changes, if there is—those are the numbers we have to work with right now. Those are the numbers that the financial institutes give us right now so that's what we have to build our Estimates on. As we move forward, if there is a change, then those would be the adjustments, but based on the numbers that we have gotten from the financial institutes now and from the federal government, the assumptions are that it'll be about 5 percent.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, when we're looking forward and the projections for the 2011-12, the 2012-13, the

2013-14, the 2014-15 projections in your five-year plan, have you used 5 percent as the basis for the next five years?

Ms. Wowchuk: The assumption is that we have some very long-range borrowing, and that—and some of that borrowing is done at a very reasonable rate. So we're assuming that our average borrowing, based on long-term, that what's in—what we've got locked in now, will be at—on an average of about 5 percent and, as we come into different borrowing, we may have to adjust it. But we have to remember that Manitoba has a very good credit rating, and we have been able to borrow at a reasonable rate. And that's why, for now, we can average at 5 percent.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's reasonable to assume, given the fact that the Governor of the Bank of Canada has indicated that rates will increase; that everyone, pretty much most financial institutions are estimating that rates will increase over the next little while, are you then saying that you've used a 5 percent base rate, then, for that 5 percent rate, or are you not projecting anything or any increases from there over the next five years?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, when we're borrowing money, we're borrowing over a long period of time. We're borrowing in twenty—ten—20 to 30 years. And we have the ability, in some cases, to get some of that money for even less than 5 percent, but we assume that, maybe, as we move forward, we may have to, as some of our terms come due, we may have to borrow at a higher rate. But, right now, we could borrow—we have a very good credit rating and we can borrow at a low rate, at—over a long period of time. And, as money comes due, we can borrow again. And that is what we're assuming right now for an average, based on what we've been able to borrow on in the past, what their interest rate is now, and the fact that we can borrow over a long period of time.

Mrs. Stefanson: With respect to equalization payments, I believe the minister said before, in Estimates, that she felt that equalization payments would remain the same, and that was the basis for the projections for the next five years in the plan. Can the minister indicate what backup she has from the federal governments? Does she have something in writing from the federal government, that those equalization payments will remain the same?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, in actual fact, equalization payments are down slightly this year, but the federal government Finance Minister has given his word that he are—they are not going to balance the budget—

balance their budget on the backs of the provincial government. And we anticipate that our 2009 was—2009-10 budget was 2,063,400,000—no, I'm reading this wrong—2 billion—over 2.06 billion, and now that's gone down to 2.001. So there is a decline from last year to this year, but the federal government has said that they're—they don't intend to balance on the backs of the province. But, of course, there's going to be some variation. We have to make assumptions, and we're assuming that they're going to stay about the same level.

Mrs. Stefanson: And what is about the same level? So you're saying they declined slightly over last year. By what percentage did they decline slightly over last year? Is that the basis for the projections of a slight decline over the next four years? Is the minister indicating that, perhaps, they'll go up by 0.1 percent, 0.05 percent? What are the actual numbers for the basis of these—of what is used, in terms of the projected deficits over the next five years?

Ms. Wowchuk: The federal equalization payment went down by about \$62 million.

Mrs. Stefanson: So what are the projections for the next four years, then, or into—to take us up to 2014 under a so-called balanced budget, then, at the time, then, in terms of what their projections are in their five-year plan? Are they saying that it's going to remain the same? Are they saying that, next year, they're planning on it being 65,000—or \$65 million less? What is she saying, then, in terms of the actual numbers for the next four years?

Ms. Wowchuk: On the overall basis, when you look at all of the things, if you look at the equalization, if you look at the CST—HT—and all of those, we anticipate that one number may vary slightly, one may go up, but we anticipate in the range of the same amount of money.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yeah, we're talking about equalization payments, though. And if—and the minister has indicated, for some reason, that she believes that they're going to remain stable over the next four or five years. And if they're going to remain stable or within a certain range, can the minister indicate what kind of indication she has had from the federal government to back up that statement?

Ms. Wowchuk: What I'm saying is that there may be—this year we saw a decline, but it's based on the

Canadian—the average of the Canadian economy. There could be some change there. There could be some change on the health transfer. There could be some change on the social transfer. So we look at it as a total number, between the number that comes through equalization, which could be adjusted depending on where the economy is going. But there also could be adjustments to the CHT and the CST, the social and health transfers. So we look at those as a total number of what we get from the federal government and what we got in the past and what we get this year. This year there was a decline of about \$63 million, and we anticipate that that will be where the average is over the next few years.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think what we're seeing here is the risk involved with depending on the federal government and for other provinces in the way of equalization payments—to rely on that for our core operating budget. And I think what we're also seeing is that, clearly, there could be a difference. I believe the federal government has only indicated that for this year that they would do that. But years going forward, unless the minister has something in writing going forward from there, we cannot continue to rely on other provinces to fund—for revenues for our Province, and I think, certainly, what happened back in the 1990s between the years of '94-95, '98-99, there was a drop of some 400 million in equalization payments from the federal government to our Province.

And if you looked at that based on the size of our budget today, you'd be looking at a decline of over \$700 million in that time frame, and I'm wondering if the minister can indicate—I mean, this could very well be the case. There has been no commitment going forward. There are—basically what she is saying is that there is no indication from the federal government over the next four years that it will remain the same, that they won't do that. And so we could be faced with a scenario that we have been faced with as a province before, and what will the minister do in the event that that happens and will she not admit that there is significant risk to relying on the federal government for the revenues of a province?

