

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

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Daryl Reid  
Speaker*

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Fortieth Legislature**

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 17, 2012

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 31—The Bilingual Service Centres Act**

**Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General (Mr. Swan), that Bill 31, The Bilingual Service Centres Act; Loi sur les centres de services bilingues, be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Lemieux:** Le projet de loi vise à garantir un rôle permanent pour les centres de services bilingues. Ces centres sont des guichets uniques où les citoyens, citoyennes peuvent obtenir des services des gouvernements en français ou anglais.

**Translation**

*This bill is designed to guarantee a permanent role for the Bilingual Service Centres. These centres are single windows where citizens can obtain government services in French or in English.*

**English**

The bill primarily focuses on enshrining principles and practices that are already in existence for the operation of bilingual services centre. One of the attractive features of the bill is that it would be beneficial for both the English- and French-speaking communities—dans la mesure où l'accès à des services gouvernementaux pour la population locale serait garanti.

**Translation**

*—as it would guarantee access to government services for the local population.*

**English**

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Merci, Monsieur le président.

**Translation**

*Thank you, Mr. Speaker.*

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

**Bill 215—The Results-Based Budgeting Act**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** I move, seconded by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), that Bill 215, The Results-Based Budgeting Act; Loi sur la budgétisation axée sur les résultats, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mrs. Stefanson:** This bill requires the budgets for all government programs, services, agencies, boards and commissions to be reviewed on a regular cycle to ensure that they are delivering the outcomes that the public needs. Once the review process is completed for a given program, the budget for the program will be re-established. The process is to be transparent, with the findings and recommendations of program reviews made public.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Bill 33—The Election Financing Act and Elections Amendment Act**

**Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour):** I move, seconded by the Attorney General, that Bill 33, The Election Financing Act and Elections Amendment Act; Loi sur le financement des élections et Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Howard:** Mr. Speaker, there's a number of changes brought forward as part of this bill.

First, the existing formula which sets out the annual allowance for registered parties is replaced by a process whereby an allowance commissioner will determine the allowance. The allowance is intended to assist registered parties in defraying their administrative and certain operating costs, including costs incurred in complying with this act.

Secondly, if a fixed election date scheduled for October will conflict with a federal fixed-date election, Manitoba's election is postponed to the following spring.

Thirdly, the chief electoral officer must examine and report on whether a permanent voters list should be established.

Lastly, The Elections Finances Act is rewritten to make it clearer and easier to understand.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

### PETITIONS

#### Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And this is the background to this petition:

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

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

These gaps made it difficult to co-ordinate firefighting efforts and to notify people that they had to be evacuated. The situation also would have made it difficult for people to call for immediate medical assistance if it had been required.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

And this petition has been signed by W. Sawatzky, C. Hébert and G. Laurie and 10,000 other fine Manitobans.

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

#### Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by D. Boychuk, V. Robertson, J. Robertson and thousands of other Manitobans.

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Education.

**Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013, for the department expenditures Estimates for Manitoba Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs.

**Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013, departmental expenditures for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

#### Sagkeeng's Finest

**Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

I rise today to congratulate Dallas and Brandon Courchene and Vince O'Laney of Sagkeeng's Finest for taking the top prize at the first ever *Canada's Got Talent* competition in Toronto earlier this week. These young men represent the dreams and aspirations of people from all backgrounds. They serve as outstanding positive role models for Aboriginal youth and young people in general. They have brought a sense of pride to their home community of Sagkeeng First Nation and to Aboriginal people across the country.

Here in our traditional territory of Treaty 1, the province of Manitoba, and all of Canada, we give our thanks to you, Brandon, Dallas, and Vince. On behalf of all of us, we are very proud of you, and may your spirit and determination continue to guide you and continue to inspire us.

\* (13:40)

They began jiggling in 2006 with the Sagkeeng First Nation's drama and arts program and became part of the Sagkeeng Elders of the Past Memorial Square Dancers, which was named in honour of all their grandparents. Both Dallas and Vince also play the fiddle. These remarkable young people, through discipline, determination, and creativity, have incorporated traditional jiggling with tap dancing, clogging and hip hop.

For the final showdown, Sagkeeng's Finest performed a fusion of traditional jiggling and tap dancing. Their highly imaginative and original performance overwhelmed the judges and the nation. They have been active members in their community and have been giving back to their community by teaching, fiddling, and dancing after school. They've had to put this on hold for the competition.

Sagkeeng First Nation community is rightly proud of these young men and view them as leaders among the youth of the community. Already they have announced that they plan to support a dance studio in Sagkeeng where other young people can learn.

Earlier today at a ceremony honouring them at the Legislature, the First Minister awarded Dallas, Brandon, and Vince the Order of the Buffalo Hunt for their achievements and their dedication to their community. This honour was well deserved.

They also performed in the—in front of a large, appreciative audience on the Legislative grounds who recognized the talent and professionalism of these young people.

I want to thank Sagkeeng's Finest, their families, Chief Donovan Fontaine, and the other performers, along with J.J. Lavallee, for putting on an inspirational and memorable event on short notice to commemorate their success, and may I add, to their manager, George Boyd.

I am very pleased to note that Sagkeeng's Finest will be also performing at the nationally televised seventh annual Manito Ahbee Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards November 2nd at the MTS Centre.

In celebrating the achievement of Sagkeeng's Finest, we are supporting the potential of youth to realize their dreams.

And I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Mr. Speaker, it is my absolute pleasure to stand up today to say a few words of congratulations to Sagkeeng's Finest. Watching them this afternoon, there is no doubt that Vince O'Laney, Brandon, Dallas Courchene are an extremely talented and creative dancing trio. Their modern take on traditional dancing has been a pleasure for viewers across Canada and here in Manitoba to watch. The overwhelming enthusiasm and support for Sagkeeng's Finest has been well earned. I congratulate these young men for earning the top prize from *Canada's Got Talent* by outperforming more than 11,000 fellow competitors.

Vince, Brandon, and Dallas clearly worked tirelessly to perfect their every dance step and to synchronize their every move. But what especially was impressive was the creativity that they infused with combining the modern music and dance elements with traditional. For Sagkeeng's Finest, a Manitoba First Nations dance troupe with humble beginnings, to going on to take the top prize has been truly inspirational.

In addition to their incredible dance talent, I think what judges and viewers back home were most

impressed with was the work ethic and constant striving to improve what they demonstrated. It was clear from week to week that these boys were determined to perform their best, which garnered high praises from the judges. They have captured our admiration, praise and our hearts and have proven to be real stars, rock stars.

On another note, I think that the story of Sagkeeng's Finest is quite remarkable. Growing up in Sagkeeng First Nations, Vince, Brandon, and Dallas learned traditional dancing from their family and community. They only practised jigging for a few years before performing—or before forming a trio and entering the competition. Sagkeeng's Finest faced some tough competition from acts from across the country, many of whom had much longer to perfect their craft. However, their triumph in overcoming these obstacles and winning against their competitors shows that anything is possible.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain that Vince, Brandon, and Dallas have a very bright future in dancing and the creative arts, as they are truly among the best in Canada. The world is now their oyster, as I understand that they will be performing at Citytv's New Year's Eve bash and have a chance to perform in Vegas. I'm sure that I'll be joining many other Manitobans by continuing to watch and cheer for Sagkeeng's Finest for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** Does the member for River Heights have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, I want to join the rest of the MLAs at the Legislature in congratulating Vince O'Laney, Dallas Courchene, and Brandon Courchene for the incredible performance, for your incredible tenacity and perseverance and ability to come through and surprise so many people in such a wonderful way. I think it is a tremendous example to all Manitobans, but a tremendous example, in particular, to Manitobans in First Nations communities around the province about what can be achieved, that the goals and the dreams are there to be achieved and can be achieved. So I salute you and congratulate you.

I want also to congratulate the chief, Donavan Fontaine, and the members of Sagkeeng First Nation, who've been very supportive and created the

community which has provided the nurturing for Dallas and Vince and for Brandon, and I think it is a tribute to the good things that have been done at Sagkeeng and the leadership that is there and certainly speaks well, not just in this case but for the future, in terms of First Nations leadership around the province.

It is a great day for all of us, a day to really celebrate, and thank you for what you've done, and I thank you for the performance that you provided just a short while ago.

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to oral questions, I'm sure honourable members are already aware of our very special guests in the Speaker's Gallery with us today. But I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Chief Donavan Fontaine and the tap dancing trio Sagkeeng's Finest, who won the national competition on Citytv's *Canada's Got Talent* earlier this week. They're—and with us this afternoon is Vince O'Laney, Brandon Courchene, Dallas Courchene, and, of course, their manager, George Boyd.

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

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Budget

#### Tax and Fee Increases

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** I'll add my congratulations to Brandon, Dallas, and Vince, Sagkeeng's Finest, and they've made Manitoba proud. We all agree of that in the Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

As we get closer to the long weekend Manitobans are making their plans, and while they're keeping their eye on the weather they're also keeping the eye—their eye on their wallet, on their pocketbook, as they plan to travel around the province.

And as a result of this Premier's broken promise, they're going to have less money in their wallet. He said one thing before the election. He said: Read my lips. No new taxes. And then after the election we read the budget, and there were new taxes, particularly on gas taxes.

Will he admit today that he broke his promise, and as a result of that broken promise, Manitobans

this long weekend will have less money in their pockets because that money went into the pockets of the provincial government?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** It bears repeating that Vince and Dallas, Brandon, their manager, George Boyd, Chief Donovan Fontaine, we're very pleased to have them here today. It's been a great honour to have the community here as well. The community was tremendously supportive of these young persons' great success, and you know what? We can all be proud of what they've achieved on behalf of Manitoba, on behalf of the country.

\* (13:50)

With respect to the member's question, he clearly has not read the entire budget. Every Manitoban this weekend, Mr. Speaker, will be benefiting by an increase in their personal deduction and an increase in their spousal deduction and an increase in their dependent's deduction. Seniors will be benefiting from an education property tax credit. And for the first time in many decades, we'll be investing in the roads that they travel on.

#### **Gas Tax Increase**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, Manitobans might remember that the Premier, he went on CJOB radio before the budget. He was so mad about gas prices, he vowed to write the Prime Minister about this very serious issues. He was so mad about gas prices, he was going to get a pen, buy a stamp, and fight Ottawa on gas prices. And then virtually at the same time, he did a one-eighty right after he said he was upset about gas prices and raised the gas prices two and a half cents a litre on every Manitoban.

Mr. Speaker, I can only imagine what that letter said to the Prime Minister, because one day he was the fighter for lower gas prices and the next day he was increasing gas prices. I wonder if he can table the letter so we can find out whether he was fighting for lower gas prices or advocating for higher gas prices.

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** I just want the member from Steinbach to know I have a few stamps left over in case he'd like to mail in his declaration with respect to Jets tickets. I would like to make that available to him. We now have the people at city hall, the people on this side of the House, that have agreed that we need a new policy. We've seen no

policy statement from the members opposite. We've seen no declaration from the members opposite.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, we still have the second-lowest gas tax in the country. And for every dollar we raise in gas tax, we spend \$2 on roads. When they raised gas tax in the 1990s, they were spending 25 cents of every dollar on roads and pocketing the difference.

#### **Government Performance Premier's Accountability**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, you know, this is a Premier, he doesn't know who he wants to be.

One day he's demanding accountability from municipal officials. The next day he says, oh, it doesn't matter if my Cabinet ministers break the law.

One day he's saying, oh, we're going to demand an apology from the Minister of Energy (Mr. Chomiak). The next day he says, we don't really need an apology from the Minister of Energy.

One day he says, I'm furious—I'm furious—about high gas prices. The next day he increases gas prices himself.

Isn't the real reason he has two positions on every issue is that he can't be trusted by Manitobans?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we actually have a policy on the receipt of tickets, and we've said, well, it can't be done anymore. We've made it very clear—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** I'm sure all honourable members recognize how valuable the time is in question period. I ask for your co-operation please. Allow for the questions to be posed, and the answers as well.

The honourable First Minister, to conclude his remarks.

**Mr. Selinger:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I stated earlier, we have the second lowest gas tax in the country. We spend \$2 for every dollar we raise in gas tax. This contrasts quite dramatically with when gas tax was raised in the '90s by the official opposition; they only spent a quarter—they only spent 25 cents of every dollar they raised on roads. We're doing the—we're doing double what we raise in the gas tax and maintaining the so—second lowest gas tax in the country.

And, Mr. Speaker, that road to Steinbach is the best condition it's ever been in in the history of province of Manitoba.

### **Provincial Debt Government Reduction Strategy**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Mr. Speaker, raising taxes on the backs of hard-working Manitobans is not the answer. And members on this side of the House, we have introduced a five-point plan that will help grow our economy so that future generations are not left to pick up the tab for this NDP spending addiction.

Mr. Speaker, since the NDP came to power, the debt in the Province of Manitoba has doubled. I'm wondering what the NDP government's plan is to help retire that debt. Or is there a plan?

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance):** It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that someone from that side of the House would actually get up and start talking about the books of the Province of Manitoba after how many years they walked into this Legislature, budget after budget, debate after debate, with one set of books up here on the top and another set of books underneath—underneath—hiding from Manitobans their spending, hiding from Manitobans their tax increases, hiding from Manitobans their expansion of the provincial sales tax to such items as baby food.

Mr. Speaker, they have no credibility when it comes to budgeting in Manitoba.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The summary net debt as a percentage of GDP has been on the rise in this province for the last five years. This is a very alarming trend, Mr. Speaker. It's gone from 2007-2008, where it was 21.6 per cent, all the way now up to 27.4 per cent, and this is a direct result of this NDP government's spending addiction.

Mr. Speaker, what is their plan to reduce this trend, and is there a plan?

**Mr. Struthers:** This is the same group of people who, in 1999, was at 32.7 per cent in terms of debt to GDP. I put our record on debt to GDP up against their record any time, any place.

### **Servicing Costs**

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, here's an NDP government now standing up and taking credit for low interest rates, I guess, Mr. Speaker. What's next?

The cost to service the debt is up 6 per cent from last year. It's now at \$857 million, and, Mr. Speaker,

we know the governor of the Bank of Canada has warned that we could see interest rates on the rise.

And I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance could explain what his government's plan is to reduce the cost of serving—servicing the debt, or is there a plan?

**Mr. Struthers:** A short time ago, when it was obvious that there was a global downturn in the economy, this government did not take the advice of members opposite. If you remember correctly, that advice was to cut deeply into health and education, cut deeply into services for kids, cut deeply into infrastructure. We rejected that model in favour of a plan, a five-year plan, an economic strategy recovery plan, that we are working our way through now.

I wonder if the member opposite is suggesting that we shouldn't stand with the people who are victims of the flood last year. I'm wondering if members opposite are telling us that we should start turning away kids who need our help.

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. We've outlined that plan, not only to members opposite, but we've outlined that plan to the people of Manitobans, and unlike flip-flopping Conservatives across the way, we stuck to that plan through the election, and we're honest with people.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I know the member for Charleswood is anxiously awaiting the opportunity to ask a question. Please give her the opportunity.

### **Hospital Stays Coed Patient Rooms**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Susan Parent is in tears this week because, following major surgery at St. Boniface Hospital, she is being forced to share her hospital room with up to four men—one, an elderly man, who she says is naked most of the time—and she is feeling very, very humiliated by all of this. Susan said that this is the third time she's been in a coed room in the last year at St. Boniface Hospital.

Can the Minister of Health tell Susan why she failed to keep a promise that she made two years ago to end the practice of coed rooms in hospitals?

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for the question. It is a very important issue, indeed.



I want to inform the member that I've spoken this morning with the deputy minister, who will be in contact with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to make every possible effort to ensure that the individual that she's mentioned today finds her way into a room that's much more comfortable and appropriate for her.

I would say further, Mr. Speaker, that for some people going into a hospital situation, being in a room with a member of the opposite sex is in no way upsetting. But for others, it's very, very different; it is upsetting, which is why I've asked the CEO of the regional health authority, all regional health authorities, to make every effort, wherever possible, to have same-sex-gender rooms and to ensure that while people are on the road to wellness that they are feeling as-most-as comfortable as they can.

\* (14:00)

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, two years ago, I brought up this same issue of women patients being forced to share a room with men, and I'll remind the Minister of Health what she said at the time. She said: If man can—sorry—if man can walk on the moon, there's no reason why Manitoba hospitals can't figure out a way to reduce the use of coed hospital rooms. And she committed two years ago to work really hard to fix this because she didn't like it two years ago.

So can the Minister of Health tell us why she didn't work hard enough to fix this over the last two years?

**Ms. Oswald:** I meant it then; I mean it now. I want Susan to have a room wherein she is comfortable in her recovery.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important efforts that we're making is in capital construction in our hospitals where we're endeavouring to transform multiple-bedded rooms into single rooms so individuals can have that privacy, which is what they ultimately desire. That is part of our plan.

Until we get to that point, Mr. Speaker, there is a direction and a plan in place, wherever possible, to ensure that individuals who are not wishing to be in an environment where there is a coed situation, that we amend that so that they are in same-sex rooms.

I do believe if you can put somebody on the moon, you can fix this, and we're going to continue to do that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, Mr. Speaker, two years ago the minister said she would fix it. Here we are two years later and this is a serious problem. And she didn't find it acceptable two years ago.

Mr. Speaker, another woman said that she, too, was forced to share a room with a man who exposed himself to her every time she walked by. I imagine this is a very frightening experience for some people.

This Minister of Health could find time to break an election law during the last election, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask her if she could also find time to fix this problem where patients don't have to be humiliated and frightened by being forced to share rooms with the opposite sex. It is not something that she agreed with two years ago.

Why hasn't she done something? She's had two years to do something, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms. Oswald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate for the member that we are working hard with capital projects to transform into having single rooms. We are working with our regional health authorities and their hospitals wherever possible to have this not happen in cases where people are uncomfortable.

And I would hasten to add, Mr. Speaker, that while we're doing capital construction to provide more single rooms, we're not calling for the de-bedding of our system as was advocated for and supported by members opposite. You can check it out. It's in *Hansard* by the member for Charleswood.

#### **Mathematics Education Provincial Exam Cancellation**

**Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, teachers, professors and stakeholders gathered to discuss math education. They were brought together by the current public debate over whether students in this province are receiving an adequate math education, and they were brought together by our poor standing in the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program test results where Manitoba students finished second last.

The minister said that we needed to strengthen math education in the province, and yet the headline today reads: minister expels math exam.

Mr. Speaker, is this the minister's idea of strengthening math education in Manitoba, getting rid of the grade 12 math exam next year?

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education):** I appreciate, actually, getting this question today,

because it provides me with the opportunity to correct information that is in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Thank you very much.

Next year, Mr. Speaker, is the first year that we will be implementing the new math curriculum, and it is a standard procedure in the Department of Education when we are implementing and piloting new math curriculum that we take a pause on a standards test where a student gets a 30 per cent—when a student gets a 30 per cent mark on that exam in grade 12.

And there will be a test. I can guarantee everyone in this Chamber and everyone in the public that there will be a test. That test is under discussion right now in my department, and there will be a mark for—

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

**Mr. Friesen:** Mr. Speaker, something's not clear. The minister says there will be a test. I want to quote from a March 2012 letter to school superintendents and principals: Grade 12, please note that while the piloting process will continue, there will be no provincial math test in 2012-13. New provincial mathematics achievement tests will be—begin in the 2013-14 school year.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, in a radio interview today, the deputy minister contradicted this letter, saying there will be a provincial mathematics test next year after all. What are teachers supposed to believe? How are schools supposed to plan?

Mr. Speaker, who's right and who's wrong, and how does the minister explain the breakdown in communication?

**Ms. Allan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a big difference between a standards test and a teacher-directed test. It's commonly known by teachers in our public education system what that test is and what those differences are, and I have every confidence in the people that are on the front line in our 'public' education system, that they know what they're talking about and that we will work this out in co-operation and in collaboration, as we always do, with our education partners, unlike what they do.

**Mr. Friesen:** Mr. Speaker, still something isn't clear. Is there going to be a test or won't there be? The deputy minister says one thing; the minister says another. This letter from the department seems to say another thing altogether.

Mr. Speaker, in talking about education and math education in the province of Manitoba, the minister stated that the new curriculum is proving to be problematic. What problems is the minister referring to? And is that the reason that the test won't be taking place in 2012 and '13?

How can the minister guarantee that things are actually on track for the implementation of the new provincial-wide math exam for the following school year?

In the same week when this minister is trumpeting a new report card format that's supposed to use plain language and communicate clearly to people, why is this minister sending mixed messages on whether the math exams are on or off?

**Ms. Allan:** Well, that's what—I guess that's what you get, Mr. Speaker, when you're inclusive and you invite your Tory critic to a math summit. All you do is get them more confused.

I'm going to try one more time, Mr. Speaker. We are in the process of piloting a math curriculum, and it is no surprise to anyone in this Chamber that we have a certain number of people in this province that have raised some concerns about that math curriculum that is being implemented, and we are in discussions with our education partners and those math professors that have concerns about those—that math curriculum.

We are taking that very, very seriously, and before we consider moving forward, we must take—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Time's expired.

#### **Headingley Correctional Centre Cottage Design and Contents**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, last month I had the opportunity, along with the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), to tour a beautiful home. And in this home there was a beautiful flat-screen TV on the wall. It had a beautiful kitchen, looked like granite countertops. There was new appliances in this kitchen.

Now, this wasn't the Parade of Homes. This was actually the parade of prisons, Mr. Speaker. This beautiful home was at the Headingley prison, the new Headingley prison that was designed, that was built, and that was paid for now by Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, can this Minister of Justice tell us why he built these beautiful homes for inmates that taxpayers could only dream of owning?

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** In hearing the member for Steinbach, I believe he's speaking about cottages that are built that are actually quite unlike anything else in the provincial system, and they're actually cottages which are built to specifications of the federal government to house federal prisoners.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I kind of anticipated that response. So, I contacted corrections services Canada. I actually have some friends there, and they were surprised that the government threw them under the bus last week.

In fact, they sent me an email just this morning, and they said in that email—and I'll give him the copy if he wants—we have made no requirements for flat-screen TVs. We made no requirements on the countertops. We made no requirements on the furniture other than how many people they need to seat. We do not set the design requirements for provincial institutions.

\* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, he designed it; he built it; Manitoba taxpayers paid for it. Don't blame anybody else except yourselves. Why are you building this kind of thing on taxpayers' dime?

**Mr. Swan:** Again, the federal—the place housing federal institutions is going to look much different from where provincial inmates are housed. And I know the member has his political channels, but what the member doesn't understand is the level of communication, the level of discussion that's happened between Correctional Service of Canada officials and Manitoba Justice.

And there are a lot of specifications put in place for federal inmates that will be housed within the Headingley Correctional Centre. We're hopeful we can get a memorandum of agreement completed very soon which is going to be positive for the Correctional Service of Canada, also positive for Manitoba Justice.

And I'm very concerned the member for Steinbach asked questions, then goes and puts very misleading information out in the public domain that could actually impact on the ability of Correctional Service Canada and Manitoba Justice to come to an

agreement which is going to be beneficial for both of those organizations, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I had correspondence this morning from Correctional Service. In fact, right at the top, Mr. Speaker, and then say—they said they were surprised by this Attorney General who last week blames Correctional Service Canada. They were shocked. They were—in fact, the words were, thrown under the bus by the provincial government. In fact, they said they had nothing to do with the flat-screen TVs. In fact, what they told me is they have one flat-screen TV through the entire federal corrections system and that's for training.

They said they had nothing to do with the countertops. They said they had nothing to do with the appliances in these beautiful, beautiful houses. Mr. Speaker, in fact, they said, you know who built it? You know who designed it? The Attorney General for Manitoba.

I want to ask him whether or not he's going to apologize to taxpayers. No wonder he didn't let them go on a tour, and I will table the text of that email, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Swan:** Mr. Speaker, it's days like today I'm just so disappointed—I'm so disappointed the member for Steinbach is not going to be seeking the leadership of his party, because the member opposite has put incorrect information—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing the response to the question posed by the honourable member for Steinbach.

The honourable Minister of Justice, to continue your remarks.

**Mr. Swan:** Well, thank you very much. And I'll put on the record again the fact that these cottages are very different from anything else contained in the provincial system. These would not be cottages that would be built under the provincial system. However, because of the lengthy discussions extending over a lengthy period of time between Correctional Service of Canada and Manitoba Justice in connection with Infrastructure and Transportation, there are some very different-looking premises out at Headingley Correctional Centre.

I'm glad that the member from Steinbach was able to tour it, and I'm very happy to answer any further questions the member may have. What is very important to recognize is that we're on the verge

of having a very positive memorandum of agreement between Correctional Service of Canada and Manitoba Justice that we think is going to work for female inmates in Manitoba.

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

### **Regional Development Corporations Funding Cancellation**

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** Well, the fallout has begun for the regional development corporations as a result of this NDP government's unilateral decision to cut funding to these community-based organizations. The general manager of the Pembina Valley Development Corporation, as we know it as PVDC, has resigned as a direct result of the funding shortfall from this government. As PVDC board chair Ralph Groening noted, half of their budget has been cut and replacing that at short notice is an almost-impossible task.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture now restore funding to the regional development corporations to avoid further job layoffs and allow these valuable commodity organizations—community organizations to continue their good work with helping start-up companies create local jobs?

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives):** Yes, as I indicated in the last couple days, as far as the Province goes, our government is committed to helping rural communities in achieving their goals when it comes to economic development. Front-line staff in MAFRI, such as business development specialists and rural leadership specialist, support rural communities and they pursue economic development opportunities for their regent.

And may I remind the member opposite there all alternative programs and tools in place to assist the entrepreneurs, and I would be glad to share the information with the member opposite, as I've indicated in the last couple of days, the four different other programs that are available for such an improvement.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. Speaker, during Estimates the Minister of Agriculture has noted the vacancy rate in MAFRI offices, GO offices, is about 15 per cent, including a number of business development officers. So I don't know where this staff is that's supposed to replace the Pembina Valley Development—for the Pembina Valley Development Corporation has been successful in assisting start-up businesses create jobs and stimulate the economy in

their local communities. Just one example would be the Pembina Valley Challenge, a huge tourism event which attracts over 400 participants each fall to the Pembina Valley.

Now the PVDC general manager is—has resigned due to a lack of vision of his—this government.

Mr. Speaker, how many more development corporations will have to lay off staff, fold entirely, before this minister will stand up for rural and northern communities and reinstate funding? Or should they just throw in the towel and quit now?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And thank you again—the question from the member opposite, and I want to repeat the question—or the answer to the question being brought forward.

We do have other agencies that will provide assist in the rural entrepreneurship assistant program through MASC; Canadian-Manitoba business service centre businesses and start loans, 'yoot' entrepreneur programs and Canadian youth business programs.

And I—just almost seemed that, the fact that we work on a three-year contract with the membering municipalities, and it was three years ago, and there was letters sent out well in advance of the proposed changes.

And let me remind the members opposite, the program has been in existence in 1960, and I'm sure they can somewhat relate to what's been tramped—what has been happening with programs that have been in existence, such as the partnership we have between the federal and provincial governments, and let me use an example, the Canadian Wheat Board.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. Speaker, when will this minister start defending his portfolio within this government?

His department's mandate is to assist vibrant rural communities, something that seems to be lost on this minister. When will he realize the damage he's done with his arbitrary, stealth-of-the-night letter to regional development corporations?

Job creation is just as important in rural and northern Manitoba as it is in urban Manitoba. This minister needs to respect his department's mandate and 'reastate'—reinstate the funding to these community-based, job-creating focused entities.

Mr. Speaker, when will this minister finally stand up for rural and northern Manitoba?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And let me remind the member opposite again, on uncertain time, families look for

creative ways to cut expenses, and we do. We're seeking ours out savings, we're making sure that we spend our money that are effective for the families, the hospitals and the education system in the province of Manitoba.

And let me remind the members opposite, the days when they were in power in 1991 and 1993, the Tories cut \$25 million out of the Agriculture budget, and then again in 1996 they cut \$12 million. So I really consider, what are they talking about today when we are concerned about the rural?

### **First Nations Communities Water and Sewer Infrastructure**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, for the last two weeks in question period, I've been asking the Premier for his plan to bring clean, running water to 1,400 homes which so desperately need it in northern Manitoba. Clean, running water is a human right and is recognized as such by the United Nations, and this NDP government is clearly directly responsible for all of the citizens in Manitoba.

We've heard repeatedly from this Premier that when the federal government is willing to partner, so will we. We've also heard that he has a proposal to the federal government, which he mentioned on Monday.

I ask the Premier: Will he finally table this alleged proposal?