Ms. Wowchuk: Just as we have put in place a five-year plan, the federal government has put in a plan over a longer period of time. There's a recognition on the part of the federal government that it's going to take time to restore balance. And they have said that they won't balance their books on the backs of the provinces. And I anticipate that they

will be true to that word, and that will follow through their economic recovery plan just as we will—ours will, and we expect economic growth in this province, a slow and steady growth. So there are various options. But the federal government has said in their plan that they will not balance on the backs of the provinces and just as we have a long-term plan, so do they.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think one of the other areas that the minister or that the government relies on is obviously other reporting entities for the purposes of balancing their budget. And I think if, obviously, there's been projections made on the other reporting entities and the Crown corporations in terms of the revenues there, could the minister indicate what the assumptions were that were made for the other reporting entities?

Ms. Wowchuk: The same kind of assumptions were made this year as were made in other years—that in other years, we look at the growth in our population, we look at what happened the previous year, and then each of those corporations build in their assumptions as to where they think that—on the kind of growth that they anticipate. So, though, we rely on the corporations to tell us what kind of growth we can expect and, certainly, when you have the growth in the province, and when you have the kinds of activities that are taking place in the province with the stimulus package, all of those impact the economy of this province and all of that is built into our projections.

Mrs. Stefanson: I assume each Crown corporation or each reporting entity comes up with their own assumptions for their own organization. Has the minister reviewed those assumptions? Are they along the same lines as the provincial government's assumptions with respect to the core operating budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Acting Chairperson, the corporations give our—their best projections, and I trust the staff. I think we have very capable staff at each of those corporations, and I trust their projections are accurate, and we rely on the numbers that they gave us.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, is there—are there inconsistencies, then, to projections that are—to assumptions that are made for the projections in the five-year plan between the core operating budget and the other reporting entities?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, I think if you look at the five-year plan, there is—the department looks at the—at each corporation. The corporations give their projections and that's what it's built on. So no—if you're asking if there's going to be a projection of some significant downturn or some significant increase in revenues from up to a particular corporation, they have their projections that they put in. And that's what we based the budget on, our revenues on, and the assumption is that our economy will grow slow and steady as it has in the past, and there will be some increases in revenues from each of the corporations.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, has the minister actually—when she received the projections from the other reporting entities, did she ask the questions of the board of those organizations, or did she ask what assumptions were used for the basis of their projections?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Wowchuk: Every corporation comes forward with their projections. They have competent staff, and they bring forward these projections and, of course, we have discussion with them as to what they anticipate, whether there would—and what they're basing their projections on. And—but I have to say, again, that I think we have very competent staff at each of the corporations, who have worked there for a long time and have the knowledge and skills and the records that they can look at—and it's based on that information that they make their assumptions and set their budgets, not any different that has been done in any—in years past.

Mrs. Stefanson: Under the Manitoba's, like, five-year economic plan in the budget book, on page 10, it mentions that core government expenditure will grow by an annual average of 1.9 percent during the five-year period. Can the minister explain that number?

Ms. Wowchuk: There will be some growth in government. People's salaries—people have their natural increase in their salaries as they move through their—I've forgotten the right word—their steps in their pay salary. There will be some increases there. There will be the normal business of government, and there will be some increases that will take place.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I guess if the minister—in terms of the expenditures, the operating expenditures

for the government are expected to rise by 5.2 percent next year; that's in the government books.

So I guess I'm wondering where the 1.9 percent comes from, if next year the government is estimating an increase in expenditures of 5.2 percent. That would mean that subsequent years following that there would have to be actual cuts in overall expenditures in order to come to that kind of an average.

So that's why I'm asking the minister to explain this number if she could.

Ms. Wowchuk: We anticipate moderate growth over the next few years, and it's based on that moderate growth that we have said we are going to also have to have very reasonable moderate growth in government spending as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: But we're talking about expenditures and next year in the government books it has an increase in expenditures of some 5.2 percent for core operating expenditures. And the government, for core government expenditures, it says that it's expected to grow by an annual average of 1.9 percent during the five-year period.

If next year it's supposed to grow 5.2 percent, then that means that subsequent years there must be projections. And I'm wondering if the minister could indicate where she got the 1.9 percent. If next year is 5.2 percent, what are the projections for the subsequent years to arrive at the 1.9 percent average?

Ms. Wowchuk: We—as we looked at this five-year plan, we had to put a plan in place in—as to how we were going to get back into balance in five years. We know that we're going to have to have—we will have moderate growth in the province, and we are going to have to have just as the same—a moderate growth in government expenditures. And that's why we have projected some very minimal spending in the upcoming years.

And, yes, it will be—we—minimal increases over the next few years to—in order to implement our five-year plan.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I don't think it's a minimal increase when you're looking at a 5.2 increase in core operating expenditures for next year. And I think what's—what we're seeing here is that it's a 5.2 increase next year. Who knows what it—the projections are for 2011-12, just prior to an election? And it looks like they're arriving at this 1.9 percent—

they're going to spend a lot of money and increase the core operating expenditures over the next couple of years and then all of a sudden, have to cut dramatically after the next election to arrive at that 1.9 percent average.

So is that what the minister is saying? That we've got a 5.2 percent increase—what will it be in the subsequent years for the core government expenditures to arrive at that 1.9 percent?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I indicated in my last answer, there is going—there will have to be, as we implement the five-year plan and move forward there will be moderate growth and there will be moderate growth in government spending.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, if the minister's looking at a 5.2 percent increase next year, then we're probably looking down the roads—down the road at massive cuts in expenditures in order to arrive at that 1.9 percent average.

Could the minister indicate what years those massive cuts in expenditures will take place?

Ms. Wowchuk: We will—as I said to the member, there will be moderate growth in the economy of this province and there will be moderate growth in the spending in this province. That's what we've indicated in our five-year plan. We have a projection of how we will get back into balance, and we have said that there is a—the projection for this year of what our shortfall will be. And then we have a projection of how we are going to reduce that shortfall so we can get into balance, and that will happen by having moderate growth in the province and by having moderate growth in expenditures as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I guess—I mean, I know for next year the Conference Board of Canada has projected a 2.2 percent GDP for next year. I believe the government was projecting a 2.5 percent growth for next year. So we're already in—and three percent for the year after that, I believe, was what the government had come up with in terms of estimated growth. But we already know that the Conference Board of Canada has come out with projections that are lower than that.

And that's what's happening, is that those projections are starting to change and they're coming back at being lower for our province. So that will be lower revenues for our province and lower or less revenue for our province, potentially, and less growth for our province than originally anticipated.

And when we're looking at expenditures of an increase of 5.2 percent for next year alone, you know, again, I would go back at the minister and say, what are the basis—what is the basis for this 1.9 percent, or is it just that she wanted to make it look like, in the budget, in the budget books, that they were—that there was moderate increase in expenditures over the next five years when, in actual fact, that is not really what will happen, especially when we're looking at a 5.2 percent increase in one year, being next year.

Ms. Wowchuk: First of all, I'd like to correct the member. It is not for next year. We are talking about the year that we are in right now, that we will have—we will see the growth of 5.2 percent. That's for the present year—*[interjection]*—for the present year.

But we—the Conference Board of Canada has put out their number. The federal government put out a number earlier. The federal government's number was much higher than our number that they've used to build into the budget. Banks have put out a number. And—but these are all forecasts and you have to take those forecasts and take a number based on the forecasts. And those are the forecasts, and our forecasts, I believe, are very moderate in comparison to what some of the projections that other jurisdictions are putting forward. And as forecasts come out, you might have to make an adjustment, but you have to make a decision, and we've made a decision based on the forecasts that have been put out by the Conference Board of Canada, by the federal government and all of the banks, and then, you make a decision. Do adjustments have to come? If there are changes, certainly. Everybody will have to adjust their numbers but our projections are very moderate in comparison to some of the other projections that are out there on revenues, on growth.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we already see from these Estimates of Expenditures in this—for this year, we see that the government is projecting a 5.2 percent increase in expenditures for 2010-11. I'm wondering if the minister can indicate what the estimate of expenditure increase is for 2011-12.

Ms. Wowchuk: In our five-year plan, we projected moderate growth in revenues and we projected moderate—and we projected some decreases in government programming and services. And so we based it on the five-year plan. We have a projection in the five-year plan that says that we will have moderate growth and moderate spending. That's what we have projected for the next five years.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess I would just ask the definition of moderate increases because for next year—or sorry, for this, for the 2010-11 budget, the minister has indicated a 5.2 percent increase in expenditures for next year—or for this—for the 2010-11 budget year. And so—and growth for this year is expected to be at, well, the government—the government's numbers are 2.5 percent. So, even with using the government's projected growth for this year, it's more than double. Is that her definition of being moderate?

Ms. Wowchuk: You know, we recognize that we are in a downturn in the economy and we had to make investments. Just as the federal government was investing in stimulus, we had to invest in stimulus to keep the economy going. Part of that spending is our stimulus package.

*(16:10)

If we were to—and I have heard the members opposite say the federal government is doing a very good job by spending on stimulus, we are—I would hope they would say the same thing about us, that this is a worthwhile investment to put money into stimulus because it's certainly keeping people working.

In our budget, we predicted an unemployment rate of 3.5 percent–5.3 percent, I'm sorry—and it's down to 4.9 percent. So you can see that the—those numbers change. More people are working in Manitoba. Our economy is moving along and, yes, we did make a commitment to invest in stimulus. The stimulus package ends on March 2011. So that stimulus money will not have to be there, so that is one of the places where you will see a decline in spending. But I won't apologize for taking—for investing in stimulus, building infrastructure, building recreational facilities so that people keep working and we can keep our unemployment numbers down.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I guess what the minister is saying then, Madam Chair, is that an expenditure increase of more than double the rate of growth is moderate for our province under an NDP government. And I would suggest that that is not the definition and it should not be the definition of moderate increase in expenditures, at more than double the rate of projected growth. And so I'm wondering if the minister is then indicating if she has already stated that in 2011-2012 that the increase in expenditures for that year will be moderate if she's

expecting it to be at more than double the rate of growth for the year 2011-2012 as well.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member opposite is mixing up her years and what I said. What I said was that in this year, in 2010-11, we made a commitment to invest in stimulus along with the federal government. We made a commitment to make sure people kept working, that we didn't lay people off. So we made the extra investment, and this year our spending is at 5.2 percent but along with spending—having a 5.2 percent increase, our unemployment rate has gone down. And that's important because if people are working, they're contributing to the economy and you're not spending money in other areas such as social assistance for those people who can't work.

But I would just—the member talks about our spending—if you look at our interprovincial comparisons of what we're spending in comparison to other jurisdictions, we are the second lowest in the country—a second—an increase of—our expenditure increase is the second lowest in the country to other jurisdictions. Only British Columbia has a lower increase in spending than we do.

So what—we made the decision to put in place a five-year plan. We made the decision to invest in infrastructure and to keep front-line services going and keep training going. Yes, we have an increase of 5.2 percent but that's—we don't apologize for keeping people working and we've also put a five-year plan in place. And I would remind the member that the stimulus money falls off at March of 2011 for most of it. So that is where you'll see a decrease in spending. Some of it will come off and you will see a decrease in the next year's budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, and just to clarify, I asked the minister what the projected increases in expenditures would be for 2011-2012, and she indicated that they would be moderate. And then I asked for the definition of moderate, and she said that moderate would be an increase of 5.2 percent. *[interjection]* That would be—that is for this year, that's right. But she indicated that a 5.2 percent increase, at more than double the rate of growth for this year, was moderate. So I'm then, therefore, deducing that that same increase in expenditures for 2011-2012 is moderate, at more than two times the rate of growth.