\* (14:20)

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** I appreciate the member raising this question again, Mr. Speaker, because it allows me to once again state that we have money in the budget for labour market training for people in First Nations communities, including the Island Lake area. We have a very substantial commitment in the budget for an east-side road, to allow goods and services to access those communities all year round instead of an increasingly short winter road season.

We're working with the Frontiers Foundation who are adapting new technologies to provide sewer and water in those communities. The minister—the deputy premier and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) has met on more than one occasion with his counterpart in Ottawa to advance this project, and we continue to do all things that we can to support this project and to ensure that Manitobans get access to clean water and sewer.

The member knows very well that when he was a federal Cabinet minister, not one inch of progress was made on this; it wasn't even raised. Now we have the chance to move it forward. We look forward to doing that. And we look forward to the federal government coming up with their part of the resources necessary to do it. And we will certainly be with them there, every step of the way.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, we can debate another time about what happened in the '90s at the federal level, but certainly this Premier, who has been in power for more than 12 years, still is at the point where there are 1,400 homes in this province which desperately need clean, running water, and he has not achieved that goal.

The MKO has set a deadline. There has been a precedent, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario and I table the second Ontario-Canada agreement, which brought clean, running water to many, many homes in Ontario. And the fact is that this agreement specifies specifically the retrofitting to get clean, running water. And that was the Ontario role.

I ask the Premier: Does he realize that with the stroke of a pen he can immediately support retrofitting homes for running water, as Bob Rae did in Ontario? Why has the Premier not acted?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I've indicated earlier that we have acted. I've identified that we've got money—training money for First Nations people. I've identified that we've got money with respect to road access to those communities. I've identified that we've done things like provide dialysis treatment to those communities for the first time ever.

I can also indicate that Manitoba Hydro has set up a special unit to work with First Nations communities on energy efficiency, including retrofits to homes. So, all of these resources have been put in place during our term in office. I do remind the member opposite that the federal Liberals were in power from '93 to about 2006; no progress was made during that time when he was a federal Cabinet minister. We will work with any federal government, of any political stripe, when it comes to improving water and sewer for First Nations communities in Manitoba.

We do think the First Nations communities in Manitoba should have the same level of services as all other Manitobans, and we're willing to go beyond our normal mandate to work with them to achieve that.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, this is the Premier who is shamefully responsible for the fact that there's 1,400 homes which, in this province today, don't have clean, running water. This Premier has failed to do—make the decisions that will get the job done.

MKO has set a target: December 31st, 2012. The Premier has known about this target for almost a year and a half now, and yet he has not got the agreement with the federal government that will get this done. And he hasn't even shown us the proposal which he's put forward.

Will the Premier put forward the proposal? Not a—an agreement with a band; an agreement with the federal government, a proposal for the federal government. Where is it, Mr. Premier; why can't you table it?

**Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs):** Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought I addressed this yesterday, including a brief summary of my conclusions on the Ontario-Canada agreement from 1992. That agreement was really land owed by the Ontario government to the federal government, much like what we have here in the province of Manitoba under what is called the Treaty Land Entitlement process.

We have been working with Aboriginal Affairs Canada at the regional level here in the province of Manitoba, the Island Lake First Nations. And what the federal department of what used to be Indian Affairs has requested, is band council resolutions. I indicated that to the member from River Heights, as well, you will recall.

One community is left to provide such a band council 'reshelution,' and that being the St. Theresa Point First Nation. The Mennonite Central Committee has indicated that they will co-operate, and this government, unlike any other governments in this country, have been working with First Nations regardless of their residency.

#### **English as an Additional Language Funding Increase**

**Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park):** Manitoba has seen record immigration over the last few years as a result of our outstanding Provincial Nominee Program.

Will the Minister of Education please inform the House about her exciting announcement today that will help newcomer and war-affected students get the support they need to succeed in school?

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education):** Well, I was honoured to be at General Wolfe School this morning with the MLA for Minto to announce another \$1.2 million for English as an Additional Language.

Many of—because of our successful Provincial Nominee Program, many of the students that enter our public education system come from war-torn countries and refugee camps where they have gaps in their education, Mr. Speaker, and this funding provides resources to schools so that they can provide programming to these vulnerable students. It—they can provide programming in early literacy and numeracy that—so that they can get them up to speed and get them up to grade level.

And we heard from a child that came here from Burma, this morning, who spoke eloquently about the difference this funding has made in his life, Mr. Speaker.

#### **PTH 5 Bridge Upgrade Requirements**

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz):** Mr. Speaker, almost two years ago, a set of lights were put up on the bridge over the Turtle River south of Ste. Rose. PTH 5 is one of the main highways in this province. It's now been almost two years; it's been cut down to one lane.

Are one-lane bridges now the new standard on provincial highways in this province?

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** Well, Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate members raising issues in their area, and I always do respond and, in fact, I was going to suggest that I will respond probably in a very short period of time in Estimates. I can provide a detailed update to the member, and, in fact, that's one of the reasons we have had some pretty extensive discussions in Estimates.

It is an important area for members of this Legislature, Transportation, and I look forward to responding to the member with full details at that time.

**Mr. Briese:** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the minister answer the member from Charleswood on her bridge questions the other day, and he talked about engineering and safety issues on bridges.

I really would like to know what the engineers are saying about the one-lane bridge over the Turtle River on PTH 5 south of Ste. Rose.

Is it not a safety issue?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member did recall the discussion yesterday where we've been very upfront as a department in indicating the safety issues. And I want to reiterate again, whether it's the bridge on the Perimeter or this bridge, the fundamental issue here—it's not political—it comes down to engineering safety.

And I realize that there are certain people, perhaps in the opposition, who at times think they know more than our engineers. I can tell you, if I have to choose between the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) or this member, in terms of engineering advice—I'm not an engineer, Mr. Speaker—I'll choose my engineer's advice. In fact, each and every bridge in this province, that's how we decide what access we use, what bridges need repairing. We rely on some very competent staff in the—this province, some of the best engineers, not only in Manitoba, but in Canada. I'm very proud of those engineers and we'll follow their advice.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time for oral questions has expired.

#### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

##### Bonnycastle Parent Advisory Council

**Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert):** Mr. Speaker, the success of our education system hinges on parents and community members being actively involved in their schools. The Bonnycastle Parent Advisory Council exemplifies the commitment to our children's education with their ongoing and impressive efforts to support and fundraise for École Bonnycastle School. I feel it's important to highlight the important work of the Bonnycastle PAC and the impact dedicated parents, educators and community members can have on providing the best schools for our children.

The Bonnycastle PAC meets monthly and is made up of elected members alongside the principal, vice-principal and teacher representatives. The PAC provides parental and community perspective and advice to the principal and staff about the school and its programming. At the same time, they act as the liaison between the school, parents, community and support organizations, and promote community understanding, interest and involvement in the school. The hands-on approach of the PAC ensures that everyone from the educational staff to the parents and the students are informed and engaged in supporting the success of Bonnycastle students.

\* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker, the Bonnycastle PAC throws many events throughout the year and I've had the pleasure of helping out at their garage sale on May 5th. This wildly popular event raises money for the school canteen and I can attest how successful it has become. I served muffins and coffee at this sale where the steady stream of people all day were there as always. People were shopping in the gym. The PAC is following up on success of the garage sale with their fourth annual walkathon tonight. This event is a fun way for the entire student body to get involved in making the school community a better place while at the same time raising funds for the school. In the past, the walkathon has raised money for smart boards, musical instruments and gym equipment that provide a benefit to all the students there.

Mr. Speaker, from the garage sale to the walkathon, from the hot lunch program that I volunteered at and in the monthly meetings that we go to, the Bonnycastle Parent Advisory Council exemplifies the positive impact parents and community can have on their schools.

I'd like to recognize the Bonnycastle PAC for their dedication, passion and commitment to the education of our children. And I ask leave to include the names of the members of the Bonnycastle PAC in this statement in *Hansard*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there leave of the House to include the names that the member referenced? [*Agreed*]

*Bonnycastle Parent Advisory Council: Chair Robyn Jones, Vice-Chair Sarah Rosnes, Past Chair Kim Thiessen, Secretary Susan Crichton, Treasurer Chris Durston, Lunch Co-ordinators Sharmela Balkaran, Principal Cristina Molinari, Vice-Principal Lise Denis*

##### Charleswood Hawks Hockey Team

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Charleswood Hawks hockey team on winning their fourth straight Manitoba Minor Junior Hockey League championship. The Hawks defeated the Fort Garry-Fort Rouge Twins 6 to 2 to take the series in six games and win their fourth championship in a row, their 17th in franchise history.

Three first-period goals and some strong play from goaltender Lucas Felbel proved to be more than

enough to lead the Hawks to a 6-2 victory over the Fort Rouge Fort—sorry, Fort Garry-Fort Rouge Twins in game 6 action of the MMJHL championship final at the St. James Civic Centre. Charleswood won the best-of-seven series 4 to 2. It's the Hawks' fourth straight year they've hoisted the Jack McKenzie Trophy and the ninth time in 11 tries they've been able to boast being the cream of the crop in the MMJHL.

The Charleswood Hawks are affiliates of the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League which was established 40 years ago. They are the only remaining original team in this 10-team city league. Players range in the age from 18 to 21 years and are selected primarily from the southwest Winnipeg area. They promote community involvement through player participation in skill camps for young players, hosting the Assiniboine Park Hockey Association Christmas tournament, and generally making themselves available for hockey-related activities. They also promote the continued improvement and development of skills and abilities of both players and coaches. They promote sportsmanship and teamwork on and off the ice. Their motto is "Win on the ice, in the classroom and in community through hockey."

The executives are all volunteers and include local business persons, parents and those who just enjoy the game. Mr. Speaker, their mission is to provide the best possible experience for all participants by encouraging, developing, advancing and administering.

Following is a list of executives, coaches and players who are all to be commended for providing exciting entertainment in Charleswood. And we, just on behalf of all of Charleswood, want to say how much we appreciate all of their efforts and wish them continued good luck.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would ask for leave to include all of the names in *Hansard*.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there leave of the House to include the names that the member referenced? *[Agreed]*

*Executive: Wayne Deschouwer, Reg George, Ted Szykowski, Wilf Erichsen, Renee Danchuk, Russ Killbery, Joe Cefali, Larry Ring, Wayne Warren, Gen Conte, Joe Walker, George Kellestine, Vern Taylor and Brenda Smith*

*Coaching staff: Stephen George, Adam Rath, Charlie Brown, Dave Ouimet, Darryl Thompson, Kevin Todd*

*Players: Eric Beaudin, Riley Court, Colin David, Nic Demski, Jack Josephson, Sean Kubas, David Lafleche, Matthew Lorange, Mike Peroff, Connor Staub, David Taylor, Jesse Toth, Brody Warren, Joel Ballard, Tyler Bell, Kyle Krzyzaniak, Dallas McDougall, Tyler Pope, Dillon Smith, Tyler Smith, Lucas Felbel, Luke Sirant, and affiliated members Alex Hollyoake, Mike Lorange, Tyler Morwick, Cory Yeroschak, Cole Benedictson and Garrett Shaw*

### **Jeannette Montufar**

**Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about an amazing woman, Jeannette Montufar, who is an associate professor of civil engineering at the University of Manitoba. Recently, Jeannette was awarded a YMCA-YWCA Woman of Distinction Award. She was recognized in the Leadership and Management category in which there were more than a dozen worthy nominees. Jeannette has undertaken groundbreaking research related to a wide range of transportation issues, particularly with older pedestrians and people with physical disabilities. She was the first Manitoban to receive the Engineers Canada Young Engineer Achievement Award and she holds the honour as having been the youngest female Fellow of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

In addition, she is also principal of Montufar & Associates, a transportation consulting firm specializing in road safety and freight transportation.

Through her engineering work, Montufar has led many breakthroughs in the accommodation of transportation users, most notably with regards to older pedestrians and persons with disabilities. Significantly, Jeannette has done innovative work on developing the National Guide for Pedestrian Crossing Control. This has led to increased safety for pedestrians and has been attributed to improving the mobility of older Canadians. With an aging society, Jeannette's work will continue to go a long way towards aiding large numbers of Canadians to be safe on our transportation networks.

As a world-renowned civil engineer, Mr. Speaker, Jeannette's work has taken her across the US and Canada on projects dealing with road safety, freight transportation, the application of advanced technologies to commercial vehicle operations, truck size and weight policy, goods movement in urban areas, traffic information systems and an automation of data-collection systems. However, we are glad that she has stayed here in Winnipeg, as her expertise



and groundbreaking work have put this city on the map as a centre for equitable transportation.

I urge all members to join me in congratulating Jeannette Montufar on her Woman of Distinction Award and thanking her on behalf of all Manitobans for the contributions she has made to fair and accessible contribution for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Shelley Chuchmich**

**Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain):** It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today, Mr. Speaker, to share an amazing story about a former constituent of the Riding Mountain constituency, Ms. Shelley Chuchmich.

Today, I would like to recognize Shelley's incredible work in the education sector in Doha, Qatar. After living and teaching in Qatar for a number of years, Shelley has made it a goal of hers to open the Alberta Canadian school in Qatar. Currently in the final stages of choosing her partners for the project, Shelley has met with numerous people in Qatar in order to help the school move forward.

Growing up in Angusville, Shelley graduated from Major Pratt collegiate in Russell before moving to Brandon to complete her bachelor of education degree. Shelley often comments on growing up in a rural community in Manitoba and garners a lot of her beliefs and inspiration from her early rural roots. After Brandon University, Shelley went on to complete a master's degree of arts in educational administration from the Michigan State University.

Shelley's project in Doha, Qatar, is focused on opening the Alberta Canadian school, working with the support from Alberta Education. Shelley will move forward on her exciting project to introduce the Alberta program of study into the school in Qatar. The school will focus continual—will focus on continual development of education through the ABC framework goals.

These goals include the development of a support centre for tuition, a support centre for writing skills in English and Arabic, a point of contact for local parents or families who wish to send their children to boarding schools in Canada, the development of diagnostic testing, support for children with special needs, and for the Alberta

Canadian school to become a model so the public Qatari education system can learn from them.

Shelley's ambition, creativity and perseverance have proven to be important contributing factors in her many successes and goals. Her latest project shows that Shelley is a leading force in advancing education to different parts of the world.

She is also currently working on creating a foundation, the Currnie Chuchmich foundation, in honour of her father who is a respected and valued community leader in Angusville. This foundation will provide the financial support for Shelley and her partners to achieve their goals.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House and recognize Shelley and the tremendous work she is doing to broaden education to children in Qatar. Having also grown up in Angusville, I can say today that the entire—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please. Member's time has expired.

### **Amanda Furst**

**Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James):** Today I would like to recognize an incredible person who recently won one of the YMCA-YWCA Winnipeg's Women of Distinction Awards. Amanda Furst was awarded the Young Woman of Distinction prize for her work as an international community advocate.

Sometimes, as Manitobans and Canadians, we forget how lucky we are to live here. Amanda is working to improve the quality of life for people in her community and in other countries. Amanda was born in Winnipeg and she began volunteering at local community organizations at a young age.

With funds raised by Westwood Collegiate, Amanda helped build a nursery school in Rwanda. Now in its fourth year, the school provides free education to more than 150 students. She graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a bachelor of education in 2005 and went on to volunteer for several years in Tanzania and Rwanda. Amanda worked, not only with students, but with other teachers and even created a teachers manual for the Rwandan grade 9 biology curriculum which is currently in its second year of use.

Upon her return to Canada, Amanda co-founded a not-for-profit organization called Growing Opportunities International, or GO! GO! is currently partnered with Tabitha Martin, a Tanzanian single

mother, and together they are hoping to create a home for street children and orphans in Tanzania.

\* (14:40)

In Canada, Amanda continues to advocate for social justice and sustainable development. She also makes presentations to local students to teach them about Africa and to help them understand the false representations of that continent that are often portrayed in the media.

The winner of the Young Woman of Distinction Award is always someone who is making her mark on the world, and Amanda's dedication and drive are helping her do just that. As a representative of St. James, I am delighted to know that Amanda grew up there and is now making a difference for people all over the world.

I ask all members to join me in thanking Amanda Furst for her contributions to local and international communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing no grievances, we'll move on to orders of the day.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Acting Government House Leader):** Yes. In government business, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to advise the House that the Opposition Day motion on the Order Paper submitted by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) will be considered under orders of the day on Wednesday, May 23rd.

**Mr. Speaker:** It has been announced that—to the House that the Opposition Day motion on the Order Paper submitted by the Leader of the Official Opposition will be considered under orders of the day on Wednesday, May the 23rd.

**Mr. Swan:** I ask that we move into Committee of Supply.

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

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

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran):** Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

As previously agreed, questions for the Department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** Yes, I do have some responses, in some cases preliminary responses, to questions, and I was going to read them into the record; there may be some follow up.

We're still dealing with the question of staffing level. This reflects full staffing complement as a certain percentage of vacancy. We did provide some information, I think, in an overall level so we'll get that.

Contracts are awarded directly without going to tender. There's approximately—were 92 from our initial analysis. It's important to note that there are a lot of tendered, you know, it really depends on the circumstance, but we, you know, primarily we do file a tendering.

Capital grants—the reduction is because of the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat funding being transferred.

Under the gates and border crossing fund, how much money was flowed in that particular department? We're getting those numbers.

CentrePort Way—I know that question was asked. Our current estimated completion date is 2014.

Then, questions were asked about the south Perimeter bridge project. Did we recover any money from the contractors, and, if so, how much? Yes, and how much was spent on legal fees?

The answer is no; this is not an issue with the contractor. It's involving the design firm, and we are currently in litigation with the design firm and, obviously, there are fees attached to that.

The—what was the original estimated cost of repairs to Pierre Delorme Bridge and what was the final projected—final cost of the project?

Projected cost: \$15 million, and very pleased that the actual cost is actually under budget and—\$13.48 million.

Highway 75: How much money has been spent, to date, by the federal and provincial governments on this particular project?

To date, expenditures have totalled \$19.702 million, so we've had a significant investment.

What was the federal-provincial share?

It—the cost share is 50-50 on the eligible projects.

The rest is that—the question was asked if it was cost shared. Is it federal-provincial?

And the—there's no—the no cost sharing beyond that.

And the infrastructures—our infrastructure, obviously, at the end of the day: Is there a deadline for the Building Canada Fund program?

Yes, the deadline for the Building Canada Fund major program end date is March 31st, 2017.

Highway 59: The question was asked about the total cost of the bicycle path project.

The total cost is \$4 million.

18th Street bridge in Brandon: Is there a cost—updated cost—that they share—

The original cost was \$17 million—what, we're at what, 27—it's in the—it's in the—it's in 25-, 26-, 27-million-dollar range. And I do want to stress again that we—the settling that took place was actually anticipated. There's sand—there was a sand issue there, and the settling does not affect the bridge; it only affects the approach. Again, this is not unusual when you have that kind of terrain, so that is not a fault in the project and won't add to the cost of the project.

Vehicle accidents damaging bridge—bridges: Actually, 1.610 million, so \$1,610,000 of damage.

Have there been any charges laid?

Yes. And I know it's not just bridges, by the way, because there was a—my legion, now, has a very large poppy canopy because somebody went and drove and knocked out the old canopy, and they were

able to use that for insurance, so it does happen, generally.

How many firms are in the Manitoba trucking improvement fund?

For the past year, 17 firms.

And, on May 18th, the question was asked, Highway 251 between Highway 21 and 83, is there any intention to move forward on the shoulder repairs, widening of that highway?

There will be minor repairs—minor spot repairs. We're not looking at widening the highway.

And I believe that's a fairly comprehensive list of the MIT questions that were asked, and we did table the EMO answers at the last sitting.

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** I'd like to ask the minister if he could explain a current revenue-sharing practices for the First Nations casinos in Manitoba.

**Mr. Ashton:** First Nations casinos are under the gaming commission. The minister of—responsible for the gaming commission is the lead minister. I'm the Lotteries Minister, and, obviously, there are questions that have been asked at the last hearings in terms of Lotteries, but the gaming commission and the minister responsible for the gaming commission are the lead—is the lead minister on Aboriginal gaming issues.

**Mr. Graydon:** Can the minister provide a status update on the Spirit Sands Casino project?

**Mr. Ashton:** I have nothing directly to do with that project, and, again, this is MIT and EMO. Even as—if we were in Lotteries, which we're not, I'm not the lead minister. The lead minister is the minister responsible for the gaming commission.

That has been the case, by the way, throughout our 10 years governing. I can't recall if that was the case in the previous government, but issues related to Aboriginal casinos are under the gaming commission; that's the lead minister.

**Mr. Graydon:** Can the minister indicate whether his government assessed the—has assessed the impact of a casino on the rural municipality of Elton?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I'm a bit surprised by the questions. The—we're not in the—we're not dealing with lotteries. And again, I'm not the lead minister on this issue, anyway. It is MIT and EMO, and I'm not trying to do anything other than point the member in

the direction of where those questions should be asked. Those are questions that would be appropriately asked of the gaming commission minister's lead minister.

And, again, we do have standing committees for Lotteries. I believe we did have a meeting recently and, again, there's opportunity at future meetings with Lotteries if there's any Lotteries dimensions.

But, again, Aboriginal casinos, it's the gaming commission that's the lead minister. I was former minister and I was lead minister then, so that hasn't changed.

**Mr. Graydon:** I thank the minister for that.

**Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler):** It's my pleasure to be here this afternoon to ask a few questions of the Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation.

In particular, I'd like to just speak for a moment about Manitoba's Highway Renewal Plan for 2011 and 2015. And I've had a chance to go through the document, and, unfortunately, I can't find any indication in there of Highway 32 south in Winkler. So I've perused the document and I assure you that it's not there.

In any case, as the minister knows, this roadway through Winkler is both an important road for the local community as well as it's a regional roadway that provides a major and important transportation link from Winkler to the international border, and throughout the region it connects other communities as well. It also helps to funnel traffic to and from and through the industrial park in Winkler.

I know that the minister has had a chance to meet with the city. Just wanted to ask him if he believes there would be any chance of revisiting the Highway Renewal Plan to include upgrades to Highway 32 south in Winkler in the plan for this coming year.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I'm very pleased to answer the question and also indicate that, certainly, we are very cognizant of the growth in Winkler. And we have been there in terms of some of the significant infrastructure needs. Actually, the mayor actually did remind me of the fact that I was minister at the time, it was our government that paved the Main Street in Winkler; it's actually part of the provincial highway system. And certainly that reflects our commitment.

In fact, our entire Cabinet was out in Winkler just recently, the member knows, for a Cabinet

meeting, and I think that really speaks to the significant recognition of the growth in Winkler and, of course, Morden as well, other areas in the region, Steinbach, you know, significant growth areas. And we're certainly cognizant of some of the additional pressures that's putting on infrastructure.

And again, we're there on the school side, as the member knows. We've been committed there in terms of the increased enrolments, matching on the school capital side with the necessary schools. And, in fact, the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) was a significant part of that when he was minister of Education.

So, we did meet with the mayor and council from Winkler. They—and I don't want to get into, sort of, some of the discussion, details of the discussion, but they did discuss some other options as well that we could look at. There are other infrastructure priorities in Winkler, so we obviously have also referenced that. So we are following up from that meeting looking at some of the suggestions and ideas and proposal that were put forward by Winkler, so it's under discussion.

And I can indicate, by the way, with the highway capital program, we do have a capital program. It's very significant in terms of dollar numbers. We're exceeding our 10-year, \$4-billion commitment this year, you know, a total of \$589 million on the system.

But what we also do is—it does evolve. We do have some flexibility in terms of projects. Right now, that—a lot of that flexibility, we're having to use for floods, you know, the \$50-million commitment this year and next year strictly for bridges. So, we do constantly review that capital program and we do make adjustments as necessary.

But I do want to stress that we had very good discussion, and I do want to commend the mayor and council from Winkler for—I think, for a very constructive approach, and we will continue those discussions.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Friesen:** Thank you, and I do want to underscore one term that the minister used when he talked about the growth in the region, and I just want to quantify that a little bit. I know that you're aware, Mr. Minister, but the latest StatsCan figures show that Winkler's now at a population of 10,670, which would indicate a 17.2 per cent increase in the population since 2006. At the same time, Stanley's

population—the RM of Stanley's population is up 31.2 per cent since 2006 and Morden's is up 18.9 per cent since 2006. The combined growth rate is 22.4 per cent.

So these communities are growing significantly, as you also indicated. And you're aware of some of the reasons for that growth; a lot of that has to do with the expanding commercial-industrial base in that region and the need for workers to come in and assist—or to meet the need and, of course, that means that there are new immigrants that continue to come from Europe and eastern Europe, but also from South America, from Central America, from eastern Asia. And there's also migration from other Manitoba communities more and more to the area, and all of that creates congestion on roadways. And I know that the minister is aware of this, and he referenced the fact that the NDP caucus was in Winkler back in—I believe about—sorry, Cabinet was in Winkler in—or just in February of this year of 2012, and I know they got to see, first-hand, some of the busy roadways in that community.

In any case, I guess the question comes to this. Because of the significant increase in population—and truly there probably are not many communities in Manitoba that can boast more significant growth rates in population over the last five years. I know that this is outstripping the provincial growth rate in the last five years by about 15 per cent of the province's average. Given this, does this perhaps increase the importance of proceeding with an expansion to Highway 32 south sooner rather than later?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I thank the member for documenting some of the growth rates, and certainly I think we should all be very proud in the province of what is happening, and I think one of the things that's often missed is that we've not only turned around the stagnant, in fact, even declining population and economic development from certainly the 1990s, but we're now actually dealing with the challenges of growth. And I do want to acknowledge that whether it's Morden-Winkler and the RM, as well, or in Brandon which has grown very significantly over the last number of years, whether you look at a number of the communities impacted by growth in the southwest, and I think a lot of the times people are also not seeing some of the significant growth in the communities in the Interlake, for example.

I mean, you could go throughout the province and you see some significant shifts. In some cases,

and it's not the case in the member's area, you also have some shifts within, you know, from rural to urban municipalities. But we are dealing with that. The unique feature here is outside of the city of Winnipeg, our department is essentially responsible for what are, in effect, very significant urban transportation links, and we look at each one in their own merit. I certainly acknowledge with the mayor from Winkler that we're more than aware of some of the pressures that are there.

I do want to say we're, you know, we're still dealing with some significant elements of the infrastructure deficit, and I look at Highway 75, which is not far out of the member's area. We continue to do major work through Morden this year, and I've always felt that Highway 75 was an absolute embarrassment to Manitobans, you know, just a short 10 years ago, and we've been significantly investing in that and, in fact, as I read into the record, with some support from the federal government.

So we're continue to deal with all of those pressures. I mention the oil industry, you know, bridges, you know, we—the Coulter bridge, for example, that we're reconstructing, which the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) is certainly more than aware of, we've had discussions on that. It will be a \$12-million project.

So a lot of our—a lot of what we're dealing with—yes, there's the flood impacts—but is to do with the growth in the province, and the flip side, by the way, is a lot of what we have done, in getting highways back to RTAC-level loads or reducing restrictions in other areas, is also driving that economic growth. So, you know, we're—we are going to continue discussions with Winkler. They did put forward some interesting suggestions on managing traffic issues. So we're into it with discussions, and I do want to, again, without getting into all the details again—so, you know, that's really something that's better done between our staff and staff from Winkler—I do want to commend the mayor and council for, I think, engaging in some solutions or entering the discussion, and we're, you know, we'll take very seriously some of the ideas that they have put forward.

**Mr. Friesen:** I appreciate the minister's response and I can appreciate, as well, that the flood put some strain on resources significantly, and I appreciate that. At the same time, I know it did also come out when the NDP caucuses visited Winkler for meetings there. The First Minister, at that time, indicated to

media that there were some reasons that they couldn't proceed at this time with an expansion to Highway 32 south, and at the time, he indicated, though, that the project would continue to remain on his to-do list.

I guess what I would seek from the Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation is any kind of suggestion about when the project might proceed to the Province's to-do list. And, I guess, in order to underscore the importance of it, I just want to refer again to traffic counts on that roadway. And I'm aware, as well, that MIT has basic standard designs that they outline in their transportation planning manual, the TPM, which advises when, basically, to increase a roadway from two to four lanes. And I wonder if the minister can advise at this time, what do the most recent numbers in traffic count indicate for 32 south in Winkler?

**Mr. Ashton:** I could get the latest information. I was going to suggest what we've done with detailed questions is, you know, I can bring it back at the next [*inaudible*] there. I certainly want to indicate they're very significant, and we are aware of a lot of the development issues.