And just—so just to clarify that that is the minister—what the minister has said. And, obviously, she seems to think that that is moderate, to increase expenditures at more than double the rate of growth from one year to the next, and yet, in her budget

Estimates, it says that then—and that there's going to be an average annual of 1.9 percent during the five-year period.

Is it the plan to then, therefore, increase expenditures by more than double the rate of growth for this year and for next year as we're leading up to an election, Madam Minister? Is that what's happening? And then the rest of the cuts will come after the next election.

Is that really what the plan is, then, in order to live up to the 1.9 percent annual average expenditure growth in her five-year plan?

Ms. Wowchuk: I will explain to the member again. I said that this year we were—yes, we were—I don't apologize for a 5.2 percent increase because we are in an economic downturn and we made a commitment to keep people working, to invest in stimulus. The member asked what was the projected growth of expenditure after that, and I said there would be moderate growth after that in expenditure. The member talked about 1.9 percent, and if the member looks at the budget, the member opposite can see that a projected expenditure of government for 2010-11 is 10.755. In 2011-12, it's projected at 11.037. So the projections of growth are showed in—growth of expenditure are showed in the five-year plan, and it continues on until 2014 when we come back into balance.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Just to the Premier. Just from responses we've had to date on the budget projections, the assumptions are that interest rates are going to stay low, equalization and transfer payments are going to remain stable, and finally, that we're going to have GDP growth of 2.5 percent this year and 3 next year. I just wonder if the minister can just reiterate that she has a lot of confidence in all three of those fundamental assumptions that have gone into the budget—oh, the Premier.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): There always is some variation of forecast. For example, on the—one forecaster has said the budget will be 2.5. We projected—one has said 2.2. We projected 2.5 in the budget on the same page if the member's looking at A-9. I don't know if he is or not, but it indicated that unemployment rate would increase to 5.7 percent in 2010. The recent stats show that our unemployment rate has declined to 4.9 percent, so we're doing significantly better on unemployment, which is a good story. So the reality is that there will be some variation based on real data as it comes forward, and

that will be taken into account in future budgeting exercises.

Mr. McFadyen: Since the budget came down at the end of March, there have been three other developments. The budget contained assumptions of 2.5 percent GDP for this year and 3 for next, and there have been three new developments since then. One is that GDP projections have been downgraded certainly by the Conference Board, which is now indicating projected growth for Manitoba as the second worst in the country this year at 2.2 percent and then next year it drops to 2.1 percent from budgeted assumptions of 2.5 and 3, so this is quite a significant departure from the growth projections contained in the budget.

The second thing that's happened is in the context of the European debt crisis. It's expected that could have an impact on the overall Canadian economy, which would include Manitoba. And the third is—are the numbers on ag income being down quite sharply as released by Stats Canada.

Is the government making any adjustments to its own plans in order to meet its targets in light of those three developments?

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the question from the member. He's concerned that the economic forecast has gone to 2.2 for '10-11. That's one forecast. There are others that will come out. We usually take a look at about five of them before we finalize what the future projection will be.

* (16:20)

We also indicated that unemployment rate will increase to 5.7 percent. We're now seeing it coming in at 4.9 percent. Unemployment has actually declined. We're the lowest in the country, so things do change. The European debt crisis has clearly been a problem, and it has once again underlined the fragility of the recession and the recovery from the recession. And the member was stating just a week or so ago that the recession was over. It's in a state of fragile recovery as evidenced by the European circumstances.

And ag income has been projected to be down for the Prairie provinces. We've had two excellent years in agriculture in the last two years, and the reality is that there—we'll have to see how the crop year goes. It's obviously very dependent on not only market conditions, but weather, and it's been a reasonable start this year. Seeding's going on right

now out there, and we'll have to see how it goes, but we've had two excellent years.

The member also indicated that the growth forecast was relatively weak relative to other provinces, but he has to remember the last year was the best in the country. So we start from a relatively higher base than other provinces. Some provinces went down somewhere between 3 and a half and 5 percent in their growth. And with resource revenue prices strengthening somewhat, they're going to have a larger bounce back. We don't go down as much; we don't bounce back as much. We tend to be a more diversified economy with a steady-as-she-goes approach. I'm pleased that the forecast is showing real growth, and we'll see what the other forecasts say as the year goes along, whether it's 2.2 or 2.5 or higher or somewhere in between.

Madam Chairperson: Order. Just before recognizing the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I want to remind all honourable members that we do have questions and answers going back and forth, and we need to be able to hear the questions and the answers so that people can respond to them.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chair, and it's always good in life to be optimistic, but, when it comes to budgets, it's sometimes prudent to be realistic as well. And we're concerned when we see projections of low interest rates, stable transfer payments and economic growth in the two and a half to 3 percent range, which are now being contradicted by the Conference Board, the Bank of Canada and federal forecasters all simultaneously. I wonder if that causes the Premier to want to make any adjustments to their financial planning in order to meet what seems to be a more realistic scenario where perhaps two or three out of the three major assumptions underlining the budget may end up being on the wrong end.

Mr. Selinger: Again, the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) indicated that they were looking at an interest rate forecast of around 5 percent. It's probably the case that the rate's slightly lower than that right now. It probably will go up later on in the year depending on the what the Bank of Canada does. But there had been some margin of protection put in to the interest-rate forecast, so there is some comfort level there going forward, not just for this year, but in future years as well.