What's also happening in Winkler, too, which is not unlike like other communities, is you're getting some significant traffic issues, actually, outside of the actual urban area itself, and that, again, is very much part of what the member identified, the growth of what you might want to call light manufacturing in the region. And so you're getting, you know, some significant shifts in terms of commercial traffic. You also have, obviously, you know, when you do construct a new school, you end up with issues of that nature as well.

So we're certainly aware. I can get the exact numbers, and certainly they are—they've increased quite significantly over the last number of years, and that is not unusual in areas where we've had significant growth. In Winnipeg where we're not responsible, you'll also find areas in the city where that's the case as well.

So it is one of the factors we do look at, and we are involved in some discussions right now with Winkler. There was some suggestions and ideas that were put forward at the last meeting we had, and we're certainly prepared to consider them.

**Mr. Friesen:** Thank you for that response, and I'm—thank the minister for agreeing to supply those

numbers to indicate the traffic—the most recent traffic counts in Winkler on 32 Highway south.

I know that the road is categorized as a—where is the term that I have in front of me?—a secondary arterial road. And, according to the information I have—it might be outdated, but it indicates that on such a road, the road like that should have a 10-year average daily traffic or AADT count of between 1,000 and 6,000 vehicles. And, certainly, the most recent statistics that I have seen coming forward from MHTIS indicate that traffic counts at some places on that road exceed 17,500 cars. So I actually made the joke to someone that I said I had hoped that the Minister for Transportation, when he was out with the NDP caucus, had a chance to try to turn left onto 32 Highway south from one of the roads, and they weren't sure if that had been the case or not, but I thought it might be a good place for a long meeting on the state of the roadway, because it does result in some significant delays.

In any case, the information I have indicates 17,500. I would, of course, be interested to know if there have been any subsequent or more recent studies conducted to measure traffic counts on that road and whether he could also supply any other information about northbound and southbound traffic for different intersections on that road, both south of the 14 Highway and also, then, south of some—south of the berm that leads south of the city. It's—to supply some of that information as well, would be helpful.

\* (15:10)

In any case, the—I just wanted to refer to a word that the minister used. He indicated that the department does have some flexibility, and he does, as minister, have some flexibility to consider projects, and I appreciate that. And I actually read on page 10 of the Highway Renewal Plan that there is a fund that's referred to as the flexible response fund. And while the minister has made plain that the flood is an important priority and dealing with the effects of the flood last year in Manitoba is an important priority, I also notice here that the wording of this particular funds mentions that long-term planning's essential for cost-effective—or cost-efficient roadway construction, as is the capacity to respond effectively and immediately to emerging needs.

And I would like to ask the minister whether some of the things that we've discussed this afternoon in regard to traffic counts, in regard to increasing population, in regard to the roadway being used not simply by the population of the city of

Winkler but by surrounding communities, whether there would be an opportunity under specifically the flexible response fund for this project to be, I don't know if the term would be fast tracked, but to be advanced.

I notice there are four criteria stated under the flexible response fund, and certainly, they don't all present a possibility, but I do notice that one category specifically states, address an emergent need.

My question for the minister would be: Would this level of population growth, exceeding 22 per cent in five years and would that perhaps indicate—and traffic levels exceeding 17,500 vehicles per day on certain segments of this road, would that indicate a possibility to address this project as an emergent need?

**Mr. Ashton:** If you're—have some sense of what we'd consider as emergent need, I think it would probably be best to point to the Pierre Delorme Bridge in the St. Adolphe area where you had a bridge that was seriously compromised in the 2009 flood. So that is an emergent need.

In the case of the Coulter bridge, that would be very much an emergent need, something that wasn't obviously anticipated prior to the flood of last year. The Souris, Killarney, I could run through, you know, various—the projects are out there. So when we're talking emergent need, it really wouldn't be comparable to, you know, what is the case in Winkler, which is an ongoing, developing traffic issue. It's an urban-related issue, and the key thing I want to stress is we are engaged in discussions with Winkler, and certainly I'd appreciate the opportunity to go out as the minister.

I can also indicate, by the way, in addition obviously the capital issues. We're also involved in many cases on traffic control issues. Steinbach recently—for example, we opened a new set of lights in an area just on the outskirts of Steinbach, very similar situation that the member's aware of. It related to a lot of commercial traffic in this case that has—is part of a, you know, some industrial development in the area.

So we're certainly aware of it. You know, I want to be very upfront, we're—there are numerous pressures across the system. The key thing we have done is significantly increase the capital budget. It's now about quadruple what it was in 2000—pardon me, in 1999.

We are spending a significant amount on our highway system generally, \$589 million. That compares very well to the amount that's actually raised in gas taxes. So we are putting a significant investment in, and we will look at this, and I will continue to stay in touch with the department. And our officials are meeting with Winkler because there's a series of what—you know, when I say urban-related issues, you know, we're almost getting to the point of the twin cities of Morden and Winkler. Well, we got one right now, we got one that's in, one that's on the way.

And, if you look at the developments taking place, I still believe Boundary Trails was the most brilliant—I don't know if it was a diplomatic move but, you know, I want to stress that we're more than aware of the growth in, not only Winkler, but Morden and in the RM as well, and it really does bode well for the province.

And I—just on a side note, I think a lot of people aren't even necessarily aware of the degree to which—we're probably the only provincial jurisdiction in the country where you get a significant amount of immigration that is going outside of urban areas. So that, again, is driving it. It's—you have—there's a lot of newcomers to Canada in the area, and that's putting pressures on schools; it's putting pressures on roads; pushing pressures on municipal services. I'll be upfront with the member: I'd much rather deal with the pressures of growth than the pressures of decline, and that's the spirit in which we will continue to work co-operatively with Winkler and other communities.

**Mr. Friesen:** Well, I would agree with the minister and I would agree that it's far better to be addressing problems of growth than attrition, and I think there's no better place to paint a target than on this road. And I would just, you know, make the comment that with 17,500 vehicles on that road per day, it's difficult to conceive that there would be any project—similar road product that would be more suitable for action, and any project that would exceed this project's eligibility criteria.

In any case, there's one more place I would like to make a comment and that—or a question to the minister, and that is, under the flexible response fund, there's another category I see. It's—it indicates projects that are candidates for cost-effective repairs, and a number of times in our conversation, the minister has referenced the most recent meeting that he—and I know that his, I believe, some of his

assistant deputy ministers might have attended recently to discuss, perhaps, a way to bring this project forward. I'm also aware of that meeting that had took place, and I believe that there may be an avenue here for the projects—the project to be addressed inasmuch as it would satisfy the criteria of cost-efficient repairs.

And I'm aware that at this time a proposal has been made to reduce the cost of the overall project from \$28 million to about \$14 million, and that proposal has been brought to your attention as minister. And I think it's a very progressive approach, certainly one that has got to get the minister's attention because it's—it comes from a group that has indicated that it can be very progressive and very ingenious when it comes to solving infrastructure challenges. And, certainly, the most recent example of the reverse osmosis water treatment plant in Winkler, shows how this community can articulate some very ingenious ways of doing projects for a very reasonable amount of dollars.

So I would suggest to the minister that this would be a way forward that I could see for this project under the category of the flexible response fund, of being a cost-efficient repairs. Certainly this would reduce the cost of the project from \$28 million to \$14 million. And I would just like to ask the minister if he would agree that this might be a cost-efficient way to bring this project finally forward to completion.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, the reference in the highway plan is probably more akin to situations where you have highways that have been significantly used or significant amount of damage on the highway, where you get to the point where actually a major capital project is a more—it's a more efficient way of dealing with it than ongoing maintenance. So I think that's the reference in the document, but notwithstanding that, we balance a series of pressures and needs every year,

And I always enjoy working with municipal leaders because the first question I always ask is, do you have a capital wish list, and the answer is yes, and do you have enough money in your capital budget every year to meet every one of those projects on the wish list, and the answer is no. And—so municipal leaders are the first to know that they have the same pressures, both in terms of capital needs, but also, you know, ensuring affordability issues, you know, for local tax base et cetera.

So, you know—and I also, when I meet with the municipalities or the stakeholders generally, I always say that the quick answer usually is no when it comes to a project. Yes usually takes some time longer and that is not unusual in any capital area, and I do want to put forward that we certainly appreciate the work that Winkler is doing. Winkler's a very progressive, forward-thinking community. I also want to acknowledge the work that is being done by our regional staff as well, too. You know, if you look at the kind of challenges we're dealing with, I mean, you know, with last year, with a flood in many areas—but we're dealing with some of the ongoing issues that they're—affecting communities. So, you know, our staff work, you know—I think, deserve a lot of credit for the ongoing work they do. We often thank them for the work they do on the floods, but a lot of the work they do, whether it's the maintenance side or on the capital-planning side.

\* (15:20)

So it's no different in this case with Highway 32. Soon as the member walked in, I said I would have been very surprised if he hadn't asked about 32, you know, I know as an MLA has a number of key highways. I actually have communities that don't have highways so, you know, even that becomes part of the agenda. I'm more aware of the importance of highways are—particularly in the Winkler area and we'll continue to work with the city on the challenging urban traffic issues that they're dealing with. I want to acknowledge that we will get the exact count; I think the member's number is not far off the official count, but I want to make sure we get it. And, yes, there are pressures and we're trying to meet those pressures with a significant capital investment.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden):** I want to thank my colleague from Lakeside for a few moments to ask the minister a few questions.

Seems when I—shortly after I was first elected, I had the opportunity of being the shadow Cabinet member for this particular minister, when he was Transport minister at that time as well, and I've worked forward to working with him over the years. I think he knows the questions I've got. It's only a couple. As he said, there isn't time for all of them, but, in particular, the Coulter bridge. He's mentioned it a number of times, and I'm just wondering if he can provide me with any update.

First of all, the only thing I'd like to say, is that, well, you know, I appreciated him coming to



Brandon and meeting with the reeves, both Mr. Trewin and Mr. Stewart, that day—Shirley Kernaghan, Betty Miller, the group—the two that have been—the local citizens that have been spearheading the group that wants to get a bypass around the washed-out bridge. I appreciate that the minister's department has taken the old bridge down and moved it out. There is a group there, though, that from a safety perspective, as the minister knows, wants to see a shoofly or a detour with a Bailey bridge or that style of bridge, something to cross the Souris River with. At this time the water is still excessively low. It's probably the extreme of last year when it was 27 feet higher than where it was on March the 1st this year.

But they have a report virtually done, as requested by MIT, to design to Manitoba standards the approaches needed to come off of 251 Highway to allow the bridge to be built. They have the okay from DFO as long as nothing is put in the water, in the river, and so they have that assurance that it will go ahead. They have spent—the both councils, the RM of Arthur and the RM of Brenda, have spent considerably thousands of money of their own into this at this point. All of the funds to build this project would come from, virtually, private industry and the municipalities involved in this one.

They're not asking the government for a lot of money—maybe a little bit here to help develop the engineered plan, but once that was in place, they just want some assurance that they could go ahead with it if the plan comes in at Manitoba government standards as we talked that day in Brandon. To the level of Manitoba standards, they know what those are; the engineering company doing this has designed it to that.

And, two things there, I guess, No. 1, does the minister see himself being able to put a few dollars on the table to help them with their engineering plan? And then would he allow it to go ahead if it comes forward to Manitoba standards?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I did appreciate the opportunity to go out. I want to commend the community representatives, obviously, the municipal leaders from the two municipalities that are impacted, and also the two retired school teachers—I believe, both retired school teachers, is that correct?

**An Honourable Member:** I think they are.

**Mr. Ashton:** That's right, and—a very thorough approach. And I actually felt like I was back in

school again, too, because there were some tough questions—and I mean it in the best sense of the word. But I do give them credit, you know, it shows the degree to which these kind of disruptions that we faced last year—the flood—can impact on communities.

I do want to stress, obviously, our No. 1 goal is the reconstruction of the bridge. When I say reconstruction, we are going to be constructing, basically, a \$12-million bridge. Our goal, subject to environmental approvals and construction issues, is to get it done as soon as possible, which is, basically, next year. I want to stress that it's going to be there for decades to come, as well, so it will be a new and improved bridge. So that's our No. 1 goal.

In terms of the immediate access issues, we certainly recognize there are access issues. And, as I've outlined in the House, number of interrelated issues, you know, other areas of the province, we look at each one on its own specific situation and specific merits.

I do want to acknowledge a lot of work has been done by the communities in terms of approaching the oil industry—one particular company, I know, which is significantly impacted by the disruption. It's not the only area. I know we've been in discussion with them as a department as well, so I do want to acknowledge that.

The key issue here, I mean, I do want to caution, when it comes to DFO, not to assume anything because if there is any even a minor issue involving fish habitat, they will most definitely be involved, I can speak from experience as minister of this department. But all throughout rural northern Manitoba we have examples of that, so again, there's no guarantee of that but, you know, I appreciate some of the due diligence has been done. That's a wise thing.

Where we left off at the last meeting—took place when I attended, along with a number of people, you know, from the department, including a regional director, we were waiting for some of the engineering work back from the community and I'm not sure if that's been received or not.

The key issue I want to stress, by the way, is when you replace a bridge that's a key component of the highway system, you're replacing a bridge that will have everything from school buses, to farm equipment, to heavy-duty equipment from the oil

industry and that area, to light vehicle traffic, you name it.

So, when we're talking about a bridge, I do know what a Bailey bridge is, an Acrow panel bridge, because when I was a kid in Thompson, for many years in the early days of Thompson, it was actually a Bailey bridge that connected the airport on the other side of the community to Thompson. It wasn't until Joe Borowski became the Highways minister, I remember that that replaced it. And actually the Bailey bridge is actually in Thompson. It's just become a bit of a historic area.

Most people wouldn't appreciate what a Bailey bridge involves. In this case, it was lining up a fairly lengthy span and having to wait to cross.

When you get into an Acrow panel bridge, there are various issues. First of all, can it be put in place and can it survive flooding, ice conditions? Clearly in this case, because of the placement, there would potentially be some issues of that. So you have to have—would have to have a contingency plan to remove it.

But, most importantly would be, would it be able to meet the standards, both in terms of the bridge and the access lane—the access road itself, and I know there's been various discussions. I don't want to get into all the details, but involving, you know, perhaps having go through private land, et cetera. But one thing I know is, the oil company will not be in a position to use a bridge or any access into that bridge unless it meets full highway standards and unless they're able to persuade their insurance company that it is a safe bridge. Otherwise, they will be outside of their insurance and they will not use it.

And, what we're into now, because I think, you know, with some of the discussions back and forth, you know, you can take a bridge, you can put it pretty well anywhere in the province, Acrow panel bridge, I have no doubt you can do it for half a million dollars, which is the figure that was quoted.

The question, though, becomes, is it a bridge that will provide safe access, and I listed all the kind of uses out there. So, we're not making the assumption it can't be done. We are waiting for, you know, some of the engineering drawings, you know, in terms of that.

I know there was some concern about the situation vis-à-vis other areas of the province, you know, Killarney area as well. Each case is assessed on its own basis. There's a very different situation

with the Coulter bridge in terms of the span, where it would be located, et cetera, so it's a—and it's no different.

I know the member for Portage has raised the issue of putting a low-level crossing in around the Portage Diversion. We do have some other situations throughout the province, so No. 1 goal to get the bridge replaced but in terms of temporary access, we're more than prepared to continue discussions. I would not have gone out to the meeting if I hadn't intended to find out first-hand what the concerns were, obviously, but also find out what the proposal is and we'll continue discussions based on the last meeting.

**Mr. Maguire:** Thanks, Mr. Minister. We appreciate that. The people know that there's going to be a good bridge built and they're very appreciative of that, what they're concerned about is that it won't be built until November of '13 and they're not even that worried about it as the minister heard that day in Brandon. They would sooner have it done right and done properly and they respect that the minister's moved it up the chain to get it done quickly because of the flood.

The concern here is for the safety of school buses and other people and they would allow the minister to put whatever restrictions on that bridge he needs to, I think, in regards to being able to slow the traffic down. It's not going to be a 100-kilometre bridge; nobody's asking for that. It would be a one-lane style bridge over the river, people would have to slow down, just as we did out here at Headingley when we built the bypasses and shooflies around the No. 1 Highway to fix the cement culverts in the bridges there.

\* (15:30)

There's lots of other examples around the province, but this is probably a unique one in the fact that they're not asking the government for any money, at least not to this stage, as long as it was built to the point of a half a million dollars, something to that effect. I think the community there, and the people around it, recognize that that's a—you know, there's some limits to what they can do. But they really need to have this done for the safety of the area and the—just the being able to keep as much of the flow of traffic split between the present detour, where these wide farm equipment air seeders are going to go down. And we'll have two more falls—or springs of that, and two more falls of wide combine headers and that sort of thing.

And so if he could provide them with some assurance, I mean, we're into May already. They've been dealing with this since last fall. If we don't do something in the next month or two, then maybe it's the idea of the minister that we'll just drag this out till it's too late to bother building it. I would hope not, and I don't think that's what the minister is doing but I have had that put to me, and I hope I'm wrong, and I've told those people they're wrong, so—in regards to that. So I just want to put that on the record, and so if there can be some early opportunity to meet with them so that there is a way that the government can help them get this done, we'd appreciate that.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, and I'm surprised there would be anybody even suggesting that, because we've had discussions back and forth, yes, and, you know, I know that some people can get cynical, but I—given the fact we're going to replace the bridge with a \$12-million bridge, that's a huge statement of commitment to the communities. We're going to do it as soon as possible. It's a huge statement of commitment to the communities impacted. And, you know, I'll put on the record, as well, that at the last meeting, where it had been left off, previously, was that the group would provide the engineering information, which had not been provided following from the past meeting, and I have no doubt that there was every intent that that would take. Perhaps it has since.

So the key issue here, and I know, you know, in the other context in that other place, I've talked about safety, et cetera; that really is the only issue of concern in the department. And we also have to look at, you know, obviously, cost-effectiveness. I mean, the first indication from the department was it would cost as much as \$5 million. And I know, again, there was some cynical with that, but if you just—cynicism with that from people that we met with, but if you build something that provides exact equivalent to what you have, on a temporary basis, given the circumstances at that site, when engineers tell me it's \$5 million, I believe them.

And, you know, I do really believe that when they also say that for half a million dollars we can't do a bridge that meets highway standards, I also believe them, now. Between \$500,000 and \$5 million, with some discussion back and forth, who knows? I'm not prejudging it. The file, to my mind, is still open, and the last delay, if you like, really wasn't from the highway side, it was really the follow-through from this engineer that has been associated with this project. I'm not being critical, I

just—just when I walked out of that meeting, that was where it was left at and, you know, we will continue to look at it. I just want to stress, again, that we—in each and every one of the situations of the 80 bridges, and, particularly, the ones which were significantly impacted by the flood, either significantly compromised or destroyed, we do look at temporary access if it's possible. We're moving ahead. The member knows, you know, what's happening in Killarney, and if we can find a feasible, safe way to do it in Coulter, we would certainly look at it.

So discussions are earnestly ongoing. There's no intent to delay anything. It's really at trying to narrow down a very big difference on—not just cost, but the safety issue as well. Because I made it very clear there, you know, I don't make any apologies for the department and our engineers, our bridge engineers, particularly, but also the people who deal with the traffic approaches, in ensuring that it meets every last need we have. Because, you know, moving heavy equipment one by one across a bridge for the oil industry is one dynamic. It has weight issues, and, you know, the rest of it, but I tell you, I wouldn't want a school bus on a highway access or on a bridge unless it was beyond safe. You know, and I want safety for the heavy equipment as well, but there are various different, you know, safety elements that go into it, and when we responded, it's always been a, you know, with two real dynamics. One is the cost, obviously, but really more than that is safety. And if we can find a safe way to do it and it's cost effective, we'll consider it, yes.

**Mr. Maguire:** The—I forgot to mention, too, that his colleague from Brandon East was with me in February when we had a joint meeting with the community there. I appreciated his involvement in this and the joint letter that we wrote the minister at that time.

It's not a matter of whether it's \$5 million or \$500,000. This community's willing to do it for no cost to the government, so I guess that's the issue here. It's just allowing them to go ahead.

There's also the Hartney bridge, and I appreciate the work that the minister's done there. He might want to answer why they're building a new mile of road, moving the bridge 50 feet to the west, instead of just replacing the hundred-foot bridge that's presently there, taking it out and doing that.

But, my—in light of time I want to ask the minister—the other situation that I have is in Virden; I

King Street and No. 1 Highway. Government has indicated that there's an overpass in the books there. There's a business that wants to build a 14,000-square-foot business warehouse, all that sort of thing, and on one of the corners of that particular intersection. It's been on the books, this overpass, since 1997, I'm told. I'm told the town and the planning area have never agreed to it. There's been indications in the last few days that it has to stay on the books, that the department can't take it off. I haven't had that confirmed from the minister or the deputy on this.

And I want to appreciate the staff's efforts that they've made on this, because it's just come up in the last few weeks.

And there needs to be some way to find a way to help our rural businesses stay in Manitoba. The alternative for this fellow is to go to Saskatchewan, to Moosomin, because of course the potash industry is—he thinks he can sell as many of these pieces of items that he sells in Saskatchewan as he can in Moosomin, as opposed to Virden, because traffic does move back and forth every day between those two communities. There's people living in each that work in the other and there a lot of traffic there. This business would bring about \$700,000 in PST alone to the government every year, if it was established, if the government would allow it to go ahead. He can't move back on the lot because there's an oil well behind the building where he would build in relation to it. That was a—would have been a very viable alternative.

And so I guess there's a bigger picture here, too. The rest of that bypass would be overtop of several of bills—businesses that are already in place. The government may own a lot of the property. Certainly they own the properties on the twinned highway that's there at the present time. But I wonder if he can indicate to me what is the likelihood of being able to have that particular plan of an overpass on King Street and No. 1 Highway in Virden removed from the government's plans.

There are lots of other alternatives that would come 50 years down the road if it was ever needed. The—probably the bigger intersection at that particular time in our history will be, in our future, will be No. 1 and 83 highway. That's where a lot of the oil industry is starting to locate their businesses now. Big interests there and on the west side of Virden, because there just isn't enough space to build everything.

There was an article on TV on Williston Basin last night or the night before. I don't know if the minister saw it, but this—we haven't hit the level of things that are happening in the Williston Basin yet, in all of our small towns in southwest Manitoba, but we're getting very close. The communities there, as the minister indicated earlier, certainly don't have the resources to build the things that they need. Melita's struggling in regards to getting a lagoon built. They know they need to, as a result of the flood and they certainly do appreciate it. But, having just put water—waterfication in, in their community, there—there's a lot of—you know, there's a development issue in Deloraine in regards to a new motel that wants to go up there that I appreciate needs to have some clarity quickly as well so that they can get it built.

These types of businesses are being built. They're sold out before they start building. That's the concern that we're having. We've got a—unprecedented demand for construction in southwest Manitoba, my—virtually all of it in my constituency, as 99.9 per cent of the oil in Manitoba is still located in Arthur-Virden, thanks to the expansion that took place in the last election, I guess with Miniota, Hamiota, McAuley becoming part of that area, in Whitewater municipality.

But, nevertheless, I digress. I just—my question to the minister is: Can he or his department help the community develop by removing that plan from the records?

**Mr. Ashton:** I thank the member for giving a good description of the growth that's taken place in terms of the oil industry, southwest Manitoba. I do want to just stress that we are attempting to deal with that, both in terms of infrastructure, but also some of the moves we've made working with Saskatchewan co-operatively on spring road restrictions, to have more harmonization there. Also on RTAC, waiting for highways, harmonization there.

So we're very committed to that, and I'm sure my colleague, the Minister of Energy, would also want me to put on the record that we've also got a very competitive royalty system and a very competitive regulatory system for the oil industry as well, yes. So I think there's a lot more potential than we currently have, and I certainly thank the member for pointing to that.

\* (15:40)

I'm very bullish on Virden and, I think, partly because of the oil industry, but just, you know, the

general health of the economy in southwest Manitoba. We're going to see some of the same pressures, and it seems to be the theme of the day here: growth and some of the challenges of growth.

And I do want to put on the record that it's particularly welcome, because if there was an area that was seeing some population decline until recently, it was southwest Manitoba. And it's not that there aren't still some rural-to-urban movements, but, if you look at the trend, particularly with the hot oil economy right now where, actually, there's a shortage of workers—there's been some significant recruiting efforts by companies in the area—it does point to the fact that, you know, the next Morden-Winkler could very well be Virden. Certainly—

**An Honourable Member:** Here. Here.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes. Yes. That's right—in which case we'll probably be facing some of the same challenges, and I'm not trying to set up a competitive dynamic here, but, on the overpass, we do have a need to maintain it on the books. We are still in discussion, you know, with the landowner affected and, you know, they—they're—this—there are versions—different angles that we can look at this. So if we can find a way that doesn't compromise a long-term need for an overpass in Virden with the immediate desires of the landowner, we will do that.

I know a similar question was asked by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) representing, you know, the Headingley area, where we do have the Headingley bypass, in that particular case, that's on the books—will be on, you know, the books for really long-term planning.

So the answer is, yes, we are going to continue to maintain that on the books, but we are in discussions to see if there is some way we can maintain that, perhaps with a slight revision that doesn't compromise the long-term needs of the Virden area with the immediate desire of the landowner to develop the property.

So, you know, I can't give any commitments yet, but we're into some good, detailed discussion. And the member did raise that with me when I was out meeting, actually, in Brandon, and I know in my office it was followed by my special assistant, and the department are, as we speak, I think, in the last period of time involved with some pretty significant discussions on this.

So, hopefully, we can find a way to satisfy both needs.

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** And my question for the minister comes back to question period. The member from Agassiz had asked about Highway 5, and even though he couldn't be with us here in Estimates this afternoon because he had other commitments in other departments, but asked me to bring up the issue regarding Highway 5 bridge south of Ste. Rose, and if we could get the response that the minister was referring to on that particular bridge.

**Mr. Ashton:** What I was going to suggest, again, I could get a detailed response by tomorrow and, I mean, I could probably get a general response now, but as to a detailed response, a full response by tomorrow and we'll try and get an answer prior to the consideration of Estimates tomorrow morning, if we're still in Estimates, and, if not, I'll send it directly to both the member who raised the question and the member who is the critic.

**Mr. Eichler:** That would be fine.

Also, staying with the theme of question period, we had—the member from Steinbach had talked about the new women's penitentiary and the cost involved there.

Would the minister like to correct the record about who's put what money where in regards to the women's institute?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I think the issue there is, essentially, with the Department of Justice. MIT does build Corrections facilities. We also do post-secondary institutions. So we're a pretty diverse department.

The jail in question, again, my understanding the issue there was the specifications because it's also a, you know, a joint facility that can be used by the federal government, and rather than get into the rather colourful debate that we had in the House—I'm quite prepared to, you know, on many issues. And I certainly participate in some of the active debate in question period myself on occasion. But our role is really—we're the builders. We build for client departments, or, in the case of colleges, we build for, you know, the colleges. They are—they, essentially, are our clients. The specifications, for example, of the new UCN campus, Thompson or the expanded campus in The Pas or the Red River campus here that was built or the Len Evans technical college—you know, it's part of the ACC—essentially, we build according to the needs that are determined by the specific departments.

And I'm very proud of—by the way, we've—on the Corrections side, we've met some very significant challenges and some of which now, of course, is being accentuated by some of the change to the federal level, in terms of the needs to house various different inmates. So our—we build it, and to my mind, I think the question was asked in Justice Estimates—I happened to be in there myself—and I'm sure it will continue to be discussed in question period.

But our goal is—we get the 'criter'; we—when I say we build; we put out the tenders accordingly.

**Mr. Eichler:** Just so I'm clear in my mind on it, because I wasn't in there at that time, but in regards to the cost of the buildings and the furnishings, is that all tendered or processed through this particular department, or is it through Justice, as well?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, well, certainly, the actually construction, you know, we basically are responsible for that. I can get a more detailed response in terms of some of the other issues. You know, who actually issues the tender, et cetera, but again, the client department is Justice. We build and any role we have in terms of outfitting is that there are specifications.

I know it's the same case with colleges. I just had a recent briefing on the UCN campus: what will happen there; same sort of thing. So I'm not sure exactly, you know, who issues the tender, but we're certainly involved, you know, because part of the issue here is when you plan the physical premises, you also have to plan the furnishings, the, you know, the appliances, whatever, you know, as part of it, because you have to have the HVAC system, electrical systems, other systems set up so that you can accommodate that, so we're certainly involved with all stages of the planning.

But I can track down—in fact, maybe what I'll do, if the member wants, I can track down some more detailed briefing on any of the Corrections facilities. In fact, perhaps I'll just take some of the major projects, the last couple of years, and give the cost and some updated details if that's of use.