On the economic forecast, we'll see what the other forecasters say. We do note that the

unemployment rate is well below what we've forecast, which is a healthy sign that indicates that more Manitobans are working. And that's also at the same time as more Manitobans are participating in the labour market. It's not related to people dropping out. There's more people working, and there's a lower rate of unemployment. And transfer payments—the indication was that the overall transfer payment amount would remain more or less stable, based on the federal commitment not to solve their financial problem on the backs of the provinces. But the minister did point out that the forecast was such that equalization actually went down about 61, 62 million dollars this year—I think it's here.

And that—it went down, but the health transfer went up and the social transfer went up. So, overall, there was about a 0.8 of 1 percent decline in overall transfer payments according to the budget papers on page 10. And we do expect to lose some equalization going forward if our growth remains above the Canadian average, which it has for the last three years. But it's also possible that when certain economies have declined dramatically, based on resource revenue prices going down, and those prices recover, that their percentage growth could go higher than ours as they recover. They start at a lower threshold; they bounce back more—a little higher. The volatility works to their advantage on the up side. It works to their disadvantage on the down side, and we tend to move along steady as she goes without as rapid declines and without as rapid increases. And that's a strength in Manitoba, to have that kind of a diverse economy, but it can sometimes be masked by these percentage numbers when they're taken out of context.

Mr. McFadyen: I just want to come back to the line of questioning that was begun by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) and to which we didn't really get a very clear response from the Finance Minister, and that just relates to the spending plans over the five years of the plan contained in the budget. What the budget documents say is that the government is looking at an average of 1.9 percent increase per annum for the five years of the plan, which, when compounded out, comes to about a 10 percent increase over the five years. More than half of that increase has occurred in this year alone: 5.2 percent increase in 2010-2011.

Can the Premier just confirm that it's his government's plan to flatten spending to an average of about 1 percent a year for the subsequent four years in order to meet those targets?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the forecast is to have moderate spending increases, which is commensurate with modest revenue increases, and these get adjusted every year as the realities of needs of the public become available to us. But, yes, it is the strategy here, and it's similar to all governments in Canada, is to have moderate spending increases until there's a full economic recovery.

Mr. McFadyen: The history of the past 10 years has been—there's been an 80 percent, eight-zero percent increase in spending over 10 years. This year, the projection is 5.2 percent on top of that, and then the government is saying roughly nine to 10 percent spending over the next five-year period, which represents increases that are about one tenth of what we've been experiencing over the last 10 years. I wonder if the Premier can indicate what steps they plan to take for this very significant level of restraint that he seems to be projecting in order to meet the targets contained in the budget.

Mr. Selinger: Well, if the member looks at B-12 he will notice that in terms of provincial expenditure, in terms of per capital increases, Manitoba was the second lowest in the country between 1990 and 2008-09. So, actually, I think that should be 1999-2000 if you read that table properly, and 2008-09. So Manitoba has shown that it's managed expenditure relative to other jurisdictions in a very prudent manner.

Mr. McFadyen: And it has to also be acknowledged that Manitoba has moved most of its debt expenditures off of the books so that you can have dramatic increases in debt even as there appear to be moderate increases in operating expenditure. But, regardless of the comparisons to other provinces, I guess the concern of the question is, how do you intend to increase spending this year by 5.2 percent, leaving another about 1 percent a year on average for the next four years, when you've been increasing at a rate of 8 percent on average over the last 10 years. What have they got up their sleeves for the post-election period in order to meet these targets?

Mr. Selinger: Well, first of all, I have to make a correction. Manitoba's actually moved its liabilities in terms of debts onto the books as opposed to the system that was under the former government where they had, really, two sets of books, and so he's just completely wrong about that. One of the obvious things that's been moved onto the books is the pension liability as well as all the Crown corporations now are included in the full summary

budget, and those are—all those numbers are in one place now and have been put in front of the public to have a complete picture of all the debt obligations of the Province as well as the assets that are available to service those debts and the different revenue streams to serve them.

So it's just completely wrong to say that there's been debt taken off the books; it's the exact opposite. It was off the books when the members were in office; it's the opposite now. We actually have brought everything in who—one set of summary financial statements, and the Auditor General has acknowledged that and commended us for doing that.

*(16:30)

So the reality is is that there will be moderate expenditure increases going forward, and these will align themselves with growth in revenues as the economy recovers, and this is a similar plan to what every province is doing as well as the federal government. They're all—we're all trying to work our way back out of the recession with an emphasis on stimulus to maintain jobs and keep unemployment low and then investments in knowledge infrastructure and investments in infrastructure, more broadly, and investments in strategic infrastructure such as CentrePort, and investments in people through education that will allow for a stronger economic recovery going forward.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier's talked a lot about the spending increases as being related to economic stimulus. Can he just indicate what is the timetable for the government to end the stimulus program and move toward to tackling deficits and debt?

Mr. Selinger: Two budgets ago, we announced a four-year program for capital investment in the province of about \$4.4 billion, as I recall, and so we've partnered with the federal government in the last couple of years on that. And we will continue to have a capital expenditure program that will continue to develop those kinds of economic assets that will help grow the economy, including things like highways, including things like water and sewer, including things like public schools and universities. So there is a—there was a four-year plan announced two budgets ago, and we will move forward with that four-year plan as announced.

Mr. McFadyen: Something that happened at the federal level which doesn't seem to have happened

here is that the federal government, mindful of the concerns about long-term structural deficits, made it a part, a feature of their stimulus program that it would be time-limited. It would come to a conclusion in March 2011, and that all of the expenditures would be on certain categories of public works projects which would be separately reported on. Can the Premier just indicate whether the provincial stimulus program has any similar features or parameters?

Mr. Selinger: Those projects that we do with the federal government will be jointly agreed upon as to how we conclude them, but, in addition, we will have, as I just indicated, a four-year program on capital expenditure that will strengthen the economic fabric of the province in terms of its assets: its economic assets, its school assets, its university, post-secondary assets, its investments in health-care capital as well as highways infrastructure and other forms of infrastructure. So those investments are part of a medium-term plan to grow the economy and move Manitoba forward.