**Mr. Eichler:** Thank you. I would appreciate that, Mr. Chair, and also, I want to thank the minister for tabling those answers on the questions that we had asked previously.

One did come back that I want to just follow back up on, and that is on the West Perimeter Bridge.

In regards to the lawsuit, is that going to delay the completion of the bridge by fall?

**Mr. Ashton:** I assume the member's meaning the south Perimeter bridge. The west Perimeter—the lawsuit and the south Perimeter involves the design company, and the west Perimeter, I assume is—you know, if he's talking about that, that's again the issue that was raised by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger). So I just want to clarify if it's the west or the south.

**Mr. Eichler:** Yes, I got my two bridges mixed up. You're absolutely right. Your comments were on the south Perimeter, and, of course, we know the member from Charleswood did bring up the west Perimeter, and she is very concerned, of course, as the residents are there, as well.

So that I'm clear on that, will the repairs and upgrades be done by this fall? Is that the plan on the West Perimeter Bridge then?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I do want to put on the record that that bridge, the issues that we're dealing with, there were some further deficiencies that were found in the bridge. It's important to know that this bridge goes back, I think, to, I think, 1959, '60 when the Perimeter was established. And I do want to stress, by the way, that what we're dealing with here, is ensuring it's safe. And that does take some significant work, and I certainly appreciate the member for Charleswood advocating in that area.

\* (15:50)

But I want to make it very clear: It was not a political decision. It was a decision that was made by our staff, and I fully take responsibility for that and fully back it up, because, quite frankly, I would not want a bridge in our system where we had any question on the safety side. And whether it's the flood impacted 80 bridges, or the many bridges that our department over the last number of years has put increased resources into inspect and to repair.

So there's no artificial deadlines here. We will go to full reopening when we can. We're certainly putting significant resources in, and I do want to stress that, by the way, because I'm sure the member can understand that we essentially found, you know, some further difficulties from what happened.

So I think the member for Charleswood—you know, I hope she would appreciate that when she asked questions of one stage, that was the answer.

And later on, if there's further developments, that's the answer, too. There's no inconsistency. It depends when you ask the—you know, when you ask the question, what the situation was at that time. So we do try and update this as it develops, and that bridge will reopen when it's safe to do so for four-lane traffic. I know there's disruptions, but I can tell you one thing: If we ended up with a situation where we reopen an unsafe bridge, be a heck of a lot more than just disruptions, you know. So that's—that is the issue on the west Perimeter.

As I said, on the south Perimeter there was a design issue; I can provide some details on that, although, I think that's probably been covered in previous estimates as well. And we're still involved in legal action with the designers, so I can't comment on it in terms of liability issues. Again, that was unfortunate, and I certainly acknowledge there was some disruptions. But these things do happen; they're rare, but when they do happen, we immediately have to move to ensuring safety of the traveling public.

**Mr. Eichler:** Part of the recent announcement on the upgrades on the various highways throughout the province, Highway 6, in particular, in my constituency, south of Grosse Isle—is there any municipal funding going into that upgrade?

**Mr. Ashton:** No. And if I could, I do have the traffic count for 32–2010. And 10,000 vehicles a day in Winkler, 5,000 vehicles a day five kilometres south, 2,000 vehicles a day north of the US border. We have done a count in 2011 but because of flood issues taking priority, we haven't published it yet. But those are the numbers and, again, it really demonstrates the pressures are in the urban area in Winkler itself, and it certainly is consistent.

Again, these are the official counts. You know, I know there may be daily counts that may be somewhat higher. You know, every time I meet with a municipality, there's always somebody that says, well, there's more traffic; I was out personally. I remember the one municipality, I got to give them credit, they—you know, we clearly didn't meet the normal guidelines for the kind of work they wanted, the—and one of the councillors volunteered to drive back and forth on a regular basis to up the traffic count.

You know what, that would be a lot of travelling, you know, back and forth, but I appreciated his dedication. But those are the current numbers. And again, if there are further issues, I can follow up directly with the member.

**Mr. Eichler:** During all that, I wasn't clear of whether or not there was any municipal funding for Highway 6.

**Mr. Ashton:** No.

**Mr. Eichler:** Do we anticipate that will done over the summer? The upgrades?

**Mr. Ashton:** We're just getting that information. So if the member wants to continue with other questions, we'll provide that.

**Mr. Eichler:** Sure. I want to switch over to airports. Of course, there's been a lot of talk about Brandon and the possibility of a retrofit there. Is there any plans that the minister could provide to us in regards to what those construction plans may be?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I certainly—I can talk to our airports division, you know, to get member a sort of—like an update, and we are dealing with municipal airports, obviously. They're in various different stages in terms of development, you know, we see a very major construction here in Winnipeg which is finally open and it's certainly made a big difference. So, you know, the—one of the other key issues in Brandon is the potential for resumption of scheduled service—scheduled regional service.

I think the member's probably aware that WestJet has indicated it's not only interested but the fact that it will be moving to regional service—they've actually gone to market too but they decide in terms of the Bombardier option. So if I would say provincially one of our major concerns here is the limited access into Saskatchewan further west. WestJet does not fly directly into Saskatoon and Regina from any location in Manitoba, so certainly we would be of the view that there's significant need. I would challenge the member to try and get a ticket sometimes in to Regina and Saskatoon. I've tried and it's often impossible for days on end. So it's not good for those provinces. So we're encouraged by the WestJet interest. Now whether that would include Brandon or not obviously the decision they would make. But again I think Brandon is looking very much at that option, and there may be others as well.

Other markets have Porter which is another regional carrier. So there's some other potential carriers, and I've always been of the view too there may be some potential for, you know, Calm Air which is a significant regional carrier that mostly deals with northern Manitoba and Nunavut to get into the area. So certainly in a broad sense I know Brandon is in that situation where they've had

scheduled service on and off. Canadian used to fly in there or PWA at the time, and I think that's very much on the horizon in terms of Brandon. So again it's a municipal airport but I could certainly provide a bit of an update perhaps at the next area.

And the PTH 6 I do have an answer, and it's under contract and will be completed if all goes well this year, 2012.

**Mr. Eichler:** I know the minister's staff did an outstanding job, and I want to commend them for being at the public meeting that myself and a number of the other colleagues that were there. So I know it was a priority for a number of those people out there and, of course, the lives that have been lost, you know, we all want to, you know, focus on safety as the minister drilled home time and time again, and that's certainly something that we're very proud of that if we can save just one more life it's all worth every bit of it. So I thank the minister for that update.

And I want to go back still on airports in regards to—I believe it was April 16th if my memory serves me correct, I had an opportunity to go to Lynn Lake, I didn't because the airline offered to take me and they were going to have the flight paid so I—because of the conflict I couldn't take the flight so I didn't go. But I was wondering if the minister could update us in regards of what the status is of the municipal airport there. We know how important it is for that community and the cost that's involved in order to maintain that. I did understand that the federal government turned over that operation back in 1996 to that community. So if we can get an update on that if it would be possible, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, thank the member for raising the question. He's quite right the devolution of the municipal—what became municipal airport system occurred in 1996 actually the lower government of the day. The key issue here as the member knows is—it was always identified that there would be airports that could very readily be self-sufficient not the least of which would be because of potential for other revenue sources, and the Winnipeg airport is no different. I'm not sure of the exact percentage of revenue that comes strictly from, you know, the flight-based systems, but if it's 50 per cent, I—you know, I would be surprised. It's significantly driven by other revenue sources and not the least which, as the member can see now, is with the new airport, a significant number of restaurants and other stores that are being put in place.

\* (16:00)

When you get into communities like Lynn Lake, which is a municipal airport, it has been problematic. There has been limited federal support available. Some airports have been able to access some of the capital, ACAP funding, but again, that's for fairly restricted purposes.

What's happened in Lynn Lake, there's some significant issues that are affecting the operation. One is the abandonment of the fuel contract. The good news on that is that there is another potential fuel supplier, and it's important to note, by the way, that that airport does get used by government, you know, the water bombers, by lodges, you know, and others that aren't necessarily going to Lynn Lake itself but do have an interest in the area. And we—our staff have tried to provide some degree of assistance. The bottom line for us is that we do provide support to municipal airports, but it's fairly limited—the first one to indicate that. If I have a frustration—I've raised it before about gas taxes with the federal lack of expenditure of gas taxes that are raised, but there's a significant amount of revenue comes out of aviation that does not go back in aviation—airport rents, for example, for major airports, and for a country like Canada which is as widespread geographically, where we do rely on air service, that's a huge, huge problem.

My understanding is that Lynn Lake has been looking at its business plan. There are various municipalities I've met that do face some challenges with airports. I do note that there was a fair amount of work that was done in the '90s on some of the infrastructure and some of that infrastructure is in need of repair, but certainly outside of the remote northern airport, you know, which we directly operate, our role here has really been working with the community providing some advice and assistance. And I believe those discussions and considerations are ongoing.

**Mr. Eichler:** My understanding from talking to the municipal officials there, that the municipality is kicking in roughly around 70 to 80,000 dollars a year in order to keep that municipal airport open. Have they made a request, a formal request to the government, for funding to assist them in keeping that airport alive?

**Mr. Ashton:** I've met with the CAO. I've met with the former mayor. There's a new mayor currently. There's been various communications back and forth. I think in a general sense their position's been asking for funding from wherever they can get it. So I—you



know, the answer's yes in a general sense, but having said that, there are other airports that also make similar requests. I've met with a number of municipalities that have been talking about the need for capital funding. Operating becomes a bit of an issue in some areas as well.

There's—and I want to acknowledge that in many areas in rural Manitoba, they have airports that actually have significant increasing air traffic. Again, I don't want to keep picking on one industry here, but the oil industry—I mean, there's—many of those airports in that area are significantly used. Other areas you have the STARS, you know, the air ambulance system that's starting to put pressures on that.

So the—you know, Lynn Lake is in a very—it's in a bit more difficult situation maybe than some of the municipalities, but all municipalities, I think, are facing some pressures, and we will continue to work with any of the municipalities to help them in whatever way we can. Again, outside of the northern airport system, really, this is a case of the federal government downloading very significantly and doing it without a significant revenue source to back it up. And I know that—I believe they have also raised that, you know, as a concern as well that they—you know, the need for some federal funding.

But we have had MIT staff—you know, we do run airports in remote areas, and I—my understanding is they have met with Lynn Lake. We did have a rep at that meeting and, unfortunately, I couldn't attend as well—you know, I don't know if the member remember the timing, for obvious reasons, the following day and the rest, but, hopefully, something can be found.

But I do believe there is one area of progress to report and that's on the fuel contract, that they have got a potential provider, which was one of the concerns as well, because, obviously, with operating issues and no fuel—well, actually, without—with no fuel, you have no airport, so it's pretty straightforward.

**Mr. Eichler:** My—again, my understanding and the concern that the community has and, of course, we, as a province, you know, the RCMP use that same facility at the Burntwood Regional Health Authority and, of course, Justice with the various hearings there and that.

Is the road—if, for some reason, that the airport wasn't able to sustain viability financially, is there

upgrades to the road that's planned? Or how would those people get in and out of the communities for a long-term plan if it—I mean, we're looking down the road here, and it—it's not looking real positive, from what I've been hearing anyway.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I don't want to assume that solutions can't be found. On the road itself, yes, we have put some money in initially—a significant amount of work from Nelson House, south; parts of it are paved. We found, by the way, many of the areas, the paving doesn't hold, the AST doesn't hold because of permafrost, because of swamp conditions, et cetera; it's not a good alignment. I know that highway very well; I travel it regularly.

So the—there is all-weather road access, and we'll continue to maintain that highway, and we're also working with the community, too, because one of the other concerns that I want to acknowledge is on the bus side because Greyhound's given notice its—of its intent to withdraw from bus service to Lynn Lake. But we are also working at—to ensure that we can maintain transportation for—especially for medical because that's probably the main concern, but also for the—for community members generally.

And, again, I'm not going to assume that there won't be other bus providers that will step in. The reality we had on the bus side is we had to make the move, and I don't know if the member's aware of that, and that's probably for broader debate on the bill itself but, yes, we're very committed to trying to find solutions on that side as well.

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz):** I have a constituent who has a highway passenger bus, has put it through safety and everything and what I'm—I guess the question is: Do—does the Province issue occasional permits on these buses? I—for—like, I know, they're licensed with the Province. Are—is it—are occasional permits available?

**Mr. Ashton:** I'm not sure what the reference to the occasional permit is. We—I—in a broad sense, I can advise the member, and I know he's probably aware of this anyway, but just for the record, that we do have a regulated bus industry in the province. We have regulated intercity bus transportation; we have regulated charter bus transportation. We've brought in legislation. We brought in a new system that moves from where we were and the interim system where we had direct payment to Greyhound to provide ongoing intercity bus service, to a more flexible regulatory regime for intercity bus service.

When it comes to charter buses, we are going to look at that as a phase 2 because there are some issues that have been raised there in terms of that regulatory framework. But it continues to be, under the current regulatory framework, which is, basically, that if you wish to provide service, you apply to the Motor Transport Board. There's hearings that take place. There's an economic test. If there's objections, those are taken into account whether a charter licence is issued. Charter licences can be and are and generally will be regional.

So that's the broad description. I don't know the circumstances in this case, but we do have a fairly strong regulatory framework at the charter level—charter bus level. We have not moved, because we have an intercity buses, to a more flexible system. But we are going to be examining charter buses over the next period of time to see if there's any changes in the regulatory framework that are necessary.

\*(16:10)

**Mr. Briese:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Minister. That's what I'm referring to, is charter buses. And I think "occasional" is the wrong word, but what I was looking for is if they—there are permits issued for use once in a while, not a full charter licence, something along that line. And the review you've referred to, when do you intend that to take place?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, my understanding is it's normal licensing. I'll check with our staff and I'll get a more detailed answer tomorrow. But I can also say, on the review, obviously our first focus is the intercity bus legislation. We need to get that passed. We need to implement the new system for intercity buses, and we'll be looking at the charter buses probably up—in the upcoming year. Once we're done the intercity bus implementation we will look at it as well.

And we don't have any preconceived ideas on it, but obviously it'd seem logical if we were going to change the intercity bus system. The member knows the background there and it was a system that was no longer working. You know, the cost 'subsidation', it was part of the system, it just doesn't apply anymore. That's the case then, you know, if we can review the intercity bus system, clearly we felt we should go with the charter bus. But the challenges, you know, we do have a charter bus system. Some people like the current system; some people don't, but we were faced with no intercity bus system or a significantly reduced system. You know, two years ago, and chaos in the short term. So we've been out of buy time and we're—now we're on the intercity buses. So, yes,

charter buses we will look at, but not until we've got the intercity bus system up and running.

**Mr. Briese:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I'm kind of bouncing around here because it's a few odds and ends that I wanted to kind of clean up. One of the things, you've heard me read many petitions on in the House already is about the possibility of a set of traffic lights at the corner of No. 16 Highway and No. 5 north, which is right by the Chicken Delight in Neepawa. And because of the change in the business development around that corner it's got to be a really dangerous corner. And I know at least three times last year they did traffic counts there, and usually they work off traffic counts and the traffic counts, I take it, don't merit it. But, at the same time, I don't want to be the fatality at that corner that causes the lights to go in.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, when it comes to signals we have certain warrants that are established and if it meets the warrants then signals are put in. I don't believe that's the case here, from the information provided from the department. I do want to acknowledge, again—and this seems to be the theme of the afternoon—there are pressures from growth in a lot of communities and we are more than aware of that. And one of the areas we are seeing some of the pressures, is outside of the capital side, is in terms of the need to put in traffic signals. So in this particular case we'll continue to monitor the traffic counts and we will consider signalization when they do meet the warrants.

**Mr. Briese:** There has been quite a change in the business development around that corner with several restaurants and stuff going up. But I've heard from many, many truck drivers say, that's a corner—it's a very dangerous corner, and the truck drivers say that's one corner where you have to be ignorant at. It's the only way they're going to get out of the traffic on 16 is to be ignorant, so they pull out in front of stuff. Thank you.

Another one I've often asked about in here and had resolutions—or petitions on, was a speed zone at Ste. Rose, and I know you've heard me spell that one out. And there's been something like eight or 10 accidents on that particular little short stretch of road in the last five years. And I know, over the years—and I'm not sure how far back—there's been at least three fatalities there, and I think there's been more. There's a curve and the—with Highway 68 comes in on the curve, and either there needs to be a speed zone there or some kind of different approach

off of 68 onto Highway 5. And I just want to bring it to your attention. If you want to make comment, that's fine.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, when it comes to speed, you know, the Motor Transport Board, as the member knows, does set, you know, the speed limits in different areas. It's a arm's-length process, so I'm not directly involved as minister.

Of course, we are now moving with legislation to give municipalities more power, and I won't get into the details of that. That, again, is something for debate in the Legislature, but that will give municipalities, in some cases, the—you know, the ability in school zones, where it applies under the act, to actually set them more directly. So we're moving to a more flexible system there.

And, you know, again, it is set by the Motor Transport Board. They do have various, you know, guidelines that are pretty well established. And I appreciate the member for raising it. I—you know, I know it's often an issue I hear from communities, and many of these situations, also, evolve over time. You know, we've seen many areas where there've been, even, cases where there's been applications to reduce speed that have been rejected, but, subsequently, have been accepted as well. So these—it's an evolving situation.

**Mr. Maguire:** I just had a quick question in regards to the levels of the Shellmouth Dam, Mr. Minister. And I appreciate, and welcome, the members from the Water Stewardship Department that are now in your area here. And so, I wanted to ask, you know, it's very close to going over the dam, I understand, at present time—the spillway. Can they confirm that, and is there any spilling or flooding in the area just downstream from the dam?

**Mr. Ashton:** As of May 17th—today—the level is fourteen oh six sixty-eight feet. The downstream flow is 1,575 cfs; the inflow, 2,430 cfs. The spillway is operating at 1,408.5 at Portage.

**Mr. Maguire:** Yes, thanks, Mr. Minister. If he could just give me the number in Portage there again. And I believe he indicated there's 2,430 cfs coming into—above the dam at Shellmouth, and the flow out is 1,575. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, and what's happening here is the—there—yes, just to reconfirm the spillway: 1,408. So the, you know, the total outflow has been increased because of the increasing inflow. It's kind of hard to—I've got a chart here, which describes it,

but it's—put it this way, there's a blue line that is the reservoir level and it's going up, and we've increased the outflows to match it; there's a red line that—which shows that as well. I wish we could actually print some of this stuff in *Hansard*, but I'll leave it to people's imagination here. But the member's quite right, there's—and, you know, it's not to be unexpected—this, you know, runoff. It is still spring in Manitoba, so this is not an—you know, an unusual situation.

**Mr. Maguire:** Yes, just a final question. The spillway level is 1,408 so it's within a foot and a half or less of coming over the spillway. Does the minister expect that they'll be able to control the flow with the conduits presently, or does he expect it to open the conduits more?

I guess farmers are concerned because they've planted their crop now in the Red—in the Assiniboine Valley again, and, you know, the Assiniboine-flooded farmers are always concerned about the potential for flooding after they get the crop in the ground. And so, I just wondered if the minister can give me an update. Given the dry spring that we've experienced, I wouldn't have thought there would have been any expectation of flooding on that river this spring.

**Mr. Ashton:** The key is whether there's future rainfall or not. You know, in May of last year, we got lots of rain. Since the summer, it's been fairly dry. So that will be the key issue of the spillway. I certainly appreciate the issues in the valley and it's—again, it's all dependent on future weather.

**Mr. Maguire:** Yes, just how recently has the flow level been increased to that level—1,575? Can the minister give me a two-weeks-ago and a month-ago report? I mean, I'm sure that I can go to the website and find all this. It—I'm sure it's there, but if he could just provide me with an update on that. And I know my question was open ended in the fact that it's all off if it rains tomorrow and for the next week, but given today's situation with no more rainfall in the near future, and, of course, we went from July 1st after the big flood until pretty well this spring with no rainfall. If there was no more rainfall, there wouldn't be any expected land flooding this spring then or this summer.

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Ashton:** The member's correct. The issue's rainfall and I was just interpreting from the chart. April 10th was the point at which we saw the

increase since, you know, the flows that I mentioned at. And what the chart does show is, you know, that there were negligible outflows and that the first real increase was on the 28th of March. It's increased since then. So this is the 10th of April at the current level.

**Mr. Maguire:** Having driven across the Assiniboine about four times every time I come to Winnipeg, at least three, and living in that area, up around Miniota and that Virden area, and having been there a couple of weeks ago myself and up in that Binscarth area, just, you know, there were very low levels on the Assiniboine through the winter and the spring. And it has risen. I'm assuming that's because of the water that's been let out of the Shellmouth Dam. It's been coming up lately as well. And we did have some rain on the west side of the province, but having said that, can the minister just let me know where the project is in regards to changing the gates on the Shellmouth or putting the gates on the Shellmouth Dam in. And what all would have to take place there before that happens, or is it planned for this year or next year?

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, we did deal with this at a previous sitting, particularly from the issue of permits, et cetera. So I'd refer the member to *Hansard*. If there's any more, you know, detailed information he's interested in, I'd be more prepared to provide it. But we did have a fair number of questions on the position of the environmental licensing, the impacts of that, and the impact on the time frame and sort of the next steps, the potential impact on other users.

So rather than repeat it, if it's all right with the members of the committee, I was going to suggest—and if the member wishes to peruse *Hansard* and then identify any follow-up questions, I'm assuming we're probably going to be sitting beyond today so that's another time to raise it.

**Mr. Eichler:** Thank you, and I know the minister can appreciate, you know, all the members' interest in, of course, in the highways infrastructure. So I appreciate his patience of the staff and my members coming and going, asking different questions so.

But now I want to come back to the Manitoba airport assistance program. Is there any indication that those dollars will be increased or staying the same for the upcoming year?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, we, you know, we've maintained the historic levels. I know, certainly, it's an area where people have been arguing for an increase. There's also been focus in on—particularly on the

capital need as well. We had to look at the overall budget and our commitment to get back in balance by 2014.

So, you know, quite apart from some very significant investments generally in the department, this is not an area where we were able to really consider any new initiative. So our focus has really been on maintaining existing commitments. And again, it's an area of some concern out there from the municipalities that I've talked to. But, you know, in this budget, we're basically maintaining funding as is.

**Mr. Eichler:** You know, and we well understand there's just so much money to go around. But I do—our caucus was lobbied by the municipal airport people, I guess it was last year. And most of them indicated that funding was just so tight that a lot of them felt that, you know, it was just a matter of time, unless something drastically happened as with the funding, a lot of them wouldn't be able to sustain it, similar to that of Lynn Lake. But having said that, I know that the departments has to be cognizant of the fact that there's so much money to go around. But we certainly do appreciate that in regards to the funding.

Is there a possibility of another way to look at this for funding, whether it be—I mean, everybody wants to keep their airport, but is there another solution out there that—where we could amalgamate airports or—I mean, I'm just throwing it out there for discussion.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I think you're seeing some of those discussions take place quite outside of government—at least provincial government. There are some municipalities that are looking at that. There's also other elements. I know municipalities that have used a lot of volunteer labour, for example. A lot of municipal airports are also increasingly working with their, you know, their users, airport users, and that can range from the local flying club through to government departments or private companies because, again, they have an interest in maintaining those airports as well. And I do think, over time, those kind of discussions will probably be the most critical elements in terms of maintaining and, in some cases, improving those services because they make a very good point. A lot of the airports have a significant increase in the number of flights. There's new patterns developing, whether it's the oil industry or air ambulance so that, you know, there's some increased need out there compared to some time again.

And you have the ongoing use, I mean, there's a lot of airports that are used for crop dusting, for example, I mean, you know, comes to mind or others that are used for the tourist industry. So a lot of those discussions, I think, are taking place as we speak, and some airports, some of the Minnesota airports have come up with some very creative solutions on that. There's been some—I won't leave the impression that all airports are facing the same kind of pressures. Some are doing quite well and have really been able to renew their airports. And a lot of it is some green light municipal leadership. In other cases, it's the local flying club or equivalent. That's also part of it as well.

**Mr. Eichler:** I'd like to move to rapid transit now in regards to the Phase I in the southwest transit way. What is the provincial share of that funding?

**Mr. Ashton:** As much as I'd love to get in on a lengthy discussion on rapid transit, I'm the former minister responsible for rapid transit. I was responsible for both as the Intergovernmental Affairs Minister in our local government and also having responsibility at the time for infrastructure planning, Canada-Manitoba infrastructure planning. The secretariat has now been moved to local government, and so detailed questions on rapid transit would be more appropriate there. I mean we do have some, you know, involvement certainly in the policy area, and I'm certainly proud of the fact we have—finally do have rapid transit in Winnipeg. You know, I was minister at the time, but I want to credit the fact that we had the city on board and the federal government on board, and I loved going to the opening of it. It's really started to transform Winnipeg. So I'd love to spend time talking about rapid transit. It is something I think it's time has come for Manitoba and for our capital city, but I'm no longer the lead minister.

**Mr. Eichler:** I thank the minister for that and we will go into that department and talk about it because it's something that we strongly believe in and know that that is the direction of the future, where we need to be moving. So we will get into that debate in that department.

In regards to the inner city bus service, I believe this is the last year for Greyhound as far as funding from the Province. What is that total amount for 2012-2013 and the balance that's come in, I believe, up until July 1st, if I remember right?

**Mr. Ashton:** The member's correct. It's July 1st. I'll get the exact amount, and I can answer the question on the Highway 5 bridge at Ste. Rose. It's restricted

to one lane of traffic. Due to the deterioration of the concrete deck we're using traffic signals to control the traffic. A new bridge is planned. It's under design and it's going through environmental approval processes. And we'll build the shoofly due to replace the Acrow bridge in 2012, and a new bridge is to be constructed next year that's anticipated to be a cost of about \$5.5 million. It's anticipated to reopen in late 2013. And again, I will get the—*[interjection]* Yes, I'll get the exact number for the member once we're able to pull it out of the Estimates for the intercity bus.

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Eichler:** Also, once the Greyhound bus line contributions are finished, what will be the department's then—will there be other dollars following to other bus lines in order to make them competitive, or will it just be a free-market system on whether or not they're going to be able to access any funds? You know, in particular, through the, you know, the grant program?

**Mr. Ashton:** What's going to happen is, obviously, we're moving from the interim system that maintain the existing network. We've got the regulatory side that we're dealing with, with the legislation once it passes, you know, assuming it passes—which I have no doubt it will—that that will establish the regulatory framework. The interim payments will cease at the end of June.

And we've already seen that Greyhound has signaled that it wants to maintain a significant part of its network, certainly in terms of passenger movements. We do have the ability for others to enter. We also, through government, have needs for intercity bus service and we will be making that available in terms of—probably over the next very short period of time—through RFIs, you know, request for interest from potential suppliers. Patient transportation comes to mind, but there are also other needs that government has and certainly, I wouldn't want to assume that we won't see some re-entry into those runs. We have other bus providers that are interested, both local, regional and also at the national level. And the goal here is to go to a sustainable system, and sustainability is also a key element in terms of the finance side.

The one clear message from Manitobans was bus service is important, but there was a real reaction against providing any ongoing support to a private company to operate it. I think people would prefer to

see a regulated market system. I say regulated, for safety, market system that allows entry and exist.

But, having said that, we also are major consumers of bus service, indirectly, for government, so we can also be part of the solution—and, I do have the answer: Greyhound service maintenance agreement—this year, is \$670,000. It will terminate at the end of June.

**Mr. Eichler:** What is the criteria for these other companies to apply for this funding? Can the minister outline that for us?

**Mr. Ashton:** My apologies, sir. I'm also getting further information. So I'll read it on the record.

PTH 21 road detour—and the MLA for Arthur-Virden asked if we were rebuilding one kilometre highway at the Souris River bridge in Hartney. It requires new grade as the new bridge is 10 metres—*[interjection]*—Also, we're also fixing about one kilometre of PTH 21—impacted by heavy trucks that were allowed to protect the bridge during the flood, that is DFA eligible.

And I think the member was asking about the criteria for funding under the—the interim funding?

**Mr. Eichler:** Yes, it was with the intercity bus program, the financial contributions is that—that's in that fund. If we could get the outline of, on how a company would apply for those funds.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, the key thing is those funds will be terminated. The funds were put in 2009 when we were faced with imminent departure of Greyhound, which would have created chaos. We thought it was important for a couple of reasons. One is to buy time to develop a new system and transition to the system we are going to move to. The other thing, quite frankly, was it would have been cost prohibitive for us to provide the service in any other way, certainly on an interim basis.

So what's happening now, that will end at the end of June and our priority here is to allow for some market exit and entry. And we'd certainly have numerous bus providers who've indicated at least initial interest. I'm not assuming all of them will follow through in a—putting forward a potential route, and I do acknowledge that running a scheduled bus service is quite different from even running charter service. It does have various dynamics, you know, the ticketing network, garages, terminals, you know, arrangements with business providers. So we're not assuming anything here, but I do think it's

likely that we will see some entry into the market by a number of those providers.

And, of course, Greyhound is more than welcome to re-enter some of those markets, as well, if they identify other ways of providing the service.

Do want to stress that in some cases we had one bus run where we had two passengers a day. Clearly, we, you know, we're in a position of indirectly, you know, providing support for that period of time. There would have to be a very significant new business model, I think, to make that viable.

We have different passenger counts on other runs, and, you know, so different short line railway situations—member knows I've used this analogy. We have numerous short line railways in the province that originally were operated by the class 1 rail lines, were basically devolved to those short line rail companies, some of which are local people, some of which are private, you know, sector investments, and many of them are operating now under a different business plan, and they're operating successfully.

So that's our goal here, really, is to try and maintain as much of the bus service as possible, and make sure it's sustainable, as in no direct payment by government—indirect payment through our purchase of services, but not a direct subsidy to the bus industry.

**Mr. Eichler:** So my understanding, there was two funds, the Small Communities Transit Fund and then the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program Regional Incentive Grant. Is there going to be other similar programs, then, or will these two be phased out, and that will be it. Is that the long-term plan for the government?

**Mr. Ashton:** I think the member might be referring to the handi-van and other funding that's available. That is through—we have ongoing funding. You know, as minister of intergovernmental affairs—I was minister when we had significant enhancement to allow for purchase. Transit funding is available to the four—and it's moving to a fifth community now with Selkirk—that do have transit service. But again, that's an initiative that's part of our municipal funding. What we had here was a service agreement basically with Greyhound, and that will be terminating at the end of June as we move to the new system.

**Mr. Eichler:** So then in the rural communities, then, routes that are going to be serviced, similar to those of a handi-van or smaller operator, would those

funds be available, then, through the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, again, the—that program's an—it's an ongoing program. It's not the intercity bus service we're looking at, and again, it's—you know, it's part of our municipal funding, municipal supports.

And I believe there's, going by memory, about 65 handi-van operations in the province that are subsidized through that, and that's ongoing. That plus transit. The only thing that was special funding in this—you know, in this case, was our funding through Transportation for intercity bus service which was paid directly to the only major bus provider. That was Greyhound. That's terminating at the end of June.

**Mr. Eichler:** I did have one question here that another member had asked me to—before I move on to another topic—but that has to do with pulling of hay trailers for those farmers and producers that was trying to get their hay in, and I know that we've made different letters of requests through your department, through Agriculture in my previous role.

The desire is to have the same length of trailers pulled that are similar to Highway 1 and Highway 6, with doubles—pulling two double trailers for hauling hay. Has there been any updates or changes to regulations, or does the minister see that there might be some possibility for change to allow those producers to get the crop in by pulling doubles?

\*(16:40)

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I can provide a general answer in terms of, you know, what are often called Rocky Mountain doubles, or, you know, the combined vehicles. Again, it's a balance between accommodating a greater efficiency in the trucking industry versus safety issues. The issues, you know, obviously relate to the safety on a particular highway. And it's been an issue where we have deployed them; will continue to be. I can see if there's an update, in terms of the specifics of this question, and I'll try and get a response by—yes, and I'll—but I'll canvass this. If there's anything tomorrow, I'll put it on the record tomorrow.

**Mr. Eichler:** Okay, taxi board. Could the minister provide us an update on where the Taxicab Board's at, far as the new or existing board, and has there been any changes to that department?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, the big change is I'm no longer responsible for the taxi board, actually. It's now in

municipal government—Local Government. And I certainly appreciated being minister. I was—I've been minister on a number of occasions, and I know members of this committee will know how important that industry is. Certainly, our Chair would know, and I would know and others would know. So I certainly do it. I—we did have one change on the board the past year. Actually, a returning member, George Gershman, very well-respected former member, came back on the board and there were a number of significant developments in the board during that period of time but, again, I'm no longer responsible for it, so that's the answer at you. The change is, yes, it's been moved.

**Mr. Eichler:** What's the current updated estimated cost to build a mile of paved highway in Manitoba, both two- and four-lane?

**An Honourable Member:** What's a mile?

**Mr. Eichler:** A mile—well, kilometre, yes, there you go. You're still on the—you're in the new generation.

**Mr. Ashton:** Yes, I can get the number and, of course, it does depend—it depends on the class of road, depends on other underlying factors, but I can get the numbers for you. And I'll—and, of course, I'm assuming the member's talking about new construction, you know, kind of the general cost aggregate and paving, so I'll get that to the member by tomorrow.

**Mr. Eichler:** That would be fine.

Speed limit increase, from 100 to 110. What is the status of that, and is there any indications about safety and the impact at a higher speed? I know there's—is a 'variable' between the US border and Winnipeg, and also on No. 1. Is there any indications that that might change, one way or the other?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I do know the intent to move to the increase in the speed limit, again, is dependent on the highway itself, and whether it meets the criteria, and parts of the same highway may have very different situations; 75's a good example. You know, we're continuing to do major upgrading, but there's still areas that have not been upgraded. So, on the other side, we're still evaluating that.

I mean, the general rule is that speed can be a significant impact, you know, in terms of accidents but, again, it's all relative to the design of the road. And it's one thing to have a posted limit, it's also quite something else to have an enforced posted limit, so that can have a factor as well. You know,

it's not what the limit says officially, it's what people are actually driving.

And—so, notwithstanding the 110—movement to 110, we certainly still do tend to be very cautious on speed, whether it be on the enforcement side, where we do have, you know, fairly significant enforcement, or in terms of speed limits. And it's interesting, by the way—just on a bit of a side comment here, but I know the member will know this, notwithstanding at times we do get concerns by people that want to see higher speed limits, and I do hear it on occasion from my constituents. There's a lot of people, and we've noticed this on the school zones, in particular, that have been arguing quite the opposite. And, you know, that—and it's interesting, I rarely get questions in Estimates from members of the Legislature asking for higher speed limits. I usually get them from members advocating for lower speed limits.

So I do think at times there's a bit of a dichotomy here. A lot of cases there's a lot more media coverage with those that don't like, you know, lower speed limits, especially if they get a speeding ticket, than those that want the lower speed limits or lower than we currently have, you know, for safety, particularly in school areas, but in other areas as well.

So I—you know, I think we have to balance it. We have to focus on safety, but I think that speaks to really where a lot of Manitobans are at, which is, you know, sometimes it, you know, it's better to slow down and take it safely.

Now, going from 100 to 110, I think, was not a major shift. I mean, we do have the US where it's 75, I believe—75 miles an hour. I know, certainly, Alberta, I was just out there, you know, a good part of their network is 110. So, you know, we're going to evaluate it, but I do want to stress that when we have moved to 110 it's after—it's often what it has been always at where we've got the highway upgraded to the standard where that would apply.

**Mr. Eichler:** You know, it's interesting you brought up the discussion in regards to the States and Alberta, of course, and, you know, certainly have to agree with you in your comments in regards to the road safety. I mean, a lot of roads certainly aren't able to handle those increased speeds.

But having said that, has there been any studies done in regards to the increased speed as opposed to safety issues? Like, is it driving ability there that you can rely on far as comparing them to the States or

Alberta for those higher speeds? Has there been an increase in accidents as a result of the increased speeds, or has it been the other way?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, as a general rule, higher speeds result in more accidents. But a general rule—it doesn't necessarily provide a good parameter for making decisions on the specifics, in this case, small sections of the highway network that are part of the national highway system that have certain level, you know, standards. You got to remember, you know, in the US, for example, it was not long ago that there mandated maximum speed limits—I think, 55—for energy reasons. And one of the flip sides to that was a decrease in the number of the—number of accidents.

But, you know, I think it's important not to compare a general situation to a very targeted, very specific situation and the Motor Transport Board did consider this. I know they looked at it and I certainly know they have a lot of expertise. I certainly respect their role in doing that.

So, yes, general rule, but, I mean, if some jurisdictions have no speed limits, Germany comes to mind, for example. But you have to also be cautious on comparing accident rates because a very different climate, very different of—level of, you know, road construction versus ours, much higher traffic flows.

I actually have driven on the Autobahn and it's quite the experience, believe you me. And even in some areas where they do have speed limits, I think, in some parts of Europe, it's 140. And I—had the experience of driving in Britain once which, of course, is interesting experience because you're driving on the other side of the road. And, you know, I was—people were passing me and I was looking at my, you know, the—what I was driving in and they were—they must have been driving about 130 miles an hour. And the member can do the calculations, that's pretty fast, right—an hour? Because I was definitely in the slow zone.

So, you know, you have to be aware of the balance there and I do think that we will look at the experience here. I'm not aware of a rash of accidents where it's happened. I can tell you I do get all of the fatality reports in the province and I could sum up it by saying that it really is amazing the number of accidents where you have people that weren't wearing seat belts in this day and age, or alcohol was involved, or the very tragic case recently of what the police reported may have been a suicide. I mean, I know that I hear this from truckers all the time where



somebody, you know, I'm not getting into details of it, but it's been in the media.

\* (16:50)

So the vast majority of a situation, that's the case. You also find, too, by the way, that the other sad part is you're still getting people texting getting in accidents. You're also getting into continued, you know, we're seeing distracted drivers—even people weren't texting. I—the last number of years I've seen pretty well anything you can imagine, and that continues to be our bigger challenge. Road-related issues, or mechanical-related issues—perhaps, in the winter times the ice might be an issue, but they tend to be far less of an impact than human-controlled issues: belts, alcohol consumption, or human error, you know. So, I mean, I'm not trying to divert from whether this is an issue or not, but when we're talking safety, that's a much bigger area, is the actual human interaction with the roads, not the road itself.

**Mr. Eichler:** That leads into my next question in regards to, you know, again, the road situations. In fact, I know travelling south of Brandon on that particular road, right before you get to the border, the number of wildlife accidents there.

Is there numbers there that indicate that we should have a lower speed limit there? Or is that—how do you determine a speed limit for a certain area, in particular, with wildlife? I mean, I know in some—I mean, we do try to get as much signage out there, you know, that there's wildlife out there, but is that something we should be looking at?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, I can speak from personal experience on wildlife, and on Highway 6, perhaps, a little bit further north than the member is used to travelling. I hit a deer just outside of St. Martin. Between St. Martin and Ashern—not at the same time, here, by the way—I hit a bear; they can run pretty fast, but this one didn't run quite fast enough.

And it's interesting because you've got two elements here, and I do believe that we've often kind of neglected one of the elements. This—a fair degree of this is being driven by climate change in some areas. Deer are starting to become a significant nuisance further north. They're spreading beyond their traditional habitat. Some of it, you know, goes with the territory; I mean, when I'm driving home on—you know, on the weekend or certain times of year, certain—you know, right around dusk is the worst time, so you have to be aware of that. But what

I also think is one of the elements here is decline in hunting.

As Conservation Minister, I remember I had the stats. You know, it's more—you know, it's clear when it comes to things like geese. You know, there was 40,000 goose hunters 25 years ago; it's like less than 10 now. And—but what you're also seeing is, really, fewer and fewer people actually hunting, and when they are it's less frequently. And more and more people that, you know, are—you know, if they go out, they go out once a year. And that is putting increased pressure, I think, on the populations, because the reality is, you know, humans have become part of the chain, so to speak, right? And I—that's probably more of a discussion for Conservation and some of the issues there, but there are many areas of the province where we have too much wildlife. I don't want to underestimate where we have, you know, pressures on moose population or any of the others, but I think you're starting to see some of the impacts on the on the roads as well.

I know—I can talk from experience, again, but I know Interlake is particularly susceptible. What usually do in terms of speed limits, the speed limits really reflect the road itself. One thing that does make a difference—I know one of the concerns is maintenance of ditches, and we've certainly moved to ensure we get proper maintenance in ditches. It was a challenge last year with the flood, mostly in terms of rapid growth, but also being able to get into those areas. And that does give sort of a reaction time. I know in both cases wasn't much of a reaction time, you know, for what I had, you know, but it is a reality. And I also hit a pelican going across the bridge. You can see how many kilometres I've put on over the last number of years because.

And part of it—yes, we do put significant signage, but the reality is there's a lot of wildlife out there. And I think the key thing I always stress is people take precautions. I do remember the late Oscar Lathlin after his run in with a moose put a massive, you know, those—it's called a moose catcher; I'm sure it's got a better name than that, but, you know, having the right vehicle and the right protections is important.

But the member's quite right. And I think MPI would probably have those stats more directly than we have, but wildlife conditions—or collisions—are an increasing problem in parts of Manitoba—maybe not every area, but in a fair number of regions.

**Mr. Eichler:** Well, as a motorcycle rider, I can tell you that I pay attention to signs, and when I see a wildlife sign, I slow down. I take those very seriously. So I think signs is really important.

Has there been any studies in regards to barrier fencing along the highways? Does that deter the animals enough or they just go on down and go around it? Has there been any information, studies that can indicate there's a safety issue in regards to barrier fencing? Would—is that something that's possible to help us?

**Mr. Ashton:** Interesting question. Not that I'm aware of. The problem, of course, is just take Thompson-Winnipeg, 755 kilometres, that's a long, long way. Perhaps in some of the urban areas might be more of a solution with the urban areas. Collisions with deer actually are a problem in Winnipeg as well. But there will be *[inaudible]* The other issue by the way though too is you always end up with movement of animals. I mean, you know, the reality is we also—we have to make sure that we're not seriously impeding normal movement of animals, and there are areas where there's a fairly decent balance on the—you know, whether it's through hunting or just general animal populations. But it's an interesting point. Probably more appropriate for urban areas than others.

The other element by the way though I think as well is what we haven't considered in many areas is, let's say climate change but also kind of the shift in habitat. That is what's driving it. You know, you're getting areas where deer, you know, deer have very different behaviour patterns than moose, for example, and, you know, I'm advised I think Banff National Park has a barrier fence. So there are some areas where that's applied but I think it would be very unrealistic to look at. Our best approach really is to have a educated and aware group of drivers and I appreciate, you know—I still have my licence. I've ridden a bike for quite a few years although I still get that itchy wrist every spring that it's a particular concern when you're riding a bike because of the consequence again of a collision or a very—I was talking to a friend of mine recently originally from Lac du Bonnet area and he had a major collision a number of years ago with wildlife and even a relatively small animal, you know, can have a major impact. You know, if you consider the number of accidents that take place actually what is amazing on the statistical side is really how frequent that there are collisions. But most people do survive. It's

usually the animal gets the harder part of it. Not always, but usually.

**Mr. Eichler:** I know, and I just don't want to just about wrap up here before the time comes here. But I wanted to talk about the mowing of the ditches. I know last year because of the flood we got a bit behind but we did ask—wrote you a letter and asked you about the mowing of the ditches mainly for wildlife, and I know that's something that's really important, you know, for road safety. And I don't know if there's a way that, you know, I—maybe they've been mowed more than once, more than twice a year. I know particular areas in particular where there's wildlife is there any indication of that—that it would be something we could look at?

**Mr. Ashton:** A number of—a couple of years back I want to indicate that we are going to maintain what was the historic level which is twice a year. It starts in June, again in the fall, and one of the reasons is exactly what the member has identified what I mentioned as well, which is visibility in terms of wild—I've got to tell you as well just general appearance. You know, people in rural Manitoba and urban Manitoba have a lot of pride in a lot of elements and, you know, part of it is having a scruffy looking ditch—highway's ditch that was a real concern to a lot of communities, and so we're respecting it. There'll be two passes this year, and I think the member will see quite a difference from last year because of the flood situation.

**Mr. Eichler:** Well, I can tell you from experience, you know, again going south and the number of cuts that's been made, you know, in regards to maintenance on the highway, and I think it's a serious safety issue about mowing and I would encourage the government at that point to stay on track with two mowings per year. I think that's something that we have to definitely maintain. Rest areas are one issue but—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. The time being 5 p.m., I am interrupting proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

#### AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order? This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume

consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a truly global manner, and the floor is wide open for questions.

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** And I just want to acknowledge CIGI, Canadian International Grains Institute. It's their 40th anniversary. They had their open house today. A few of us were over there this morning and we wish them all success moving forward for the next 40 years.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I would like to turn it over to the member from Arthur-Virden who has a quick question.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden):** Just wanted to have an opportunity to ask the minister if he can give me an update on my dairy farmer from Hartney, Fred Neil, in regards to Cell Farms. Mr. Neil has—he's in an absolutely desperate position out there right now. Banks won't extend him any more money. He's sold off \$240,000 of his own milk quota. He's in the top 10 producing levels of dairy in the province of Manitoba. He was flooded out because of the Souris Valley river flooding in 2011. It was a forced evacuation. RCMP came to his yard to ask him to leave. I don't think he had a choice.

He has received funds for—from Manitoba Crop Insurance and we appreciate that. And I want to be clear that Manitoba Agriculture's the only one left that seems to be helping him. He's exhausted DFA funds, it seems, for the things that he got back. He received some funds for machinery. In the last little while we've been able to deal with that as well as the insurance company did have some all perils that they were—that they had to pay him for, so he did receive, I think, \$19,000 out of 30 for that, in the estimates that he had.

There's a dike that he built that he's received some funds for. There's a—he hasn't been paid yet for the dirt and gravel that they had to buy to build that dike yet, some \$85,000. But he's lost—some 15 dairy animals have died on him. He had to move 230 of his herd off of the premises at that time and move them into five different dairy farms across Manitoba. He lost all of his income for that period of time because, of course, under the rules, it goes to the people that are actually milking the cattle during that time.

He had business loss insurance, which his insurance company has indicated. And I believe the government has confirmed, that by checking their

policy with their legal counsel, that the insurance company's not eligible to pay him because the cattle were moved off the premises. It would have applied if he'd have left the cattle there that had died; he'd have got covered. That's not the humane thing. Mr. Neil did the humane thing. He did the right thing, as everybody has mentioned to him, including, I believe, the minister and myself and others, that he did the right thing by doing the humane thing, moving the cattle off the premises.

He's the only dairy farmer, I want to stress, in Manitoba, that this has ever happened to, certainly, the only one out of the 2011 flood. And it may not be an example that just fits into the round pegs as a square—as a round holes as a square peg, I guess. And that's the problem we're having with this. There needs to be maybe a program built for Mr. Neil's case. We don't want to see a dairy farmer go broke in Manitoba, I think, was the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—his words to me in January when I first mentioned this to him. And I wrote letters to the minister here, deputy, the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Ashton), DFO, EMO—at the—DFA, DMO at the time—EMO, and the Premier.

And so I appreciate everyone's concern about Mr. Neil, but he doesn't seem to be getting paid for any of the loss. Certainly, he's not going to be able to buy that quarter of a million dollars' worth of dairy quota back at that price. He has had to bring cattle in to replace the animals that died, from Ontario, at great expense to him, as well, some 60, 70,000 dollars at least, in that area. He's lost about a quarter of a million dollars' worth of income from lost milk production at that time and over another quarter of a million in feed and that sort of thing, that he's had to bring in to continue with vet bills and everything else since he'd brought the cattle all back home again as well.

And I just wondered if the minister can—I don't know if you can tell by the desperation in my voice, how serious this situation is being, and what can he tell me in regards to what we can do with—for Mr. Neil?

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the—opposite member bringing forward the concern, and I truly have to sympathize with the situation that we are faced with. And I want to assure the producer and representative from the district that it definitely is a very unique circumstances and, I guess, you know, the policies

are drawn up accordingly and sometimes we don't cover all bases.

I do want to bring forward the fact that presently the producer has received \$133,000 from the various government departments, specifically, on the 'fordige'-forage shortfall program, \$73,000 has been advanced. And I know that it's not a fair comparison, based on the dollars that have been brought forward by the MLA for Arthur-Virden.

I want to ensure that our department—first of all, I'd like to thank the member opposite. As well, thank you for being very co-operative with our staff and department. You know, as we work 'co-operately' in this circumstances, referring to my earlier comment, that is definitely a very unique scenario situation. And I suppose there's always that tendency to wait for A step to B step to happen before you kind of reconsider other alternatives. And, with your assistance in the private insurance investigation, that was really recognized and we appreciate your co-operation in regarding that program.

I want to ensure the MLA from Arthur-Virden that we're still pursuing possible alternative measures, if I could put it in this contents, to somewhat address the financial situation that it's—has come forward to the producer. And I want to make—that we, staff, are continuously work on it, and, hopefully, we can come to some understanding and some movement towards the financial hardship that has been brought forward by Mr. Cell.

**Mr. Maguire:** I thank the minister for that answer. I just wanted to bring it to his attention again.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicated, when I asked the question in the House on first or second day of the session here, that Mr. Neil could appeal.

And I just wanted to reiterate, for the record, that, you know, he had one application for \$79,000. He got, you know, the—you take the 10 per cent off, he was around 71. He was paid \$26,000; \$2,000 of that was described as for fence and that sort of thing, but it left \$24,000 that wasn't described. It was under the heading of other. I have the documentation and I know the minister does, as well. Course, it left \$45,000 that he didn't get and so he doesn't know what—you know, he knows what to appeal for there. But of the \$26,000 cheque that he got, and this was only one of them, how do you appeal when you don't know what the other \$24,000 is for? So I guess that's a concern. I just wanted to raise that as well.

And I bring to the minister's attention the desperation of this situation. He's been nine months now. It's been eight months, I guess—nine months almost, since he got his cattle back in his operation. He still had two more die, weekend before last—continuing results of the situation.

And I think it's—it behooves us all, to try and do what we can for Mr. Neil, given the fact that he was forced to evacuate in that area. He may not have a written evacuation notice, I don't know. But when the RCMP show up on your doorstep and say you got to get out of here, you don't argue with them. You know, it's pretty much a forced evacuation in my books, and I guess we need to look at that. And, just the fact that there's a considerable situation here, where he's the only dairy farmer in Manitoba faced with this. And, I know it may not be the same as the programs we put together for crops and cattle and horses and hogs, and all the other types of agriculture that we have, but the dairy industry, you know, has to have, basically, business loss insurance to stay in business with the type of industry that they have.

And I really would encourage the minister to try and find a way to deal with this in a more expeditious manner. He's already out there trying to sow his corn for this year to keep his dairy herd going. He's just rebuilt a new barn. It is three feet above the 1997 level of the flood that occurred back in the—last time there was a flood. He built his new operation to that height and above, where the flood stage was and, of course, this one still took him down.

He could have left the cattle in the barn for four or five days but they might have stood it for one day but they wouldn't have stayed there for five and they would have drowned if he'd have left them there. And so the sad irony is, you know—and it's a pitiful situation, really—if he'd have left them there, he might've got paid. I won't say he'd have been better off, but he would've collected the value of his cattle and been able to start his herd over. Not—and he didn't want to do that, so he did the humane thing and did the—I can't imagine what the animal rights people would have said if he'd have left them there and walked away, even on a forced evacuation, without getting them out.

So I just wanted to bring that to the minister's attention and if he can provide me with any information now as to—I guess, my question is: How soon can he expect to see some results?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I want to assure the member opposite that, in my years of being—working in the cattle industry for 30-plus years and—there's a number of events that Mother Nature, you know, tends to throw tricks into us, and problems. And I know that by me saying that is no needed comfort to Mr. Neil at this point in time. But I do want to assure the member opposite that our staff and our department will be working quickly as we can. I want to ensure the member opposite, as well, that we will turn every rock over we possibly can to find a solution to assist Mr. Neil in this preparation. And I apologize that I can't give you a deadline, but I do want to leave this conversation or this topic that—be rest assured that our department will work to find, hopefully, a suitable solution for both parties concerned.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Pedersen:** On a different note, on—it's come to the public's attention, I don't know how much time the department has had, but this is regarding the community pastures. Federal government has—is going to drop the Community Pasture Program. Much of this land is provincial Crown land. There is some municipal land involved, but in terms of the provincial Crown land, what is the department's stance on this? Where are we going? What will be the—what will we see going forward?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Yes, from a personal perspective, you know, I live very near to probably one of the largest community pastures in the province of Manitoba.

I guess the reality is is that we know there's a number of producers, since the '60s, have been using the community pasture, and that's one large component. But there are also other components of people that have been employed with the community pasture organizations for a number of years. That is going to have somewhat of a negativity in the small, rural economic economy. And I do want to ensure that our government, our department, is very, very concerned as my discussion with Minister Ritz in Ottawa a number of weeks ago. And we discussed that issue going forward. As Mr. Ritz indicated, this program will somewhat, basically, come to an end in five years from now—2017, if my memory served me correctly.

The 2013 season will probably see the demise of five community pastures. I've got *[inaudible]* per province, and Manitoba, I believe, has 20-some-odd

community pastures, if my calculations are right—21 community pastures.

And, you know, to—just to kind of bring forward some information, it—the pasture provides about—pasture for about 30,000 cows and approximately 500 'patrons,' and 80 per cent of the land base is provincial Crown land, and the remaining is municipal land. I guess our discussion has been somewhat, you know, it—things—decisions within the provincial government don't happen overnight to somewhat accommodate that—is but brought forward to our jurisdiction. And, I suppose, with our discussion with the federal Ag minister was we wish we could have maybe had some additional time.

I do want to assure that our staff is presently having some very fruitful discussions with the federal staff department. And I think in all fairness, as we look at the amount of 'patrons' that are affected, our department has somewhat gone into consultation, as I said earlier, with the federal department. Is there some tools in the toolbox that may assist us to a point of assisting whether it's a large producer or a small producer? And I think the fear in a long run is that the fairness of the producers that need to have some of that pasture land—and we all know the price of land is truly escalated to a point where the young producers, the agriculture cow-calf producers, really are going to rely on the existence of community pastures to sustain their input cost of being a cow-calf operation or the feedlot operation, to potential.

So I think as far as our department, we've had some discussions with the federal counterparts. We haven't made any firm decisions. I guess, living in a perfect world, where they're co-operative is an appetite, possibly, of a number of ranchers, if they choose to. But I guess the question being is that, are we going to have enough time for the betterment of the producers in the province of Manitoba?

And let me assure you, there's producers from Saskatchewan that use our community pastures as well. And I think the Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister has also stated, in the paper, on his concern. So is it going to take somewhat of a strong communication base that we as the three western province have to come together and have an understanding?

But to answer the question, we are definitely in consultation with the federal department, and we don't have any immediate answers. But I want to

assure you, we're there on behalf of the cattle producers in the province of Manitoba. And I would, somewhat, appreciate some recognition to the Manitoba Cattle Producers organization that, I think, play a fairly large stake in this. And I wish that they would come forward and address their concerns as a cattle organizations, as it's been somewhat silenced. Thank you.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Well, I thank the minister for that history lesson. I was familiar with both of—most of it, but really the question is, very simply, will there be consultations with producers over this summer, into the fall? Prior—the community pasture system runs on allocations in the fall. You have to know in the fall whether you will have allocations in the spring. Right now we need to know whether there will be a pasture at all. The province has ownership of the land in most of the cases, other than the bit of municipal land involved. What will be the process, for when we have patrons calling us, as MLAs, whether they call—and I know the beef producers are well aware of it, what will be the process to developing a new pasture management system, whatever that is?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And I want to, somewhat, 'reinate' the earlier question or my comments, is that the member opposite is true. It is Manitoba Crown lands. We had a strong working relationship with the federal government, the PFRA, and we still want to continue working on that basis, but I think the consultation period is to probably work towards a solution that somewhat doesn't cause hardship for our provincial government, but more so, I think, to the producers, the cattle producers that are affected.

And I would, somewhat, reinforce the comment that the MPs, in the appropriate jurisdictions, should be contacted by the cattle producers and their organizations to maybe put forward some suggestions or some ideas how to address the situation, because as you know, it's definitely a very serious issue for the people that use the community pastures.

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz):** And just to follow up to that—I'll give you the breakdown on our community pasture, which is right beside me, is about a section and half is federal Crown land, or federal-owned land, about a third of it is municipal owned, and the remainder is provincial Crown land.

\* (15:10)

Now, in the last few years there's been a fairly major shift, in my view, on agricultural Crown land in this province. And I—my question is going to—and it revolves around the community pastures to a degree, but it revolves around all agricultural Crown land. I understand now that if a producer gives up a piece of agricultural Crown land, it is then circulated through several departments and they—for instance, recreation, Water Stewardship, some of the departments—and they have a chance to pick that off and it never returns to agricultural Crown land.

And I'm wondering if the minister is committed to seeing agricultural Crown land in this province remain agricultural Crown land. It's very important for the cattle industry in this province. We've had a tough time, cattle industry has to regrow, but that agricultural Crown land is a very important part of that.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Thank you, MLA for Agassiz.