Mr. McFadyen: The budget projects 5.2 percent increase in spending in 2010-11 over last year, and I'm wondering if the Premier can indicate what percentage of that increase is related to stimulus spending on the projects he's identified and what percentage of that is related to just regular operating increases in expenditures.

Mr. Selinger: I mean, the 5.2 percent increase in spending is a combination of capital spending, stimulus spending, and putting the resources into priority services, and, as indicated several times in the House, 90 percent of the operational expenditure is going to health care, education, services to family and children, justice, policing, and as well as some money to infrastructure. So the spending has been focussed on those priorities that Manitobans have told us they want us to maintain and to strengthen, and that's where the money's going.

Mr. McFadyen: Much of the stimulus spending is being financed through borrowing and is being treated as being amortized as capital expenditure, which means a lot of it doesn't show up in the 5.2 percent. Will the Premier just provide an indication or an undertaking that he'll get back to us with a breakdown as to how much of this year's 5.2 percent is directly related to one-time stimulus spending and how much is related to increases in regular government operations?

Mr. Selinger: The member looks at our moving Manitoba forward five-year economic plan. On page 3, we show the breakout of expenditure there in terms of infrastructure investments and where the \$1.8 billion is going, and it indicates the various types of facilities we're investing money into there, and all of these dollars actually stimulate the economy in this budget year. That's part of the point, and that's why it was positive to see that the unemployment rate had declined to 4.9 percent in the last projection when the budget actually had indicated that it would climb to 5.8 percent. So it's great news to know that the unemployment rate is actually the lowest in the country right now, and we hope that trend continues.

Mr. McFadyen: Just to be clear, then, the Premier is saying that all government expenditures is stimulus spending then. Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Selinger: You know, government spending during a time of recession acts as a form of stabilization for the economy. It helps keep people working; it helps provide front-line services. And, if the member again looks at our plan, I indicated where the capital spending was going on page 3. On page 4, it indicates where the spending is going in terms of departmental expenditure for basic services to support Manitobans, health services, family services, education investment, services for justice and policing, as well as other departments.

So those things combined together provide a form of stabilization in our economy and allow people to keep working and to get services if they need retraining. If they need—if for any reason they lose their job and they need some retraining, there are resources in the budget to do that. If they want to go back to school and get further education, there's money invested in post-secondary education to do that.

If they need help with issues related to family functioning, there's money in Family Services there, including money for daycare to increase the number of funded spots in Manitoba, so that if people enter the labour market, they can have a safe and secure place for their child to attend daycare so that they can enter the labour market. And clearly adding those additional spaces for daycare, for example, is helpful when your unemployment rate declines to 4.9 percent.

Mr. McFadyen: Premier seems to be saying that any and all government spending represents stimulus spending. I want to ask him one area of moderate

increase was the expansion of Cabinet, which resulted in the additional payments. Does he consider the expansion of the—of Cabinet to be a form of stimulus spending?

Mr. Selinger: I think this was a question raised earlier. And I indicated to the member opposite that we have less deputy ministers than were in place when we came into office in '99, and we have less assistant deputy ministers that were in place when we came into office in '99. And so, overall, there's been very careful management of the growth of the public service in terms of senior officials.

Mr. McFadyen: And just carrying on that theme, does the Premier also consider the \$13 million spent on the enhanced ID program at MPI to be stimulus spending?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member seems to want to tie everything into that. The enhanced drivers' initiative was done earlier, before the recession actually started, as a way to ensure that with the increased thickening of the border in terms of security measures, that Manitobans had alternatives in terms of high-level identification technology that would allow them to travel back and forth to the United States at a reasonable cost. Not everybody, for example, has a driver's licence or needs a driver's licence. And there are, for example, some people that want to enter into the United States, school groups for example, where the enhanced driver's identification is an appropriate level of identity security that will allow them to travel across the border.

Mr. McFadyen: Just—does the Premier characterize all spending as stimulus spending, does—can he just indicate whether the TV ads purchased by his Justice Minister on *Oprah*, *The Biggest Loser*, and *Desperate Housewives* was stimulus spending as well?

Mr. Selinger: I have some breaking news for the member opposite. Apparently, one of the state senators of Minnesota has just informed us that, as the Minnesota legislature has signed on for the enhanced driver's licence—and he believes this will help trade to move more rapidly between our respective jurisdictions.

So I wouldn't necessarily say it was stimulus spending, but I would say it was spending that increases the ability of the economy to grow, which is, after all, what we're trying to do here.

* (16:40)

Mr. McFadyen: And just back to the question about ad buys—can he also indicate whether he views the Justice Minister's anti-gang advertising campaign as a form of stimulus spending?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the focus of the ads with respect to crime prevention and alerting the public as to some of the dangers of being involved in gangs was entirely focussed on crime prevention, protecting the public from some of the untoward influences that can sometimes take advantage of young people when they're in the community. And it was just one element in a total crime prevention strategy, and other elements include some of the toughening of the laws that we've been discussing in the Legislature but also some investments in education, which help people stay in school, investments in recreation, which give people constructive alternatives, including programs like the Lighthouse program, including programs like the seven recreation directors that we funded in the city of Winnipeg so that several neighbourhoods would have community clubs open and active programming going on there. These are all part of a total package of providing alternatives to young people so that they can have healthy life choices and healthy recreation and educational opportunities available to them.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, I thank the Premier for that testimony into the power of advertising on *Desperate Housewives*, and I just want to ask him if he can just indicate whether the—any cash has flowed to date with respect to the stadium project.