I'm sensing the question is, is that if any agriculture-lease Crown land comes up for re-leasing it is always recirculated back for an eligible individual that chooses to use it as agriculture grazing land. And, I guess, maybe at times there are—and it circulates through various departments, but only if there's an interest of someone not interested in it, right?

So I guess my—if I'm reading the question correctly, and forgive me if I've misinterpreted the question, the MLA for Agassiz—but I want to ensure, also, that one of the concerns—I think that if we refer to the PFRA situation, is that if the property was to be somewhat sold off—and it may be of the wishes of the feds—it is somewhat of a concern that it becomes into cultivation and we respect the ecotourism.

I also understand in the area that the MLA from Agassiz represents there has been also some property that has probably turned into a, if I could refer to a wildlife sanctuary, is that something that is also part of the question, if I may ask the question?

**Mr. Briese:** Yes, that what you said originally there isn't entirely correct.

There's a interdepartmental process it goes through when—if it's given up as agricultural Crown land and it can get picked off before any other agricultural producer even has a chance at it, it can go into—and wildlife management areas is a good example. But there are others, some of the things that Water Stewardship are setting water aside for—or setting land aside for.

So I just would like to hear some assurances because, in my view, agricultural Crown land should first be offered to other agricultural producers, not having them at the end of the line with others ahead of them. They should be first if it was—if it is agricultural Crown land, let's keep it agricultural Crown land.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And I guess the—just to provide some history on the sales in Crown land sales to the member from Agassiz. In 2008, 2009 there were seven quarters of land sold; '09-010 was six quarters—I assume those are quarters, right, or parcels—pardon me, if— For the record, I've got some statistical information but I'm assuming it was quarters, but it was—it's classified as parcels of land—so seven sales in '09-'08-09; six in '09-010; and '010-'10 and '11, there was 20 parcels that were sold.

I think one of the things that I'd like to bring to the attention is as Louisiana-Pacific in certain designators of the province definitely has a very strong objection to any Crown lands being sold. As I'm sure the members opposite are quite familiar with the agreement that was drawn up 13 years ago in the L-P's existence that there was not to be any Crown land sold, or not allowed to be sold unless prior to 'expection' of potential vegetation for harvesting for the Louisiana-Pacific processing plant.

But I also want to ensure the member from Agassiz that in the process, the application for the lessee to purchase the land does exist, but also, in the process, there are a number of different departments we go into, but also First Nations consultation has a very large involvement in that. The municipal governments do. And all the various other departments such as Conservation, Water Stewardship and—but I do note the point that the member from Agassiz has brought forward, that it remain possibly in Ag Crown lands.

**Mr. Briese:** Yes, I want to move on to something else, but I certainly—I wasn't talking about sales of this land. I was talking about re-leasing it to another agricultural producer when one gives it up. And you just opened it up at the end there with when you mentioned all those other that are in that process. If it's agricultural Crown land leased to an agricultural producer, a cattle rancher or whatever, it should be re-leased to another cattle rancher or producer.

I'd like to move on to the—if I may, to the subdivision process in the province, and I have a background—I was chair of a planning board for close to 15 years, so I have a fair understanding of

subdivision processes, and something I've noted in the last four to five years is Agriculture getting more involved in the subdivision process and causing a lot of subdivisions to be turned down out in rural areas of the province, and the rationale being that they're trying to protect agricultural land, which is a fair statement.

But what's happening is that they're being overzealous on it. They're—I just heard of another subdivision turned down in a municipality not too far from where the minister lives, yesterday morning, and it's—municipalities aren't only property. Municipalities require people, and people have a right to live where they want to live.

What we did in my municipality was we went out to the poor land; we did allow some subdivision development out there. We didn't put it in the prime agricultural land. That wasn't our intent. We didn't put it right next to the border of the urban centre. We went out quite a ways from the town and developed some four-acre lots and allowed some rural subdivision.

\* (15:20)

We're—there's a pattern that seems to be developing. I'm getting phone calls from almost every corner of this province where agriculture has opposed particular subdivisions that were put forward. And it—I need to mention that the way the process works, when a person makes application for subdivision it—as it moves forward it's circulated through government departments. Those government departments have a right to make comments on that subdivision.

What seems to have happened—and this has happened in the last few years, for a number of years this wasn't a problem. As a local planning board, you looked at the application for subdivision, you looked at the comments that came back and you implemented some of them or you chose not to implement them. Land use planning is supposed to be on a local basis. It's supposed to be local people making local decisions. The departments now—and especially the Department of Agriculture—appears to think that they have a veto power when that circulation goes out, and there—it isn't a veto power—make some comments, allow the local people to make the local decisions.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Thank you for the question brought forward.

Just a point of clarification, if I may, member from Agassiz. On lease-re-leasing of land, when an agriculture producer is making an application to re-lease a Crown land lease, okay, the application process is not drawn out through the different departments. It's only when the purchase is to apply. So if a producer chooses to take over a Crown land lease that someone else has released, the process is applications through Crown Lands only to find a candidate. It does not circulate through Water Stewardship and all the different departments if it's retained as a leased piece of property only. Okay, so hopefully we got clarification on that.

**An Honourable Member:** I'll be writing a letter on that one because I want to have written clarification.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Well, we'll—and I'll gladly address that in paper to the member from Agassiz. Only in the process of purchasing we go through the different various departments.

Back to the question brought forward regarding the sale of Crown land. For an example, if I could refer to subdivisions for an example: in—and every case has its own characteristics and I think that it would be somewhat naive for me as a minister to put a blanket coverage and refer to that everything should be sold off. I—being involved in municipal politics—and I agree with the member opposite—as planning districts play a very key role in making decisions for the betterment as the planning districts, but also representing the municipal governments. So, for the record, I feel that planning district have very key component in it as well.

But I think there's also circumstances that municipal governments have to somewhat investigate, and I refer back to my earlier comment. For it to become a blanket coverage somewhat could be somewhat detrimental as we may soon find out that municipal governments, when you sell a piece of property—or has been sold, a piece of property—and a prime example, rural water lines, you know, become the issue. And then we have the municipal governments coming forward and somewhat very uncomfortable with the rural water.

Now, when the federal and provincial government had partnerships in rural water development, it was totally understood. But I think there's—a lot of thought goes forward into the fact that the municipal governments may be faced with addition challenges if we let things blossom to the point that we have no control. And I understand the member bringing this forward has a very valid point,

and I want to assure that if that situation needs to be observed, I will have it discussed with my staff. But I also think we have to accept the responsibility of being involved in municipal politics being in the AMM organization. I think we're quite familiar that it's not always roses on—thinking of blanket coverage there's some thorns and some tough decisions that have to be made to re-address that situation.

**Mr. Briese:** In 2007, with great fanfare through the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, the Throne Speech said there would be the development of a commercial greenhouse in Grand Rapids. In 2008, Rosann Wowchuk said the feasibility would—study would be completed in October '08, and that the start of construction would be spring '09.

I'm just wondering what the status of that greenhouse at Grand Rapids is right now?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Yes, the—as we indicated to—Rosann Wowchuk requested that a feasibility study be done for the northern health foods, through the greenhouse initiative. In 2009—or 2008, the feasibility study was completed, and at that point in time it was decided that the proposed project was not feasible or economical to proceed with the initial design. So in 2009, in partnership with the ACC college in Brandon, we've moved forward with additional information, different design to somewhat 'accommodate' the original design, or renovate the original design, to move forward of the benefit that would provide healthy food, along with an education component, to the residents in the Grand Rapids, Easterville jurisdiction. As of the spring of 2012, the project shall commence—or proposed project is to commence in 2012.

**Mr. Pedersen:** The Manure Management Financial Assistance Program, have the regulations been completed for this program?

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Yes, the terms and conditions have been completed and has been circulated, communicated to the industry individuals that are involved of the manure regulations.

And if I may just bring forward to the member opposite, earlier a request in our discussions of Estimates, the member had asked for the director's listening or listenings of various commission members, board members, and I would be pleased to provide the document as requested earlier by the member.



**Mr. Chairperson:** I thank the minister for that. We'll consider it tabled and make the appropriate copies.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So the regulations are written for this Manure Management Financial Assistance Program. Can you provide me with a copy of them as they are—not necessarily today, but can your office supply me with a copy of them and I'm sure you can?

What is the dollars involved in this program?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I—we would be glad to provide the copy of the terms and conditions to the member opposite.

And also relating to the question brought forward, the dollar figure is \$26.3 million and we're entering into our second year of a three-year agreement which is cost-shared with the federal government.

**Mr. Pedersen:** And what is the fed-province share of each of that? Of that, it's 26.3 in the second year—\$26.3 million in total. And what is the federal share? What is the provincial share?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I guess—I think—well, the cost is 60-40. If you wish, my staff can break that down in dollar amounts, if you so choose.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So the program is \$26.3 million. How much has been paid out to date?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** The total funding allocated for 2011-2012, it'll be just a few thousand dollars short of \$7.2 million.

Just for further allocation, we'll give you a breakdown: increased manure storage capacity, 9, that's approximately \$1 million; improved storage repair, there are 23 applications of roughly \$1.6 million; and manure treatments, solid-liquid separation applications approved are 15 with approximately \$4.5 million.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So what is—this covers both dairy and hogs, correct, in terms of liquid manure?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Point of clarification, thank you, Mr. Minister. This dollar allocation amount is strictly for the hog operations. Okay, there is an alternative program, and forgive me if I don't have it in front of me, but for the dairy industry there is additional programs that are available.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So you don't have this information or can you get me this information for dairy because this only relates to hogs, the information you've

given me. What is the parameters of the dairy program then?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** If it's all right with the member opposite, we'll gladly provide the—we don't have it in front of me. Is that—or give us a minute or two, I can talk if you want but—go ahead.

**Mr. Pedersen:** No, I'm okay with you providing it to me in written form within the next week, and—but I would like to know how many dairy operations have applied for manure storage, increasing manure storage, those units that are under 300 animal units, repairs to existing operations and solid liquid manure separation in terms of dairy producers. And that's the number of applications you've had, the program dollars for it, and whether—how many applications have been approved to date.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And just to refocus on the question brought forward by member opposite, are you requesting also terms and conditions or are you just asking for application numbers, dollar allocations, and the various programs that have been segregated to?

**Mr. Pedersen:** No, I would also like to have the application form or application qualifications for the dairy operations because there are some dairy operations there who have had applications in and are not hearing anything back from them, and they're being held up in their expansion plans. So I would like to have the details of that plan as well.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And by all means, if I may make a suggestion to the MLA, can you—rather than us verbally going back and forth, would you be kind enough to send a paper documentation to our department and so that we're saving time with the necessary questions you wish to have fulfilled, and our staff will accommodate the request.

**Mr. Pedersen:** I can certainly do that, and it will be in terms of Manure Management Financial Assistance Program as it relates to dairy and to hogs. And I will get it specifically what I'm looking for out of those.

There is—the environmental farm plans. Can you bring me up to date or give me an update as to what's happening with environmental farm plans within your department?

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Mr. Chair, pertaining to the question brought forward, since 2009 we've had

101 environmental farm plans workshops held with 1046 producers in attendance.

Keystone agriculture producers has issued 566 statements of completion of certificates, with approximately 1.56 million acres assessed. And I want to assure the member opposite the workshops will continue throughout 2012 and 2013.

**Mr. Pedersen:** What is the budget for environmental farm plans?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** The actual breakdown is somewhat challenging in short order here. But we're prepared to provide that number to—in a very short order as it tends to involve a couple other educational components when it comes to environmental farm plans versus the education component of it versus the actual work that's been in place, whether it's through infrastructure or the movement of the necessary program.

**Mr. Pedersen:** I have a feeling that this is going to be another written question for environmental farm plans anyway. So I'll let you keep looking, but I will move on to some other things right now.

In terms of manure management, have there been any soils—soil fertility testing done in the southeast region where the hog and dairy concentrations are—because the hog moratorium was put in order, supposedly, to stop further nutrient runoff?

Has there been any comparisons done in soil nutrient levels and runoff levels in the southeast region of Manitoba?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Mr. Chair, as I'm sure the member opposite is quite familiar, when it comes to detecting the phosphorus and the nitrogen level, which falls under Conservation, and I want to assure that the information is done on a regular basis, as we move forward on the manure management program.

It's a requirement of the soil test being done, prior to the application, on the proposed property so that falls under the helm of Conservation. And the information can be provided by department, if the member opposite so chooses.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Can the minister, Mr. Chairman—can the minister tell me about the First Nation bison marketing station, if there's any financial aid given to this organization?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, to the member opposite.

The earlier question regarding the bison ranch and we refer to, as you probably are well aware member opposite, it was four First Nations that were involved in this project. It was meant to be a five-year project and it was to deal with an understanding where one First Nation was raising the, I guess you'd call them cow-calf operation, and then the specialist was hired to develop a feed project in providing some education component towards the feedlot, if I can refer to that in the bison species, in Ebb and Flow district.

\* (15:50)

As I said earlier, it is—it was, or is a five-year project. At this point in time, staff is presently trying to nail down an exact dollar for you, member opposite, but at this point in time, we don't have it in front of us and we'd be glad to share that with you in a later date.

**Mr. Pedersen:** If it's a five-year, also, what year are we in? Like, five years from when is obviously the question, too, and how long's it going? And, yes, I would like to know what the budget is—the yearly budget and the total budget and, obviously, where we are in the five-year agreement.

So while they're looking up that up, then I will go to on to a different one.

On page 105 of the Estimates is the Prairie Fire Growth Ventures. Can you explain what the Prairie Fire Growth Ventures Inc. is?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** As brought forward, as we're quite familiar with this organization's intent is, or is to provide technical support for a number of new businesses or new products for processing and practice advance—advanced by Prairie Fire Growth. The number of the new business provide a healthy and ready-to-eat products, so our—and it also provides a new multi-task stakeholder collaboration, focusing on development and commercializing of Manitoba food products. So I guess, to sum it up, it's an agency that provides a commercialization of a new inventive product.

**Mr. Pedersen:** And what is the annual budget of this, and if it's a multi-year agreement, what year are we in? How much money is being spent by the department on this being paid towards Prairie Fire Growth Ventures Inc.?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** It's a two-year project. We're into our second year of the project timeline presently. So what we have is \$100,000 that is put towards the, I

guess, the finalization of commercialization of identified project, and there is additional dollars available as, if I could refer to as seed money, to move forward innovative ideas or suggestion project ideas, which comes from a joint venture, from—that project is called the federal-provincial Innovation Fund.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So how much money is being paid to prairie fire—Prairie Fire Growth Ventures for management?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** The dollar paid towards providing the moving forward of commercialization of it, which probably does include some—does include administration charges, but also other avenues, of \$100,000.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So do we have an answer on the First Nation bison marketing station, the five-year budget, what year we're in, how much money is—budget is?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** No, we don't have those figures. If—and we'd be glad to provide that, the paper copy to the minister—or to the MLA's request. I do have—it is a five-year project. We're in the fifth year, and the dollar allocation with this was to be over five years.

Just a point of clarification, we are possibly in the last year. We'll double-check on that. And the dollar allocation was \$600,000. But, as I indicated earlier to the member opposite, we'll gladly provide the paper document once we are able to tabulate all the figures.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Okay, the—you'll provide the—a breakdown, but I will also include that in written question to you too because I have more questions about that. Certainly, could've run a heckuva marketing program out of my feedlot for 600 grand, but I guess we'll wait and see where this one is.

But on a—the rural fairs, Manitoba rural fairs, I don't know what they actually call themselves, they have a fair board association. Their education grants and infrastructure grants totalling about \$281,000 per year. There's 59 ag societies and 12,000 members. Does this department hand out these grants, or does this come directly from Education and Infrastructure?

\*(16:00)

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** The grants are provided by this department, MAFRI department, with the advice through Manitoba agricultural society, as far as the recipients of the grants.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So will the amount this year be comparable to last year?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** The dollar amount will not change from last year's budget.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Another question on a different issue. Manitoba 4-H turns 100 years old, next year, in 2013. 4-H is near and dear to my heart, and I also happen to be—the founding headquarters of 4-H started in Roland, Manitoba, which is in my constituency. So what are the department's plans? Do they have a budget right now in terms of supporting 4-H, any special activities, and what is the plans of the department to celebrate 100 years of 4-H in Manitoba? In Canada?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Thank you, Mr. Minister, and congratulations to the member opposite to be somewhat blessed. And I know being involved in 4-H has made the member opposite a better man, being involved in 4-H, obviously. Kudos to your accomplishments.

And I was very honoured to be at Ag Days and the kick-off. Yes, and you can—the member opposite can be rest assured that the 4-H has definitely been a great organization, and I don't think you'd find any resistance from the Ag Department or a number of other departments within the government that we'd truly recognize the volunteer services that are brought forward by the 4-H organization; and I do really respect the 4-H organization.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So, having said that, what is the department's plans?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Thank you for the question, again, and I didn't personally try and revert—not answer the question to the member opposite. I just needed to get an update on that. But I had to bring forward the—obviously the betterment of the member opposite, being involved in 4-H in his younger years, obviously.

I do want to assure the member opposite that one of our highly trained staff members, Dori, is the co-chair of the Manitoba 4-H organization and I—and has been very instrumental in the national organizing committee, pardon me, for the record.

And we are also quite in tune with the department. Our department is quite in tune with the 4-H organization. I want to assure the member opposite that we are working very closely, as a 100 year anniversary is definitely something that we're very proud to be involved in, and we want to

continue to work with the 4-H organization. And as we move further into the success of the 4-H organization, we will bring forward suggestions, and we hope they will bring strong suggestions forwards—how we can make this a memorable event for 2012—[*interjection*] '15. Sorry. Sorry, sorry.

**Mr. Pedersen:** So I'm just going to conclude just by getting confirmation then, Mr. Chair, from the minister. I did submit that written list of questions to MASC about flood. You have—you will confirm with me that you'll commit to getting those back for me. I have—the other one I have is staff—no, staff—hold on a minute—[*interjection*] I've got that one. Contracts awarded over \$25,000—you will commit to getting me that also.

And this information about the First Nation bison marketing co-op, there's some more information there—and I will put it in written form; you'll have it beginning of next week then—about questions regarding the Manure Management Financial Assistance Program in terms of a split between dairy and hogs and what we have in there. And I'm sure it will be an ongoing discussion about these, because we're having—I am hearing back some serious concerns about this program. So, if I get the details, that's the first start.

And so, with that, Mr. Chair, I have many more questions, but no time to ask them. So we'll go on to line by line.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I want to assure the member opposite—thank you, Mr. Chair—that the questions that we haven't been able to provide was, simply, because it's fairly detailed to somewhat to have a large calculator in place here and try to provide the information. But I want to ensure the minister—and I want to ensure that the MLA from the—that, I think, in order for us to be very transparent in the questions, please provide us the necessary questions as we agreed to. I also want to ensure the MLA, they—Midland—is that the manure management question, I think, where we're going to deal with the dairy component of that, as far as the additional dollars, and the number of applicants, are—

**An Honourable Member:** Right, they got the hogs.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Yes, okay.

And so, with that being said, I think we're just about—we—[*interjection*] We're done; we're officially done.

Well, I do want to thank the members opposite for the fruitful discussions. I somewhat apologize for the lack of the quick answers, but I think they have to understand it's not just a simple process. But as—being in involved in agriculture—and the member opposite's been in agriculture, as well—it's near and dear to my heart that we move forward in agriculture for the province of Manitoba. There's a window of opportunity internationally and not locally. But I think—as we move forward into growing forward with the federal government, I think we have to be very proud of the insurance-based programs, such as the crop insurance has really been a thing that we can be proud of on either side of the House.

And when we talk about innovation, development, processing it—as a newly Ag Minister, I often thought as I was making hay bales or that—I often—when we've got a wealth of raw materials, that in this province that we tend not to, maybe, create a stronger appetite of processing. And then, I know it takes dollars, but I think it takes individuals that we need to entertain to move forward in processing of some of these raw materials, whether it's northern Manitoba or it's in our jurisdiction that we exist. And I see the viability of the raw product produced in the province of Manitoba.

And I'm very proud to have been involved in agriculture for a majority of my life. And I want to be—I'm a grassroot individual from the farming prospective. And I want to bring those thoughts to my fellows members, and move forward for the development of agriculture being a very key component in the province of Manitoba, in suggestions, in a diplomatic matter, from the members opposite. Thank you.

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Chairperson:** Well, thanks to everyone for their contributions to this Estimates discussion.

Seeing and hearing no further questions or comments, we will now proceed to consideration of the various resolutions.

Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,614,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Policy and Agri-Environment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$147,948,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,130,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Industry Development and Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$41,934,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Food and Rural Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$510,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 3.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$250,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered in this section of Estimates is the department item 3.1.(a), the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 3.1.

The floor is open for questions, if any, on this item.

Seeing none, we will proceed to consideration.

Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,852,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

What is the will of the committee? Shall we briefly recess, or are we ready to begin right away?

I've heard a suggestion of—or, sorry. Recognizing the honourable member for Midland.

**Mr. Pedersen:** When you do the salaries, did that include the minister's salary? That wasn't broken out? I always thought that—I'm just asking procedurally. Usually you ask the staff to leave and then you do the minister's salary. Is that—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Yes, the staff left, and then we did the last section, which—the minister's salary isn't broken out. It's contained in that last piece. *[interjection]* My pleasure.

I've heard a suggestion that we briefly recess for about five minutes so that staff and various MLAs can assume their new positions around the table. All right. Recess for five minutes. Thank you, everyone.

*The committee recessed at 4:14 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 4:20 p.m.*

**ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY**

**Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to some semblance of order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy):** I do.

I'm pleased to speak in support of the budget Estimates for Advanced Education and Literacy. I know that one thing that matters to Manitobans is maintaining an accessible and affordable education and training system, and as the Province responds to the ongoing global economic challenges, investment in education and training is critical to the future economic growth and the ability of Manitobans to take advantage of new economic opportunities. Education and training are also critical to ensuring that we have a province where all can succeed, an equitable, prosperous and inclusive society. It's why

our commitments to education remain firm, even in these uncertain economic times.

Government's strong record of supporting universities and colleges continues with Budget 2012. University operating grants will increase by 5 per cent in 2012-2013, and college grants will increase by 4 per cent. Investment in our infrastructure are also important, and we will continue to see our public post-secondary institutions improve equipment, complete renovations, address deferred maintenance and undertake major capital projects.

Government is moving forward with plans to rebuild the Thompson campus of University College of the North and provide significant renovations to the campus at The Pas in addition to improvements at UCN's regional centres. Government is working with Red River College to meet the commitment to build new trades building to support the efforts to address the shortage of skilled labour in construction, trades and technology.

In addition to assuring our sustainability in our post-secondary institutions for the 2012-2013 academic year, government has taken steps to protect affordability by continuing to manage tuition increases. For 2012-2013 academic year, university tuition fee increases are limited to the rate of inflation, this year, equalling 2.8 per cent, and colleges are able to increase tuition by \$150 per program.

Manitoba's average arts and science tuition remains the third lowest in Canada. On May 10th our government introduced legislation that will see tuition fee policy for university become law, helping protect affordability for university students for the long term.

The quality and efficiency of university and college education is what Manitoba students expect of our system. The ability to transfer credits across institutions and enrol in programs that are well articulated and aligned with labour market needs are important aspects of this. Students want educational opportunities to be accessible and to be successfully complete their programs in a timely manner. Articulation agreements benefit institutions because they help to correctly place learners with the minimum of assessment, thus saving human resources, but they also benefit individual learners since they save time, money and aggravation, making it possible for people to move effectively and efficiently between educational programs while

minimizing the amount of time and money they must invest. We've already seen the efforts to improve articulation bear fruit, including in the area of technical and vocational education where increased partnership in some trades have resulted in more co-operation and partnerships between high schools, post-secondary institutions and apprenticeship.

We know that part of the affordability picture is an effective student financial assistance program, and we are proud of our accomplishments in that area. The Manitoba Bursary, Rural-Northern Bursary, and recent addition of the Student Success Grant are a few examples. This year we will amend student aid policies so that students are able to earn more money while in study without that income affecting their student loan eligibility. Instead of \$50 per week, as of August 1st, 2012, students will be able to earn a hundred dollars per week without penalty.

While continuing to maintain the affordability of post-secondary education this year, we will also see the increase—we will also increase the affordability of student loan payments. In 2012 the interest rate on student loans—Manitoba student loans—will decrease from prime plus 1.5 per cent to prime rate. By continuing to apply the Manitoba Bursary debt remission program to students with the greatest need, Manitoba's average student debt will remain among the lowest in the country.

Adult learners are often the most vulnerable to economic downturns. Individuals who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, obtain high school credits needed for high school diploma, or those who require high school courses for further education and employment are the 'benefactors' of our adult learning and literacy program.

In the last reporting year, Manitoba Adult Literacy program supported 41 agencies that provided adult literacy programming to 2,773 adults. As well, 45 adult learning centres were registered to provide Manitoba high school programming to 9,281 adults. We remain committed to providing access to education for adult learners throughout the province so that all Manitobans have the ability to improve their skills and their employment prospects.

Aboriginal Canadians will constitute an increasing proportion of the regional labour force over the coming years. Ensuring that Aboriginal Canadians possess the educational training and skills necessary to compete successfully in the labour force is one of our most important challenges. My department remains committed to taking steps to

improve the participation and success rates of Aboriginal learners. We support the vision of full participation of Aboriginal peoples in society throughout education, training, labour market, and participation. And we continue to play a role in interdepartmental and intergovernmental initiatives to support education and employment outcomes.

Manitoba remains an innovative leader in the international education. In addition to offering domestic and international students quality programs with affordable tuition, Manitoba was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement the off-campus work program, the first to offer the tuition tax rebate program, and the first to dedicate an international student stream to the Provincial Nominee Program. This year we now extend provincial health care coverage to international students, growing Manitoba's reputation as a destination choice for thousands of students from around the world.

I would like to say that the estimates provided to the committee today strike a balance between approach of a prudent fiscal management and preserving the education and training services upon which Manitobans depend. And, Mr. Chair, upon closing, I would also like to thank my staff for all their support, advice, and wisdom, and their dedication to seeing that Manitobans get the best education possible. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the honourable minister for that opening statement.

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Yes, I do.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Please proceed, representing the Honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time I would just like to take a few seconds to, as well, thank the department and the staff of the minister for all of their hard work, as they have the job to ensure the education of not only recent high school grads, but also many, many other Manitobans who look towards post-secondary training, their high school credentials, and increasing their literacy skills.

So, with that being said, it's going to be an interesting few hours and—getting to know some of the staff as well.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the official opposition critic for the—for that opening statement as well.

Now, just for everyone's information, under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is, in fact, the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 44.1.(a) contained in resolution 44.1.

Also at this time, we'd invite the minister's staff to come join us at the table, and perhaps once they're settled, Minister, you'd be kind enough to do some introductions.

\* (16:30)

**Ms. Selby:** I'm just confirming that I pronounce everybody's last names correctly and I apologize because I know all of you well, but I don't always pronounce the names correctly.

So to my left immediately is Gerald Farthing, who is the acting deputy minister for adult—for Advanced Education; next to him is Claude Fortier, who is from finance; over on the wall, we have Darcy Rollins, who is the executive director of Corporate Services; we have Josh Watt, who is at COPSE; Dan Smith, who is also at COPSE; a little further down we've got Lynette Flett, who is from adult education and literacy; Kim Huebner, who is from student aid; and Carlos Matias, who is also from COPSE.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Excellent. Welcome staff. Thank you, Minister.

Last question for the committee is: How do we want to do the questions? Do we wish to proceed in a chronological or a global manner for this discussion?

**Mr. Ewasko:** I guess we'll proceed globally.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Globally has been suggested. Honourable Minister?

All right. It's therefore understood that questions will proceed in a global manner for this section of the Committee of Supply, and the floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Ewasko:** It's tough, as I look around, I guess I'll start the questioning.

We're going to start off, I think, possibly a little bit easier today. We're going to start talking about the Bright Futures fund.

When we—when I took a look at the—some of the numbers over the past few years, can you comment on how much was in the fund last year?

**Ms. Selby:** The member might not be aware that Bright Futures is no longer in Advanced Education portfolio. It's now under another minister's portfolio.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I am aware that the funding has been provided to Children and Youth Opportunities for the administration, but the minister doesn't know how much money was transferred over?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, we, of course, know the answer. It's \$4 million and we are glad to see that it is in the—it's a wonderful program. Bright Futures is a—really a bright point of this government, and allows a lot of children and young people who may not have normally even considered post-secondary education—the chance to dream about it, and not just dream about it, but recognize that and make it a reality.

So it's a wonderful program. It was fantastic to have it under my care for about a year, but I know it's under the very capable hands of the new minister now.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Yes, I'm very much aware of the Bright Futures fund and I'm not disputing the fact that it's under capable hands of the new minister.

But what was the rationale for sending it over to child and youth opportunities as opposed to it being covered under Education, because I know that that's been a question in the past?

**Ms. Selby:** Well, certainly, the Bright Futures program does fall under Education, but it also really specifically falls under opportunities for youth. It was part of a consolidating of programs from a number of departments where we felt that, that although that they are all excellent, and of course, programs that we were all very proud of, that consolidating the programs to be within one department made more sense.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Okay. So, then, a couple of questions, I guess, I'm going to have on that fund is still going to go back to how many students that participated last year under the bright beginnings fund.

**Ms. Selby:** Appreciate the question from the member. We're just looking for the number to make sure that we have the exact one for you, and we may have to bring that to you as we find it. I know that staff is currently searching for that exact number for you.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So would you like to—like me to continue with the next question then?

So, then, as the staff are looking for that answer, then they might as well look for the number of students that participated in 2010 and '11. And since we're on that track, we might as well—how many students attended each of the programs that are part—that make up the Bright Futures fund as well for last year?

**Ms. Selby:** We will get back to the member with that detail. We don't have all the breakdown of it right now, but we will look forward and bring it to you as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ewasko:** The actual—and I might as well throw this on there as well—the actual amount of money spent for the year 2011-2012, I'd like to also request that number, as well.

**Ms. Selby:** We might have that number for you in the next few minutes, but perhaps you want to go on to another question while we just gather that up for you.

**Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul):** Yes, and page 9 of the budget, supplementary information, page 9, under support for universities and colleges, can the minister tell us where in that might have been money that was allocated towards the Red River community college buying Jets tickets?

**Ms. Selby:** I'm sure the member is—realizes that universities and colleges make their own decisions on what they're going to put expenditures on and if the member opposite would like information on their decision-making process, I would encourage them to contact the institutions, because this is not something that is directed by the minister. The institutions make their own decisions on how to spend the money that is allocated.

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Schuler:** So, in the case of Red River community college, it would've been only their decision to have given the minister Jets tickets?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, I attended a game with Red River College—the president of Red River College, as I declared in December, and I have paid for that ticket.

**Mr. Schuler:** That the minister said that it's the individual institutions that make those decisions, was that a decision that was made by Red River community college whereby they offered the ticket to the minister, or did she ask for it?

**Ms. Selby:** I think it's important that the Minister of Advanced Education stay in contact on a regular



basis with students, with the presidents of all the 'facilitive'—the president of the institutions, of course, with parents, and, in the case of Advanced Education, there are a number of stakeholders, from parents, to communities, to faculty, to administration, to students.

One of the things that I think is important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students, which I do. I just did this afternoon with representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students, and I meet regularly and have regular conversations with the presidents of all our institutions. And, yes, I was asked by the president of Red River College if I would go to a Jets game with her, to which I accepted.

I did declare that. Although it was a gift that was under \$250, I did declare it in that I have a connection with the institution and felt that that would be important. That's why ministers on this side of the House, of course, think it's important that Manitobans know which MLAs have gone for Jets games that are paid for by Crowns, businesses or unions, and it's why the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has directed government MLAs to repay those tickets that were obtained, as I have done, as my colleagues have done.

But, of course, the Premier has also asked, and I would ask that as well, that MLAs on both sides of the House should probably come forward and declare the tickets that they've received, from whether it's Crown corporations, unions or businesses.

**Mr. Schuler:** I think it's very important that we stay focused on the issue at hand, and that would be, we're starting with Red River community college. And, in full disclosure, I can disclose to the committee that I never received a ticket from Red River community college. In fact, I've never been to a Jets game.

Can the minister tell us that, besides the president of Red River community college, who else did she go with to that game?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Just before acknowledging the minister, I want to remind members of the committee that the questions here are supposed to relate directly to the Estimates.

The earlier questions are fine because you were looking for, you know, where in the budgets what would a Jets ticket have come from. Asking who else went to a Jets game might well be outside the purview of that. I'll leave it to the minister's

discretion on whether she wants to answer that, but it doesn't really directly relate. So I just wanted to raise that caution.

But, Honourable Minister, as you see fit.

**Ms. Selby:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said, the president of Red River College invited me to go to a Jets game with her, so I accompanied her to a Jets game. And, as I said earlier, universities and colleges make their own decision on what they're going to spend. They make their decisions on their expenditures, and if the member would like more information on that decision-making process, I would encourage him to contact the institution directly. They would probably have a better idea of who the president meets with and talks to and who she does business with than I would be able to tell him right now.

**Mr. Schuler:** Perhaps we could direct the minister to page 9, item No. 2, Support for Universities and Colleges, and perhaps she could tell us, did the Red River community college use some of that money to pay for Mr. Vogt, Paul Vogt, to go along with her and the president to a Jets game?

**Ms. Selby:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I understand that Paul Vogt did accompany the president to Red River College to a Jets game. He did not accompany me to a Jets game. I went as the guest of Stephanie Forsyth, who is the president of Red River College. I understand that Mr. Vogt did as well, and that he has also paid back his ticket. So, no, his ticket was paid for by him, as my ticket was paid for by me.

**Mr. Schuler:** And page 9, item No. 2, Support for Universities and Colleges. Can the minister tell us that, along with herself and the president of Red River community college, who else would have gone along for the Jets game tickets, which would have initially been paid for by Red River community college?

**Ms. Selby:** I believe I answered this question already. I did go to a Jets game with the president of Red River College; she invited me to go and offered me a ticket to go with her. So I'm only aware of the ticket that she gave to me. I have heard it since that time that some of my colleagues have attended and paid back the cost of their tickets as well and declared them, something that is important.

We think that all MLAs should probably declare whether they got tickets from Crown corporations, business, unions or other institutions. And on our

side of the House, we have done that. But if the member wants to know some more specifics, I really think it's something that he'll have to speak to the institution directly. They make their own decisions on what to spend on, and I would expect them to make their own decisions on who they meet with and that sort of thing as well.

**Mr. Schuler:** Thank you, very much. Page 9, item 2, Support for Universities and Colleges. Can the minister tell us, was it just her and the president of Red River community college that went to the Jets game, which initially was paid for by Red River community college?

**Ms. Selby:** At the time when the president extended an invitation to me, she extended the invitation for me to join her, as I did. When I was there, she introduced me to another person. I don't know how that person came. They may have come with the president as well, I—not usually the question people ask when they first meet. They say, hello, how are you. How is—what is—didn't catch your last name—what do you do for a living. But you don't necessarily ask who paid for your ticket.

There was myself, Stephanie Forsyth, and another woman whose name I don't remember now, who Stephanie introduced me to. But I'm afraid the member would have ask the president of Red River College who she's attended Jets games with, because it's not something that the minister office keeps tracks of.

I also didn't—don't keep track of who the presidents of our various institutions meet with. I don't talk to them about who they have dinner with and who they've gone to the ballet with. This is something that the member would have to ask them directly.

**Mr. Schuler:** Yes. Thank you very much. Page 9, item 2, Support for Universities and Colleges. Is the minister at all aware of the University of Manitoba purchasing Jets tickets or season tickets?

**Ms. Selby:** As I've said, that universities and colleges make their own decisions on what to make expenditures on. And if the member has a question and would like some information on their decision-making process, it's something that he could directly contact and ask them.

**Mr. Schuler:** Same page, same section. I'd like to ask the minister—University of Winnipeg, is she aware, is—has any of the money under page 9,

section 2—has any of that money been spent by the University of Winnipeg on Jets season tickets?

**Ms. Selby:** I think that my earlier answers would have covered this, but just to make it clear to the member, that universities and colleges do make their own decisions on what to spend, what to make their expenditures on. This is the sort of thing that they make the decision on.

They have autonomy to decide, because in many areas that they make those decisions and have the autonomy to decide. And, if the member would like information on how they do that and the decisions they make, I'm quite sure they would be open to having discussions with him directly.

**Mr. Schuler:** Same page, same section. Support that goes to universities and colleges, and, on top of that, a lot of students work all summer.

Fact, the esteem gentleman to the left of the minister, I worked for him one summer—one of the best summer jobs I ever had. Learned a lot from him as my boss and, you know, I'm probably just trashing his career by praising him at this committee, but I just—I can't help myself. He was an outstanding boss. And I also worked—as students work today—evenings and weekends.

And does the minister think it's a prudent and wise decision for colleges and universities to be buying Jets tickets when students are struggling and there's pressure on tuition increases. Does the minister think it's an appropriate thing for universities and colleges to be buying Jets tickets?

\* (16:50)

**Ms. Selby:** And I think the member must be remembering the '90s when he's talking about the undue stress on students for tuition increases, because it's true. In the '90s, there was undue stress as tuition went up by 132 per cent when the Conservatives were in office.

Over the last 12-year period, it's only gone up 3.4 per cent under us. We also have put a lot of different things in place to support students, not only the legislation that we just brought in. Of course, the member may have missed that, but we have brought in a legislation that is freezing the rate of increase to our tuition to the rate of inflation. That's going to be about 2.8 expected this year.

We also have done something that, understandably, wasn't around—I'm not sure when the member went to university, but certainly in '90s

when I went, there was no such thing as a bursary, and it was difficult for students because all there was was loans. There was no bursary whatsoever. When we came into office we brought in a bursary program and on top of that we've brought in a tuition rebate program so students get some money up front. They know that they're going to have help throughout. They know they'll have predictability with their tuition and that it will never go above the rate of inflation as long as we're the government. You certainly won't see 132 per cent increases with this government, like we did with the last one.

But, also, that upon graduating and putting down roots in Manitoba students know they'll get 60 per cent of their tuition back in a tax rebate, and that doesn't matter where they study. They could have studied out of province, they could have studied out of Canada, and as long as they are excited to come and work and live in Manitoba and put down roots, well, we want to thank people for choosing Manitoba by giving them a 60 per cent tuition income tax rebate which, so far, has put almost \$8 million back in the pockets of students.

So I think, perhaps the member is forgetting that things are different now than they were in the '90s, and there was a lot more support for students and a lot more protection for them as well. And that is why, when we meet with students, they congratulate us on bringing in things like freezing tuition to the rate of inflation.

**Mr. Schuler:** So what the minister is saying is, she's okay with it. She's okay with universities and colleges buying Jets tickets and taking ministers and political staff to Jets games because she thinks that's an appropriate thing for universities and colleges to do?

**Ms. Selby:** I think the appropriate thing would be for the member not to try to put words in my mouth.

What I would like to say is that I'm proud of our record of supporting universities and colleges in this province. We have increased our support to them and made sure that they have the ability to offer an affordable, accessible and, might I say, high-quality education to people in Manitoba, which is why we've increased supports for post-secondary education by nearly 90 per cent since we've come into office, also, \$800 million in capital support. We now have three-year block funding to universities: 5 per cent last year, 5 per cent this year and 5 per cent next year means that they can plan ahead and put into place programs that we know are competitive with

anywhere in the world. We're expanding our student aid eligibility to allow students to work more, should they choose to, during the year.

And the other measures that I spoke of earlier, as well, are to support both students and universities. I think we have found a very good balance between supporting universities and colleges and making sure that anybody who has the passion to learn in Manitoba can afford to do that, and that the ability to pay will not be the thing to stop them. I'm proud of our supportive universities and I will talk about that any day, our record supporting universities, colleges and students, as opposed to the members opposite when they were in government, any day, any time.

**Mr. Schuler:** When the minister took her opportunity to sit with the president of the Red River community college at a Jets game, can she tell us what was discussed? Were any ethics complaints discussed at that meeting? I take it, it was a minister and a president of a college, and business would have been transacted. Page 9, section 2, talks about support for universities and colleges. Perhaps that was discussed? Perhaps ethics complaints were discussed? Could she tell us what was discussed at that Jets game?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, I can tell the member a few things that were discussed. One of the things that we discussed at that Jets game, that the president and I discuss pretty much every time we talk to, is about both of our interest in making sure that we are continually to increase the outcomes of Aboriginal students, to make sure that we see more participation of Aboriginal students, which we have seen. And I would thank the president for that because I know that she has certainly made Red River College a very welcoming and culturally comfortable place for all students, but particular Aboriginal students. That is certainly an important thing that we've discussed. And what we can do to better improve that, we have certainly seen that that has worked, some of the programs that we've put in place. We've seen that in the past five years, the number of self-identified Aboriginal students in Manitoba at post-secondary institutions has increased from 9 per cent to 9.8 per cent, which sounds like a small number until you know that that's 600 more Aboriginal students, self-identified Aboriginal students, attending post-secondary education. But, of course, we'd like to see more, and that is something that Stephanie and I did discuss—the president and I discussed at the Jets game, and we'll continue to discuss every time we see each other.

The other thing we talked about was increasing graduation rates. It's another thing that both of us is important that we have seen in graduation rates increase. We see them continuing to be on the rise, but it is something that we'd like to see students get through school quicker in a more timely manner and to make sure that they are graduating. One of the things that we brought in place, and I have to say the president of Red River has been a key partner in bringing in the memorandum of understanding that we brought in last June between all the institutions in Manitoba to make sure that students have more ability for articulation and credit transfer. We see that that is the key of getting students through school quicker.

We know that if you've studied at one institution, it doesn't mean that you're necessarily going to complete your studies there. Quite often what we see, in fact, is that many students, perhaps students who don't have a family history of post-secondary education, will often start at Red River College or Assiniboine college and sort of get their feet wet, but then perhaps start to think that maybe they have the ability to move on to a university setting, something that they might have been a little bit intimidated to do. And we want to support those students. And the president of Red River College is particularly supportive of this idea.

I know that when she worked in BC, she was very active in the articulation and credit transfer program that they have there. It's quite robust, and we aspire to get to that someday. And I think we've made some really good steps on that in our memorandum of understanding, and the more programs that have already gone into place since we've signed that.

That is something that's—that the president and I discuss quite often, at every meeting we have, including at a Jets game. We were both, of course, both excited to have the Jets back in town. I know it's been great for sport, it's been great for Manitobans, it's been fantastic for downtown, and we've certainly seen that Manitobans are excited and feeling good about it.

But, at the same time, any chance that the president of Red River and I get to discuss matters of mutual interest—and things like Aboriginal outcomes of our Aboriginal students and increase of grad rates being two of the most important things to both of us—we will always take the opportunity to 'scuss' that. And whether we're at a Jets game or monster

trucking, we will still discuss Aboriginal income—outcomes at education and increasing our graduation rates and what we can do to put supports in to make education smoother and a quicker transition for all students in Manitoba.

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, I'm glad the minister is her very own fan club. That's really good to hear. But the question was: When she went to the Jets game with the president of Red River community college, did she discuss any of the ethics complaints that had come forward?

**Ms. Selby:** As I said, two of the areas of interest, in particular, to both myself and to the president of Red River College are increasing our graduation rates and increasing our participation rates with all students, but we both have a particular interest in knowing that we have a large and fast-growing young Aboriginal population in Manitoba. I think it's probably the greatest resource we have, and certainly whether we talk about Winnipeg or we talk about the north, the best resources we have in Manitoba are the people of Manitoba. We want to make sure that everybody has ability to participate.

And so I can guarantee that that is always a question and conversation between the president and I. In fact, in most conversations I have with presidents of our institutions, we are talking about what can we do to continually improve the access and quality of education in Manitoba. I'm proud of the quality of education at all our institutions. I think there are graduates around the world who are making fantastic ambassadors for us. But, of course, as Manitobans, we always want to keep improving and making sure that we're moving forward in the right direction.

\* (17:00)

**Mr. Schuler:** Can the minister tell us why two vice-presidents have left during this school year from Red River community college?

**Mr. Chairperson:** With regret, I'm interrupting the proceedings. This Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock.

#### FAMILY SERVICES AND LABOUR

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff):** Good afternoon. This section of the Committee of Supply will continue with the consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Labour.

Would the minister's staff and opposition staff please enter the Chamber.

This department is listed beginning on page 85 of the main Estimates book.

As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. Floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Madam Minister, I just have a couple of questions in regards to Child and Family Services.

I would like to ask if you have the authority to look into a concern, unless it's common practice, as a family has an open file with CFS, are they then allowed to be a foster family under another branch of CFS?

**Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour):** I'm not sure the member is referring to a specific case. If he has a specific situation that he's encountered, I think probably the best way to deal with it would be to give me that information—not on *Hansard*, of course, but privately—and we could certainly have the Child Protection branch work with the agencies involved to look into it. And I would endeavour to get him that information back off the record.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Thank you, Madam Minister—Mr. Chair, and then Madam Minister for that answer.

Not necessarily a specific case, but from your answer, I'm taking that you could actually, by a case-by-case basis, have an open file with CFS and then on the other hand, become a foster parent under a different branch of CFS? So you could be getting investigated by CFS on one hand and be a foster parent on the other.

**Ms. Howard:** I think one thing I've come to learn in the child and family services system is that the best course of action is probably not to get into speculation or hypotheticals on the situation, that if the member knows of a specific case where this has happened then, really, the best course of action is for him to forward that information to me and we can look into that and I can get him a response to that.

When a foster family—when a family applies to be a foster family, a number of checks happen. Interviews happen; home study happens. There's criminal record checks, Child Abuse Registry checks. There should be a check on the CFSIS system which would indicate if that family has contact with Child and Family Services agencies.

I would also say there could be a number of reasons why a family would have an open file. It could be because there's a child abuse allegation or investigation or child protection order, but they may also have an open file because they're receiving some kind of support services from Child and Family Services.

So I think, without knowing the specific—the specifics of any case that he may be talking about, I can't give him as complete an answer as I'm sure he would like.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Ewasko:** And that was going to kibosh one of my next questions as far as the training and different checks and that. But back to the specific example that you're wanting me to give. So out of all the years that you've been—or the time that you've been involved as far as the minister, you've never heard of a situation like that? You're needing me to give you a specific—I'm just asking if it's possible, and it's not speculation, it's—has there been a situation where there's been a family that has had an open case with CFS, but yet, on the other hand, they have been a foster parent?

**Ms. Howard:** Yes, I'm just going to say, again, for the member: If he is aware of a situation like this that he is speaking of, where—you know, from his line of questioning, I would assume his concern would be for the safety of the children involved, then really his responsibility is to bring forward the specifics of that information, and if he wants to provide that to me privately, I can make sure that it's investigated.

**Mr. Ewasko:** As far as giving, you know, specifics off the record and privately with you, that's understandable; definitely it is. But my question is more so leaning towards that, is there a policy? I mean, we have—you said yourself, that in order to become a foster parent there is checks—there's criminal record checks, there's Child Abuse Registry checks, there is home visits—and this is what you said. Then would that not be, then, covered by the CFS or the interviewing team so that they would safety the possibility of that actually happening? So from what you're telling me, is that with all these checks that the chances of that happening would be pretty nil, and I understand that you're asking for a specific example off the record and if I had that, I will give it to you.

**Ms. Howard:** I think, you know, the number of interviews and going to the home and looking at the

home and doing a check on the background of people applying to be foster families—all of that is geared to ensure a safe environment for the foster children that are in that care. That's what it's geared towards doing.

If the member has information that that isn't working in some instance and he has concerns about the safety of children, then his responsibility, as I'm sure he knows, is to bring forward that information and we'll do our best to act on it.

I would say, on the topic of foster families, we've worked very hard to recruit more foster families and we have seen quite a significant increase in the number of people stepping forward to do that work. I'm sure he's met many foster parents, and I know the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) has and I have, and the work they do is absolutely incredible and—sometimes in heartbreaking situations, and so, you know, we're going to do our best to continue to work with those families and recruit more of them. But the checks that we do and the work that is done by child and family agencies is geared towards ensuring the safety of foster children, and if the member has information of places where that isn't happening, then I would ask him to bring it forward and we can certainly look into it.

**Mr. Ewasko:** After all the checks are done and the Child Abuse Registry checks and the criminal record check and the home visits, and all of those things are done, is there specific training that foster families can also take after that, once they've been approved of being foster parents?

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing—and Labour, sorry.

**Ms. Howard:** So, there's a variety of kinds of training provided to foster families. There's often an orientation session for foster families that are new to the system. There's ongoing training that is provided, some if it by organizations like the Manitoba Foster Family Network. Agencies will also do training on various topics that are of interest and concern to foster families, like fetal—dealing with children who have fetal alcohol syndrome disorder or effect, so the training is generally ongoing.

**Mr. Ewasko:** More so just a comment, Mr. Chair. It is nice to hear that the minister and her department are doing and taking their due diligence to do the checks and the home visits. And I'd just like to assure you that if I did have a situation where there is a

child at risk, I would definitely be bringing it to your attention, so I thank you for your answers.

**Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East):** And just following up on some of the Child and Family Services questions.

And I know that I've had significant discussion and debate with the former minister around safety of children when they are in foster care, and I know the former minister had indicated that safety, of course, was first and foremost a priority, but we're still hearing from the Child Advocate's office and I'm still dealing with families, foster families who have been in the system. And I know that the minister's indicated that we've recruited foster families and they are doing an awesome job, in many instances, of looking after the children that come under their care.

And, you know, it's not an easy job to be a foster parent. I think there are many that find very heart-wrenching issues when a child is—arrives at their home that has been abused or neglected and needs a lot of support, a lot of nurturing, and a lot of care in order to bond and heal. Many of those families have opened their doors to some significantly challenged children and have, over a period of four or five years, seen that child progress immeasurably as a result of the bonding and the consistency and the care and the love and the nurturing that they've received.

And one of the things that the Child Advocate has indicated to us and continues to report in annual reports is that case planning is something that is lacking within the system and that, from day one, a foster child that's placed should have a case plan started. And very often that case plan would be—the ultimate goal would be to see the birth family be able to receive the supports and services available to them in order to reunite that family. And most foster parents—I would say all foster parents go—enter that very worthy cause knowing that, if at all possible, they would like to see that child reunited with their family.

\* (15:10)

But I've seen case after case where the permanency—or the plan, the case plan, has not been implemented at day one, and there is no case plan for five years. And, all of a sudden, there's a decision that that child should be moved to a strange environment with people they've never met without a proper transition plan put in place. And that's happening today within the system, and it's a grave concern to me.

And, you know, Gage Guimond was one of those children that fell through the cracks and was reunited with family without a case plan, a proper plan, without any transition plan. And, when he was placed in one unsafe circumstance, was moved to another unsafe placement and eventually died.

And I know that all of the recommendations that were made, as a result of that broad-ranging review, are important recommendations, but safety of the child has to be a first and foremost priority. And we don't ever want to see another Gage Guimond situation in the province of Manitoba.

And, I guess I would like to ask the minister, whether she could indicate to me what role she or her department has—it seems to me there's a lot of confusion. And, I've brought cases directly to the minister's office in the past. I have met with staff in the department as a result of cases that had exactly these kinds of issues. And, I guess I'd just like to know, with the whole devolution of Child and Family Services, what power and authority the minister and her department have if things are going awry?

Because it seems to me like there's a very complicated process, and the process seems to get in the way of protecting the children. And, in my mind, the child should be first and foremost, the priority for absolutely everyone involved. And we have children that are being bounced back and forth and all around in a very traumatic way. That concerns me. So I recognize and realize that there have to be meetings and there has to be meetings of the mind, but sometimes these cases are so prolonged, that it's not necessarily in the best interests of the safety of the child.

And so I would like to get on the record exactly what the process is, and how much power and authority the minister and her department have now or, as result of devolution, are we seeing that the minister's and the department's hands are tied to some degree, and they can't move as swiftly as they should move, to protect these children, these very vulnerable children, and to ensure that the child comes first, over and above any jurisdictional dispute.

**Ms. Howard:** I mean, I would agree with the member opposite that safety is the primary consideration when we're dealing with vulnerable children, children in the care of Child and Family Services, children in foster care. I believe that's why the minister previous to me did change the law to

make that explicit, that safety should be the primary consideration.

In terms of how it works, if there are concerns with agencies, the way that it works practically is often, if those concerns are raised with me or my department, we'll work through the Child Protection branch. The director of the Child Protection branch will work with the authority to which the agency is accountable, sometimes directly with the agency, to deal with some of those concerns that have been raised. So far, in my experience, that has been an effective way to resolve issues. But the legislation that creates the authorities also does contemplate a situation where that process might not work, and it does provide for the minister to have authority to issue directives to the authorities, to ask them to do certain things.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** So, then, there is ultimately ministerial responsibility, and the minister can make a directive, and is the agency or the authority required to follow that directive?

**Ms. Howard:** Right, well, my understanding of the legislation is that the authorities who are charged with the oversight of the agencies can be directed to do certain things by the minister. And, when that incurs, they are compelled to comply. But I would also say that my experience, so far, has been that the more practical way of dealing with issues that may come up in agencies or authorities is to work directly with some of those folks, sometimes through staff, such as the director of the Child Protection branch, who has responsibility for the safety of children, to deal with those issues as they come up.

It's been my experience that people who are working in child welfare do have the interests of children foremost in their minds. And so, practically, many of these issues are worked out by the Child Protection branch coming into contact with the authority or with the agency.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I know I have brought cases for—before, and I'm sure there will be cases into the future that I will want the minister to look into. And I want to say that I believe that much of the system is working very well, and there are many committed people out there, both on the front lines and in our foster care system, and others that are looking after children that are vulnerable. And—but it's the individual instances, where children are put in harm's way, or not put first, and it is their safety, but it's also their emotional well-being that is extremely important. And I think we sometimes tend to forget,

with the processes that have been put in place, that there needs to be expeditious resolution for the sake of the child. And so I'm just hopeful that, as I bring more cases forward, and I know there are some today that I need to bring to the minister's attention, that we will look at the child first and not let the bureaucracy get in the way of serving the child first and foremost.

\* (15:20)

So I thank her for the commitment that she's made, and I know it's not an easy job, but I'm hopeful that, as we move forward, we will see as swift as possible resolution to some of the issues that these very vulnerable children are dealing with.

The—can the minister indicate how many children—are we seeing an increase still in the number of children in care?

**Ms. Howard:** So, as of—for March—the year ending March 2011—I don't yet have the number from—for 2012, but we can get that to the member when it's available—there were 9,432 children in care. The previous year, there were 9,120, so it is an increase of 3.4 per cent. When I look back over the years, it appears to me that that is the smallest increase since the time between '03 and '04, but it is still a significant number.

And certainly, included in those 9,400 children in care would be a number of children who are on extensions of care. So these are children who have so-called age doubt of the system, who are 18, and who are eligible for an extension of care until they're 21. And this is being done more and more frequently, really under the advice of the Children's Advocate because we know that if we can—if a kid who is 18 is well attached to their placement or their foster family, they're—want to go to school, they want to proceed with some training, or they're doing some personal healing from some of the trauma that they've suffered, that keeping them in the system a little while longer can actually really help with the outcomes as they age. And so, this has been—I know in the Children's Advocate's most recent report on youth in care, she talked about the importance of doing this and the importance of doing more of it.

So I always, you know, want to point out when we look at the overall number of children in care, that some of those children in care are there very deliberately because we have extended the age to 21 of when they're receiving services. And we do that because we think that it actually does provide for a better outcome than to simply have them leave care

at 18 without the supports that they may need to make a successful transition.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** And I just have a newspaper article in front of me from April 27th of this year, and it was just an article in the *Free Press* that said, nine-year-old girl sexually abused for years, and this was in Brandon, and there were three men that were charged.

I wonder if the minister could just indicate to me whether there was any connection to the child and family services system for this young girl.

**Ms. Howard:** I believe the case the member is referring to is likely still under investigation by police and, because of that, I'm not going to make any comments on it.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** But I realize the case may still be under investigation, but the question becomes, was this child connected? And we have no identifying information. All I'm asking is, I'm sure the department is aware of whether there has been a previous connection.

I know the former minister was able to answer. I remember asking a question in question period about an individual, or a child, and he was able to, within a very short period of time, give me an unequivocal no.

Can the minister give me an unequivocal no today? Because this is almost a month ago now, and I would imagine that if we can't have an unequivocal no today, that there has been some previous connection to the child and family services system.

**Ms. Howard:** I'm sure the minister, or the member opposite, appreciates that I would not want to do anything that would jeopardize the potential prosecution of people who've harmed children, and I'm sure she wouldn't want me to do anything that would do that.

I personally would be sick and would be unable to live with myself if something that I said here today turned out to let somebody go free who hurt a child. And so, with that in mind, I'm not going to answer questions about something that's currently under investigation by the police.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** And I think that answer is quite telling.