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to take that question and get specifics for him on that. I do know that the project's moving forward with the co-operation of the City of Winnipeg, the University, the Winnipeg Football Club, the private sector. So the project is moving forward, but on the specifics of cash flow I'd have to get details for him.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just indicate the name of the entity that will be on the receiving end of those payments when those payments start to be made?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the exact name of the entity, but the entity will be composed of the University, the City. They will be the main owners of the facility, and there will be a limited partnership put in place to support that. And I believe the partners on that could also include the Winnipeg Football Club along with the City and the University.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just indicate whether there is an indication of the—one of the terms of the MOU being the issuance of a performance bond? Can he just indicate whether that performance bond has yet been issued in connection with the project?

Mr. Selinger: Again, there was a commitment made by Creswin realty that they would construct the project after being selected by the Winnipeg Football Club to do that and that they would take responsibility for any cost overruns. And, on the specifics of the performance bond, once again I'd have to check what the status of that is at this stage of the game today.

Mr. McFadyen: Commitment by Creswin to pay for any overruns is fine, provided it's capitalized to the point where that becomes meaningful, and I wonder what due diligence the Premier or government has done just to assure themselves that the company is sufficiently capitalized to meet any obligations that may arise down the road.

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, Creswin realty has been considered by the Winnipeg Football Club as a legitimate entity to build the facility. They've done due diligence on that, and if the member's asking the question, do they have sufficient resources to cover any cost overruns, that's related to the question of a performance bond and any other resources they might have in posting that performance bond.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just—and just be clear, I mean, we don't have any information one way or the other on the performance bond issue. But, given that it's provincial taxpayers' money that's being spent, will the Premier undertake to ensure that the necessary capitalization, performance bonds, and other assurances are put in place prior to any cash flowing in connection with the project from provincial—the provincial Treasury?

Mr. Selinger: The member's—I believe the member's really asking if there will be security provided by Creswin to cover any cost overruns, and I will undertake to find out more about that for him.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Back in May—May the 20th, 2009—I asked the then-minister of Finance, now the Premier, a question in regard to sports, track suits, uniforms, and at that time I sort of raised the issue with him that has to do with those who are 14 and under and don't pay PST. And the then-minister, now Premier, was going to look into it. And what the issue is is that if you go into a sport shop and you

buy a track suit or uniform for someone who's 14 years of age and under, it is PST exempt.

For some reason, if you buy it for a team, for instance, if a whole bunch of parents get together and you buy these track suits for your children, it is not PST exempt. And the reason is, there's a problem with the definition, and the definition is between a uniform or a track suit. If it's considered to be a uniform, meaning if it's something that is worn on the field that is used for the game or for the sport, then, if you buy it as a group, you have to pay PST on it.

Yet—I'll just suggest to the Premier, the former minister of Finance, and the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), we just bought track suits for all of our—my son's soccer team, and we're doing the same thing for my daughter's soccer team. And, basically, you don't wear a track suit in soccer. You can't; you may not. You have to wear, by regulation, it has to be cleats, a shin pad, socks, shorts and a shirt. You cannot wear a track suit. So we buy them because they wear them to school, and it's one of these cool things. Yet, if we buy them as a team—I mean we all get together as parents, we each kick in our \$125; we have to pay PST on it. So what the sport shops, then, have to do is they have to bill the team individually, and it just becomes a paper nightmare.

Anyway, Seven Oaks Sports Shop ended up getting a call, because I'd asked the then minister of Finance if he would look into it. And the PST branch had called and said they would look into it, and it's a definition issue, and that there's a conflict between uniform and something that is everyday wear. And it was laid out to them that even a track suit for hockey, you can't wear a track suit playing hockey, so there shouldn't be a problem with the definition. It's everyday wear.

The kids wear them to school, and it's a pride thing. You know, you have your name on there, your number and if you've won a championship. I was wondering if the current Minister of Finance would be able to get her department to get a better answer from the department as they never did get back to the Seven Oaks Sports Shop. And all shops are looking. Like, they're all sort of wondering where this issue is. Could the Minister do that for the committee?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I'm very pleased that the Department of Finance did look into it, and if it requires additional work, certainly, I will ask them to look into it.

Mr. Schuler: They actually never did get back to the store, so if she could do that.

I have a second issue that I'd like to raise with the Minister of Finance, and that—it comes in the form of an e-mail, and I will read it, and that way the information is very clear. Comes from a constituent, and it reads, I quote: I was extremely shocked to learn today that while individual Boy Scouts can claim their fees under the fitness tax credit, individual Girl Guides are not eligible for the same tax credit. If this is, indeed, so, I cannot understand the logic behind why our Girl Guides seen as not being active as their scout counterparts are. Dare I say it's sexist and backward attitude, or is it simply an oversight by the administrators of this tax credit? Why is there such a discrepancy?

And first of all, I'd like to ask the minister, is there any provincial involvement in this fitness tax credit?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's—certainly, we'd check. I don't know why Girl Guides and Boy Scouts would be treated differently. I can investigate that for the member, but, it's by—administered by the Canadian Revenue Agency. So, but we can do some checking as to clarification on that issue.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): A question to the Premier (Mr. Selinger). I know the Premier is involved in setting up a committee to look at the future of the Manitoba Developmental Centre and that there is a question about that committee, whether it will have somebody from the disability community, or representing the disability community of people who might have been in MDC previously.

* (16:50)

Mr. Selinger: Well, if the member is asking, could somebody be on that committee from that community, from families or people that were part of the MDC experience—is that what he's asking? And, if he's asking that, I'll take that as a serious recommendation and we'll have it discussed with the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) and see what's possible there.

Mr. Gerrard: To the Premier or the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), who is ever better to ask this—or answer this—when a bridge is built and it's amortized—the cost is amortized over 40 years, how much of the total cost of the bridge is put into as an expense the first year and the rest of that would be put in presumably as a debt to be paid in future years, and where would that appear?

Mr. Selinger: It's a very technical question and we'll have our officials give you the detail on that, but, usually, when a, say, a bridge is built and it's identified as a 40-year useful life of the project, the total cost of the bridge, including the borrowing cost, the amortization, depreciation are worked out over the 40 years. So they work out a formula that writes off the asset and pays it off over the 40 years, the useful life of it. And, as the member knows, it's basically like a mortgage, where you have a certain staggered set of payments and, over time, as the principal gets paid down, the interest rates drop because there's less principal upon which the interest rate is levied.

Mr. Gerrard: The—I'm just wondering about the amount of that that gets added to the net debt in a given year. How much of the amortized cost would be added to the net debt of the province?

Mr. Selinger: The full amount. It's divided—let's say it's the bridge over 40 years, it's divided by 40 and there's a formula that's put in place that ensures that it's paid off over the 40 years and, like a mortgage, you have more principal up front and interest payment on that and then those relationships change. As the principal gets paid down, the interest rate goes up as a proportion until, at the end, it's a large interest payment and a small principal payment. And it's usually the opposite at the front end, a larger principal payment and a smaller interest payment and then the proportions change as it moves forward over the 40 years.

Mr. Gerrard: The amount of the interest included in the increase in the net debt, or is that just recorded in terms of the annual interest that's paid?

Mr. Selinger: The net debt includes—I'll have to check this, but the net debt includes the total cost of the asset, interest amortization and depreciation. That's all part of the amount that's put in there.

Mr. McFadyen: Just—I wonder if the Premier can just give an indication or just a status update on where things are with CentrePort and what the plan is for the coming 12 months with respect to CentrePort.

Mr. Selinger: Well, as the member knows, CentrePort really is proceeding with its infrastructure investments and so they're moving ahead on that. That's part of the capital budget that's in front of the government right now and so that's the first requirement is to get some of the infrastructure pieces in place, including the interchange on the west

side of the province. And I also believe that the project's going forward that has the interchange hooking Highway No. 1 up to the Yellowhead. And, of course, there's investments going forward as well on Highway 75 to strengthen that transportation route. And so all of those things are proceeding in part during this budget and they will proceed in future years as well.

Mr. McFadyen: Just in terms of the viability or the success of CentrePort going forward is fundamentally grounded on significant amounts of trade flowing through Manitoba, and I note that Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. are promoting their inland port projects in conjunction with their promotion of the New West Partnership. And I wonder if the Premier can indicate whether he's got any concerns that our exclusion from the trade agreements could, in some unfortunate ways, have a negative impact on CentrePort.

Mr. Selinger: Well, I think you'll find that CentrePort is very much involved in future opportunities, including trade relationships with countries like China. And the member may see, as early this week, an announcement of a relationship between CentrePort and an opportunity that could be emerging in one of the Asian countries. So we should stay tuned on that.

The reality is is that we've had a trade representative in China for over 23 years, a Manitoban by birth and upbringing, who, as I understand it, locates himself out of Beijing and has been very successful and productive in the relationships he's developed over there including attracting business investment and newcomers to come to Manitoba. So we've had a very fruitful agent operating on behalf of the Province of Manitoba on trade relations in the Chinese market, for example.

Mr. McFadyen: I wonder if the Premier could just indicate if—they've had a bill on the order paper now for some period of time respecting transparency and private-public partnerships. Can he just indicate whether that bill is designed to shed more light on projects such as the stadium project and the Hydro wind power deal?

Mr. Selinger: Well, the bill is designed to take a look at any public-private partnership that has, I believe, when it's tabled, it will have a certain capital threshold and a certain duration threshold that will be looked at to ensure that larger projects are reviewed on a go-forward basis.

Mr. McFadyen: And will that bill allow for close scrutiny of the partnership at Wuskwatim as well as the Hecla Island project?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I—as I—the bill hasn't been tabled, but I—if I understand it correctly, the bill will be available to look at projects on a prospective go-forward basis. I don't believe the bill will be looking at everything that's gone in the past.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just indicate what has prompted the bill, and why the decision was made only to look prospectively rather than retrospectively at some significant public-private partnerships that have entered—been entered into by his government.

Mr. Selinger: Usually bills are prospective in this regard because they allow people to be aware of what the requirements are on a go-forward basis before they enter into them. If the member is concerned about any projects that have gone before the bill is introduced and put in front of the public, there are existing tools to investigate those projects. Those tools can include the Auditor General's office, they can include the Ombudsman's office, they can include internal investigations done by departmental staff. So there are quite a few tools in place to aid in investigating anything the member might have a concern about.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just indicate whether the thresholds and the prospective nature of it will allow for a close examination of the stadium public-private partnership?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the money for the stadium, which will be a public asset after it's completed, owned by the university and the City, is being—the money is being provided to public entities. Creswin is acting as the developer after being selected by the Winnipeg Football Club. So, it's at this stage of the game, it's going to be a public asset.

Mr. McFadyen: Within that, though, is a plan to privatize the football club, and I wonder if that would not bring it within the scope of the P3 provisions of the new bill?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I think we should let the legislation get tabled, then the member can ask those questions. I don't want to second-guess legislation that hasn't been tabled yet. The reality is is that the football club is a non-profit organization right now.

Mr. McFadyen: Although I think his announcement indicated that the intent was to privatize it, going forward, and so, in light of that, I just wonder if he can indicate whether he would want to apply the same sort of transparency to that transaction as he wants to to other transactions?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member—

Madam Chairperson: Order.

Okay, the honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: The member will have a chance to review that when the legislation is tabled, but the legislation was intended to deal with public services and public entities, not—that's the idea behind it.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Deputy Speaker: The House is adjourned, and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 17, 2010

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