Could the minister 'intigate' to me that the former minister did a couple of—what he called—unprecedented external reviews into the abuse case



of a six-year-old little boy who had begged for help several times before getting help, and was returned to his mother's care? And, of course, his parents were sentenced in late December of 2011. I think the department's quite well aware of the individual, and we've—don't know and we will not know, in order to protect the child, who that child was.

But we have asked for some information through the Freedom of Information and were denied that information on what the results of those external reviews were, and it's really unfortunate that—

At least the recommendations—I know that in the case of Phoenix Sinclair, we got recommendations. In the case of Gage Guimond, we got recommendations, at least on what was wrong within the system, so that at least the system could be held accountable for any changes that were made or not made.

I'm wondering if the minister could indicate to me why we were denied any information on the results of these external reviews because, in order to keep that kind of information secret when it's not identifying, really does leave the public to question, you know, why there isn't some public accountability for something that went so terribly wrong.

\* (15:30)

**Ms. Howard:** Well, I think, as the member rightfully points out, we would not be able to release any information that would compromise the confidentiality of a child receiving services from Child and Family Services.

I'm told that, in this particular case, that review is ongoing, that there's been quite a lot of police involvement in this case, and so it's taken a little bit longer to complete the review, and that that police involvement continues in this situation.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** But this happened a considerable time ago, and I guess my question would be: Have we learned anything? Even though there's an ongoing review, obviously, the department and the minister must have some sense or some indication of what went wrong.

And have there been any changes made in the system as a result of—even if the review hasn't been completed, are we still moving along, allowing the same kinds of things to happen, or have there been any changes in the system as a result of this situation?

**Ms. Howard:** I'm going to speak more generally so I don't get into compromising the confidentiality of the child involved. But, generally, in a situation like this where there has been some significant issue identified with the way an agency is working or providing care and some significant concerns raised with respect to the safety of a child, the agency and the authority and the Child Protection branch will work immediately to help identify the problems and to remedy them, to put in place solutions to them. They don't wait for the results of a review. They don't wait to be told by the minister's office what they should be doing. They immediately identify problems and start to build solutions. And so some of those solutions could include things like additional staff resources where those are needed. It could include things like additional training for staff where that might be needed. It could include strengthening the leadership of agencies. It could include better documentation, better use of the CFSIS system.

But, certainly, when there are concerns raised with regards to the safety of a child in care the response is swift to identify what has happened. And it's swift to put in place solutions to strengthen those agencies so that they can do a better job ensuring the safety of children.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Does the branch in any way do any random file checks of any of the agencies, or who's responsibility is that?

I know that the minister, the former minister, had said, you know, every child will be seen every time, and that the visits were going to be regular. And, you know, that was an expectation that he had put in place. How does the department hold the agencies accountable for the statements that the minister makes for the case plans that certainly were absent in the case of Gage Guimond and others that have died in the system?

So, I guess, what is the department's role, the Child Protection branch's role in doing random checks? Are they done? And maybe the minister could just sort of explain to me, you know, what, if anything, you know, or not what if anything, but what the department does in order to ensure accountability for the standards that are put in place and our provincial standards?

\* (15:40)

**Ms. Howard:** There is, of course, a standard development responsibility within the department, and we do that in conjunction with the authorities.

The authorities also have a responsibility for quality assurance with the agencies that they are responsible to provide oversight to. So that can involve things like a total review of an agency, which can involve looking at the files of that agency, ensuring that children are seen when they're supposed to be, and other standards are met.

The Child Protection branch can also work with authorities to do quality assurance reviews. That could also involve things like file audits and making sure that standards are being followed and, as well, the Child Protection branch also has powers under section 4 of the act, to do an investigation in an agency where there's a concern about the safety of children or a concern about standards not being followed.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Can the minister indicate to me what remedial action is taken when the branch finds that standards aren't being followed or met?

**Ms. Howard:** I think the approach that quality assurance people take within the authorities or within the Child Protection branch is a find-and-fix approach. So they would, if they were in a situation where they found that standards weren't being met, that there were issues that could compromise the safety of children, they would work with the agency to develop an action plan to fix those problems. If there was a situation where the agency required some kind of additional resources or training, staffing in order to do that, then we would be in a position to help provide that, and I guess, ultimately, if, working together, the authority and the agency weren't able to address the issues, the authorities do have the power to take over the administration of an agency.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Can the minister indicate whether there's been, sort of, general co-operation among the authorities and the agencies or have there been instances where issues couldn't be resolved?

**Ms. Howard:** I trust you're comfortable and—I would say, generally, there is good co-operation in trying to resolve issues or problems when they arise. My experience has been that everyone brings to the table, certainly, an attitude of trying to resolve problems. I think that in my experience, so far, in the child welfare system, that everybody brings to the table the desire to do the best that they can for the children who are in care and a keen understanding of the responsibility to protect children who are very vulnerable.

Of course, there are sometimes problems that are complicated. There are sometimes issues that take more time to resolve, but I would say that, generally speaking, my experience has been that people stay at it until those problems are resolved.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I know that as we see the numbers of children in care increasing, there is a lot of pressure on the front lines, and the caseloads, in many instances, have increased as a result. And, I know that the Child Advocate had reported that, you know, although it was an anecdotal statement, that front-line workers were leaving the field and they were, in some instances, moving into positions in other areas, like Education and Health, which does certainly create some problems.

The Child Advocate's office also was seeing multiple staff changes, and was concerned about workforce stability. Can the minister indicate what the caseloads are, generally speaking, today, and are we seeing that trend continue of turnover in front-line staff?

\* (15:50)

**Ms. Howard:** Under the new funding model that has been rolling out last year and is also rolling out this year for agencies, the funding formula allows for caseloads of one to 25 for children in care. Now, I'm sure, in all agencies, that can't always be achieved, and I think the other thing that we know we have to be sensitive to is what the mix of cases is within that. But that is what we are funding for. That rollout of that new funding model is going to be completed this year and looking at the rollout that was done last year and this year, that funding model is going to put an additional \$23 million into the operations of agencies, which can go to hire staff and can go to reduce those caseloads.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** But the funding formula does not necessarily put bodies in positions to deliver the service. And I guess my question is: are we seeing people leaving the front lines of our child welfare system? Are we seeing a turnover in staff, and are all the positions filled or are there some vacant because we can't find the appropriately trained individuals?

**Ms. Howard:** You know, I think, certainly, we can agree that working as front-line staff in the child welfare system is a very, very difficult job, and the folks that I've met who do that work, you know, I think there's not enough that we can say about their commitment to children, their commitment to the

safety of children. It's certainly not work that I think I could ever do.

You know, not only do they have to deal with sometimes heartbreaking situations where children are put at risk, they have to witness to the kind of abuse and exploitation that no child should ever have to go through. They also have to go into very volatile situations to remove children and, I think, added on top of all of that, I think they also have to endure often times a real lack of public appreciation for the work that they do and the role that they play.

I would say in terms of turnover and vacancies, I think in all kinds of workplaces and all sorts of jobs that we do, there is some turnover and there is some vacancy. I think, certainly, as is the case in all kinds of jobs, you would see that more acute in isolated communities. We know that agencies that recruit to isolated northern communities also often have to do extra things to make sure they can get staff there, and we certainly, with the authorities, work with agencies who are having any particular issues with vacancies.

But my information, according to the authorities, is that there is nothing that's not manageable in terms of turnover, that the workforce is relatively stable. When jobs are posted, there are many applicants for it. They do recruitment. They work with universities to recruit people into the system, and I would say that the authorities and the agencies do a good job of making sure that they have staff in place to serve the system and to serve children.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I understand the whole issue of workplace shortages right across the board and how difficult it is, especially in remote communities.

I guess the question becomes, then: Is the minister satisfied that there is enough trained staff and enough front-line staff in all of the agencies throughout the province that have the skills and the knowledge and the understanding to ensure that child safety comes first and that children are going to be protected?

\* (16:00)

*Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Ms. Howard:** There are a number of initiatives that are ongoing to ensure that people can be trained to work within the child and family services system. Certainly, there's much work done in post-secondary institutions, with the Council on Post-Secondary Education to ensure that people are trained to do that.

There is also, you know—the reality is that there are many new positions being created because of the funding model, because of the ability of agencies to have access to money to deal with some of the caseload concerns, which are historic. You know, these are concerns that go back many, many years. So, you know, I don't know that—you know, I think there's always a need to be training staff. I think there's always a need to be recruiting people to work in the system. It's difficult work; it's emotionally challenging work. And so that work goes on.

But I do think that what we hear from authorities and agencies is that they are able to recruit staff that they need to do these jobs, and we will have to keep focusing on making sure that the training programs are in place so that they can continue to recruit that staff.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** And I'd just like to ask about the CFSIS system and ask whether all agencies are up and running and using CFSIS?

**Ms. Howard:** They—for the CFSIS system, all agencies are using it on intake.

There have been challenges, of course, for some agencies who are dealing with connectivity issues, who're just dealing with technology issues, particularly agencies in the north where—and in remote communities where being connected to a computer system can pose some challenges.

There has been some progress made on this with agencies within the southern authority with some help from the federal government in terms of funding to ensure that there can be that kind of connectivity, and we are very hopeful that we can do some similar projects in the north to strengthen connectivity. And I think—you know, hopefully, in doing that, that will help to get more full use of CFSIS within those agencies.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Madam Chair, so is the minister telling me, then, that all 9,432 children that are in the child and family services system today are on CFSIS?

**Ms. Howard:** So I'm informed that, since 2005, we've expected agencies to use the CFSIS intake module, to use it for all of the children that are coming into it. But I will also say that I think it's no secret that documentation and the use of CFSIS is an ongoing issue for some agencies. That's certainly been something that has been pointed out in various reviews, and there have been recommendations made to strengthen the use of CFSIS throughout agencies,

and so that's why we've worked with the authorities and the agencies to put in place additional resources for training, sometimes additional resources for staff positions that can do that data entry, and I think there is some of that provided for in this budget.

We also know that, throughout Manitoba's geography, there are some communities where connectivity and technology issues prevent full use of CFSIS, and so we're also trying to address that. But it is our expectation that agencies are using CFSIS, that they are using it for documentation of the children in their care so that we can track those children so that we know what's happening to them and so we can ensure their safety. But it is also an area that does need to be strengthened in some of the agencies.

\* (16:10)

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** So could the department or the minister, sort of, indicate, you know, what percentage of children in care might have the appropriate information on CFSIS that should be there? And I would imagine that that should be on intake and, you know, a case plan and ongoing entries. Is there a percentage of those that the minister or the department might say are 80 per cent, 100 per cent up to speed?

**Ms. Howard:** We'll have to do some more work to get the member as accurate percentage as possible. I don't think I have that right with me. But I would say that, certainly, a high percentage of children in care, of those cases, do have information on the CFSIS system.

You know, we're always working to strengthen the quality of that information and the quality of that documentation. I think that is often—you know, when we look at the reviews and the investigations of cases where something has happened, that hasn't been in the best interest of the child, often there's comments, so they need to strengthen the documentation of that case. And so that is certainly a theme that we're working on within the department, working with agencies and authorities on how we do that, and that will continue to be a focus as we go forward.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I wonder if the minister, while she's looking into getting some sense of what percentage, you know, have information, full information on CFSIS, I wonder if she could try to estimate, I guess, how many children in the system, today, would have permanency plans, because that is one of the issues that the office of the Children's

Advocate has raised very often. I know in committee, the previous—or the acting Child Advocate, before the present one we have in place, indicated that a case plan should be started day one as people—as children are entering the child and family services system—very high priority, I believe, in the best interest of the child, and the safety of the child, and the ability for that child to grow and thrive.

And I would ask whether the minister might see whether it's been a recommendation that's been made, both in the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry and Gage Guimond inquiry.

And I would imagine that it continues to be an issue. It still is raised in the last Child Advocate's report as an issue, and I would like to know whether we're making progress on that front. And, if the minister might indicate where, if any, there might be some significant issues within the system on that.

**Ms. Howard:** I think, certainly, the authorities and the agencies would see the need for having permanent and stable placements for children in care and, having plans that can put those things into place, see that as important. I know it's something that the authorities see as an important issue that they are focusing on as well.

I don't have a number for the member today. We'll endeavour to do our best to come up with something on that, working with the authorities, but it may take some time. We're talking about 9,400 children and 9,400 files to go through so—but we can certainly talk to the authorities and get a sense from them about the progress that they believe that they are making on ensuring permanency plans in place for children in care.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I look forward to getting some sense from the minister on what the improvement, I guess, has been in that respect.

I know in 2010-2011, it was reported by the Children's Advocate that there were 156 kids who died in Manitoba, but the majority of children that do die are—die either naturally or accidentally. But there were 19 who died by suicide or homicide, and 11 of those were in care or had received services within the year before their death from the child and family services system.

I'm just wondering whether the minister can shed any light—I mean, I know we can't go back, but what we have to do is look at what we might be able to do to prevent this from happening into the—in the future.

And I don't know if the minister's free to comment on the cause of the death of any of these 11 children and whether anything could have been done to prevent them, and whether there are any new policies in place as a result of the reviews that have been undertaken.

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Howard:** I will say that since coming into this portfolio, absolutely the most difficult thing for me has been reading the special investigation reports that come from the Children's Advocate on the deaths of children who are either in care or who are in receipt of services from Child and Family Services in the last year. And I try to make a point of reading each one of those reports, and they're very difficult, some of them, to get through because we're dealing, in some instances, with children who have suffered horrendous abuse. And, you know, perhaps, difficult for me in a certain way because I also go home after reading those reports and sometimes I bring them home with me and hold my own son and can't help but think of those children who will never be held by anyone again—many of them, who in their lives, never even knew that kind of parenting or that kind of love.

So it's, by any stretch of the imagination, the hardest thing that I've ever had to deal with in my professional life.

All of those deaths are investigated by the Children's Advocate. Recommendations, of course, go to agencies, go to authorities, go to other organizations, go to the department and then the Ombudsman also has a role at looking at those recommendations and assessing how they've been responded to.

I should say that I think the Children's Advocate's office has to be given a tremendous amount of credit for the work that they have done in clearing the backlog of those reports and making sure that they're caught up and those reports are happening in a timely way so that recommendations are going to agencies and to authorities and to other organizations in a timely way so that people can improve the processes and improve how they're taking care of children who need their services.

So I think that they should be commended for the progress that they have made in doing those reports.

When you look at those reports, I would say, you know, some of the things that strike me is, in some

cases, we're dealing with families where the parents in question never knew their own—never had their own opportunity to be parented, that may have been in the custody of Child and Family Services their entire lives as well, who may have had parents who were taken away from their own parents and put in the residential school system or have been part of the '60s scoop and adopted out. So often, I think, we're dealing with generational issues that result in horrendous outcomes for children.

So I would say that, you know, the solutions to that problem are also complex. The problem is complex and the solutions are complex. But it is one of the things that makes me glad that we have invested money not only in child protection, but also in family enhancement, that we are—of course, if a child is in need of protection, if a child's safety is at risk, that's the first priority and that child should be apprehended and taken out of that situation and made sure that they're safe.

But we also know that there are a number of families who come into contact with Child and Family Services who, with the right kind of supports, with adequate supports, with supports from the community, with access to different agencies and organizations that exist, can become families that can take care of their children.

And so I am glad that the system in Manitoba is making steps—is taking steps towards being able to not only apprehend children, but also serve families and strengthen families so that they can look after their children, because I would say many of these cases, when you look at the recommendations and you look at what happened—I mean, in some cases, people do things that are just evil. I don't think there's another word for it, and I don't have the philosophical or theological ability to explain why some people do evil things. But, in many cases, we look at a child who has died and you look at what's happening in the family, you can see where there were opportunities to help that family that were missed.

And so I think that trying to strengthen not only the Child and Family Services agencies and their ability to help those families, but also the communities that those families live in is an important part of what we've been trying to do.

There also has been a lot of—a great deal of work happen, looking at the suicide strategy and how we prevent suicide. That's ongoing work, working in northern and remote communities, some of which

have suicides that are really at epidemic proportions, and putting in place clinical supports and putting in place outreach.

I'm also particularly proud of the work that the former minister did in addressing sexual exploitation of youth in this province. We look and we know that that work came out of the death of a child, and has been named in her honour, Tracia's Trust. It's \$10 million that goes every year to different kinds of programs and projects aimed at helping to prevent sexual exploitation, raising awareness in communities, raising awareness of the effects of sexual exploitation.

A big part of the campaign has been to help communities say clearly that people who sexually exploit young people, buy sex from young people, that that's not an acceptable practice in their community.

And I know that, when we started this work, several of the communities who are now involved believed that this was not an issue in their community, that this wasn't something that they needed to address. And now those communities are on board and are working. And I was very honoured to get to go to the forum that happens every year and hear about some of the work that they're doing, look at some of the art that some of the youth that are involved are producing.

Another program that has come into place through Tracia's Trust is StreetReach, and that program, we know, has helped hundreds of young people return to safety and find a safe place to be. We also put in place a residential facility for young people who are healing from sexual exploitation.

So there's been a tremendous amount of work done on that and, I think—I think, really, I want to commend the former minister for putting that in place. You know, these young people, who were the victims of sexual exploitation, are often the young people that everyone forgets about, and certainly are not—you know, there is no—there is no credit to be had in reaching out to those young people. They're the people, I think, that often our society would like to forget exist.

\* (16:30)

And so I think for the former minister to put such a focus and to put such tremendous resources—really unparalleled in the country, the amount of resources that goes into this—is to be commended. And I do think that that can also help to prevent the

kind of abuse and injury and death that we see in young people.

So, you know, it's a very difficult thing to read about the death of a child. But I do think we've put in place a way to review those deaths by the Children's Advocate and then have the recommendations followed up by the ombudsman that can ensure that, when those deaths happen, that the system can evaluate why they happened and can take some learning from those deaths and can make the appropriate changes. It's never easy. But I do think that we have now in place a system that is capable of making sure that changes happen.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Thanks, Madam Acting Chair, and we ended last day talking about the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, and I'd just like to go back and ask a couple of questions.

Does the minister have any updated timeline? Are we still looking at the same timeline or has that changed?

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing—Labour, sorry.

**Ms. Howard:** Thank you very much. Don't give me any more jobs, Mr. Chair.

The—my—the latest that I—information that I have is that the inquiry is scheduled to start July 4th and the expected conclusion would be the end of January. I know that the commission has set up a website where they update information as it's available. So I think that's the most recent information that we have. But, if the member wanted to check the website to see if there's anything more new—newer available, she could do that, but my understanding is they'll start July 4th.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Mr. Chair, and I don't know whether this would be on the website or not, but I know that the minister indicated that meetings are called with all parties that have standing. And is there information on the website on who has standing, or can the minister share that information?

**Ms. Howard:** Thank you very much. I can give what we have by memory, but I think it is also on the commission website. But, I think, in terms of who has standing, the department has standing; the four child welfare authorities and ANCR, which is intake organization, share standing; Intertribal Child and Family Services has standing; Kim Edwards and Steven Sinclair share standing; and the MGEU has

standing. We think there may be one more, but we'd have to get that off the website.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I know that there is a line in Family Services budget for the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, and I would imagine that the commissioner's paid out of the Department of Justice, and is there money anywhere else within government for the inquiry?

**Ms. Howard:** Yes, the member's correct. There is a line in the Department of Justice for the inquiry. I believe that that line covers the operations of the commission and the other parties that have standing, and our line in Family Services and Labour covers our costs as a party with standing at the inquiry. So it'd be administrative costs and legal costs for that inquiry.

And I think that's all the—I think that's the total number of places where funding for the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry appears in the budget.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I just want to move back to the position summary in the Department of Family Services and ask a few questions. I'm looking at page 18 of the detailed Estimates. And I notice under Executive Support that there's one more staff position, I believe, than was there last year. Could the minister tell me who that—what that position is and who's filling that position?

**Ms. Howard:** Just a second, actually.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Ms. Howard:** That position, I believe, is in the deputy minister's office. It's an assistant to the deputy minister that came with the deputy minister from the former Department of Labour and Immigration, and it's filled by Sarah Obaid.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** In the Policy and Planning line there, we're down one position, and I guess I'd like to know which position was eliminated, or was that a position that was transferred over to E, T and T, and who would've been in that position? What was the classification?

**Ms. Howard:** Yes, that position was transferred to ETT to support the transfer of EIA, and I'm informed that that position was vacant when it was transferred, and I wouldn't know if somebody is in it now.

\* (16:40)

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Well, it's very interesting that we are down one staff position, but the salary line in Policy and Planning is up by \$80,000. Could the minister explain that?

**Mr. Chairperson:** You still have the chair, yes.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Yes, can I just add to that? If the position was vacant, is it being filled over in E, T and T, or is it—was it a redundant position?

**Ms. Howard:** So, my understanding is the position that was moved was vacant, so I don't know if it still is vacant. I suppose that's a topic for ETT Estimates. But the position was moved, but the money remained in the budget, and that money has been used in order to provide funding for IT support for the Policy and Planning division.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** So there really—there was one position transferred and one position created then.

**Ms. Howard:** My understanding is there's not an additional position here, that it's money that was transferred in to fund a position that had been funded out of operating dollars, and it's just a more accurate way, I suppose, of funding that position that does IT—IT support.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I notice that the Innovation Information and Technology line is down by one position. Is that—was that a position that was transferred over to E, T and T, and who might that be?

**Ms. Howard:** Yes, that is a position that was transferred to ETT. That's the famous Mike Denton that we talked about the other day.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I wonder in—under Financial Administrative Services we're down eight from last year, and I know that these—I believe we talked about that yesterday, and these were positions that were transferred over to E, T and T.

Could I ask the minister—and she may not have the information at her fingertips today, but we probably won't be back into Family Services until Tuesday, so maybe I could ask that we have the information on Tuesday on the positions that were moved, what their classifications were and who was in those eight positions.

**Ms. Howard:** Yes, I'm informed we can get that by Tuesday.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** I had an interesting experience this morning. There was an individual that called that was having difficulty accessing the EIA program—a single mom, and when I spoke to her, because I wasn't quite sure where I should go because, very often, when I get issues or cases like this I will go directly to the special assistant in the minister's office and, very often, I get—I have to say I get speedy results and very good results in most instances when I make inquiries, and if someone feels—if I feel that someone is in need of emergency service, that's usually what I do. And I—so I have to say that the minister's staff—and I know she has some of the staff that was there under the previous minister and I've found them to be very helpful. So I wanted to put that on the record too.

But—okay, yesterday we—or the other day we had the discussion around what functions were transferred to E, T and T and what remained in Family Services, and the front-line service delivery remains in Family Services and those positions in the community offices are still Family Services positions. So I spoke to this woman and she was looking to receive some emergency support.

So I called the minister's office and asked to speak to one of her assistants that would deal with EIA and I was told that I needed to call the Minister of E, T and T's office to get that support. And I said, well, I'm—I hate to say I'm confused, but I was at that point in time because, basically, the people that deliver that front-line service are still employees of the Department of Family Services, they hadn't been transferred to E, T and T. My understanding is that the IT function, the administrative function and the financial function was transferred, but that the front-line services were still staff and employees of Family Services.

\* (16:50)

So, anyway, I indicated as much, and I was only talking to—and not only, but I was talking to one of the individuals that answered the phone, so they transferred me to someone who could help me. And I'm not sure it was all that clear, even to that individual, but I was told that there's an intake co-ordinator or position, in E, T and T that deals with—and I was given the name of that person in E, T and T that deals with people that have issues with employment and income assistance.

Well, I guess to me that doesn't make any sense at all. Now—and maybe the minister could get back to

me by Tuesday with—because I don't think yesterday, or the day before, when I asked questions about what positions had been transferred, there was any discussion around an intake co-ordinator, someone that—or assessor, or whatever the position or title is—being transferred over to E, T and T.

I mean, if you've got front-line service delivery that are staff members of the Department of Family Services, why would someone from the community have to call the Minister of E, T and T's office to get the very support, that that person would have to go back to the Department of Family Services to ask for?

So I—it was unbelievable, Mr. Chair, and I guess I'm really questioning what's going on here, and I wonder if I'm not understanding what's happening. And I, as an MLA, don't know which minister's office to go to, to get some help for someone who needs to access the system.

And those front-line workers are in Family Services, why I would have to go to another office and have someone over there redirect them back here? If I'm having trouble, what about those that are needing assistance? How much information has been given to those that are on the EIA program right now on where they go? Or are they being told by the minister's office, when they call, well, don't call us, call E, T and T? I mean, if I don't know where to go, how do the people that need to access the support, and the system, and the service, how do they know where to go?

So I'd like the minister to try to explain to me—and I know that she came into the position, sort of, after the decisions were made to make the changes, but it just doesn't seem to make sense to me, and I'm having difficulty understanding it. So, if she could, in the time that's left, maybe, try to explain to me, what's happening and maybe let me know what's happening to those out there that need the support and the service, those single parents.

And it was a single parent this morning that called me, Mr. Chair; what is said to them and what am I to tell them? And I guess the question, then, for me, is, where do I go, and is it going to be E, T and T that provides the support and the service or is it going to be Family Services? I—we need some straight answers and we need to know what communication is happening, so people know where they should be going and what they should be doing.



**Ms. Howard:** So I was informed by my staff that the member opposite had called and was looking for some assistance, that she spoke with my special assistant, who took the information and proceeded to work on the case that she had talked about. My understanding is that case has been resolved today, and that when she returns to her office, she should find a message on her phone from my staff indicating that.

### Point of Order

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member for River East, on a point of order.

**Mrs. Mitchelson:** Can I just indicate I did—I talked to your staff today and I want to say thank you at the outset.

But I guess the issue becomes, why did she have to call over to another department to get someone to look into it, when the staff are right in the minister's own department that deal with the issue?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay, the member does not have a point of order, but I'll pass it back to the Minister of Family Services and Labour.

\* \* \*

**Ms. Howard:** I thank the member for acknowledging that her situation that she brought forward has been dealt with and was dealt with by my staff and was dealt with, I think, in an extremely speedy way, frankly. So she brought forward information. My staff worked on it and provided a resolution to that case.

I think as we spoke the other day about what happened in that transition, that the policy and program functions for that program for EIA are now with ETT, and the front-line staff delivery of that services are with Family Services.

Oftentimes, when you get case work, they do have to deal with policy—the policies that are set for entitlement to benefits. Sometimes they have to deal with how somebody's been treated by a front-line staff; that does happen.

And so I think it, you know, was felt that because ETT had the responsibility for setting the policies and setting the criteria and setting the eligibility for Family Services, that it would make sense that the intake co-ordinator also be attached to that office.

But I will say to the member opposite, I'm not sure how government worked when she was a minister, but in our situation it's not uncommon for one minister's staff to hear about a problem and work with several departments to resolve that problem. Oftentimes we have people that phone up that are dealing with issues that touch multiple departments, and people will deal with multiple departments.

And I think in this situation, as she has stated, she received the information that she was looking for. The person who she was seeking to help, the single parent who was in need of assistance, that situation has been resolved the same day that the member opposite raised it.

So I don't see a gap in this instance in the services that were provided. I think, frankly, that it's a very good example of the system being very responsive, not only to members opposite, but also to—for this case in question.

And I do think—and I appreciate her comments on the helpfulness of my staff, because I do think the staff that work, both in my office, but also in the office for the Minister of ETT, they deal daily with situations that are very difficult of people who are requiring benefits, of people who are in contact with the child and family services system, people who are dealing with very troubling situations and oftentimes traumatic situations, and they do their jobs not only with compassion but a great amount of integrity.

And they are very attuned to the need to help, not only constituents of members on this side of the House, but constituents of members on all sides of the House, and I think that's important to note.

So I'm sorry if the member opposite found this morning confusing. My understanding was that she called, she was put through to somebody who took the information, that person made sure that the constituent, or the person that she was trying to help, got the service that they were needed, and it was resolved all in the same day. So I fail to see how that's a lack of service or a gap in service. I think that's fairly good service, frankly.

But, you know, I don't know how to make the transition more clear, and we talked about it at great length yesterday. I suppose we're just going to disagree on the necessity of that transition and that's fine; we can do that.

But, certainly, I think the goal in doing this transition has been to make sure the clients receive good service; and, if she has other case work, if she has other situations where she thinks people aren't getting their calls answered in a responsible way, or people who aren't knowing where to go, we can help to sort that out and we can help to make sure that those people are directed appropriately.

I will say so far that that hasn't been the feedback that we've received, that people do seem to

be able to find their way to the right minister and to the intake co-ordinator to get the information they're looking at, and as was the situation in this case.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. The hour being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings of the committee.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess and will reconvene tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. Thank you.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 17, 2012

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