

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

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
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
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	PC
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 24, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Repeal of The Jewish Child and Family Service Incorporation Act

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

In 1952, Jewish Child and Family Service, JCFS, was incorporated by a private act of the Legislature. This act was re-enacted by The Jewish Child and Family Service Incorporation Act, RSM 1990, chapter 80.

Since 1952, JCFS has provided a variety of social services to the Winnipeg Jewish community and the community at large, including mandated child-welfare services, poverty-reduction programs, aid to seniors to assist them to live safely and comfortably in their own homes, mental health programs, immigration and resettlement services.

In honour of its 60th anniversary, JCFS wishes to update its act to modernize the language and to ensure that the act reflects the current operations of the agency.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That The Jewish Child and Family Service Incorporation Act, RSM 1990, chapter 80, be repealed and replaced by an act that better reflects its current operations.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by R. Asper, D. Asper, M. Blankstein and many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rule 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): Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And 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 to 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 G. Fender, D. Turner, M. Borkowsky and thousands of other Manitobans.

Bipole III Routing

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been directed by this provincial government to construct its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba.

This decision will cost Manitoba taxpayers at least \$1 billion more than an east-side route, which is 500 kilometres shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to build the Bipole III transmission line on the shorter, more reliable east side of Lake Winnipeg route in order to save Manitobans from a billion-dollar boondoggle.

And this petition is signed by L. Mueller, L. Richards, J. Andrews and many, many more fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2012-2013 Estimates for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

As well, I'm pleased to table the 2012-2013 Estimates for Sport.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I'm proud to table the 2012-2013 departmental Estimates for Housing, Community Development.

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I'm pleased to table the 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Acting Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism): On behalf of the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick), I am pleased to table a Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): I'd like to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of 2012 to 2013 of the Department of Innovation, Energy and Mines.

Mr. Speaker: Prior to—oh, pardon me, ministerial statements. Seeing none.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I wish to draw the honourable members' attention to the public gallery where we have with us today Reverend Dr. Sam Son, secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention of the country of Myanmar; accompanied by Reverend Dr. James Humphries, founder and director of Project LAMBS International; and

La Wom, master degree student from the Providence Theological Seminary.

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

And also in the public gallery today, I believe we have with us from Pride Winnipeg committee Barb Burkowski, Morrissa Granove, Debbie Sladek and Scott Carman.

And also we have with us Heather Foster, Kamalah Shah and Laurie McCreery, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Family Services and Labour (Ms. Howard), the honourable Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Rondeau), and the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady).

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

And also we have with us in the public gallery from Shevchenko School 26 grade 6 students under the direction of Ms. Pamela Storoschuk. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook).

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

And also in the public gallery, from the Lord Selkirk Park Adult Learning Program, we have with us 12 adult education students under the direction of Ms. Linda Smith. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Children and Youth Opportunities.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Manitoba Evidence Act Amendment Implementation

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I also want to pay a special welcome to my guests from Myanmar and Dr. Humphries as well.

Mr. Speaker, it was a year ago that this House passed the amendments to The Manitoba Evidence Act that would allow criminal organizations to be put in a schedule, within an act, that the Attorney General said would help to speed up prosecutions of gangs.

But in a committee two weeks ago, the Attorney General told us that, in fact, a year after that legislation had been passed, not one single gang was

on that schedule, a year after he said it was important to have the legislation pass quickly so they could tackle gangs.

Which means either, Mr. Speaker, that we are now gang free in Manitoba or the Attorney General hasn't been doing his job for the last year. Which is it?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Of course, I'm always pleased to talk about the efforts that this government has made to take on organized crime in the province of Manitoba.

And, of course, there's been several very successful—very successful—integrated prosecutions that have taken place using the RCMP, the Winnipeg Police Service, as well as other municipal police services. And just in the past couple of years, we've seen some major takedowns of some very dangerous and very serious offenders in the province of Manitoba.

And, of course, the first-of-its-kind legislation that was brought forward and was passed by this House will be one more tool. But I just want to point out to members, as I said at the time, it can only be used for provincial prosecutions. It is not a catch-all; it cannot be used for the Criminal Code. We're working with the federal government. It is our hope the federal government will also move ahead with similar legislation that will allow all provinces, including Manitoba, to have more tools at their disposition to keep making this a hostile place for organized crime.

Income Assistance Benefits

Denial for Outstanding Warrants Implementation

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, hostile environment: it's been a year and there's not one gang listed on this schedule.

But that's not the only thing that the government's been sitting on for a year. In fact, it was a year ago in this very Assembly that we passed the legislation that would stop welfare payments from going to individuals who had serious outstanding warrants.

It took a long time for the government to come to that position, that they didn't want taxpayers to be paying for individuals who are avoiding the law, but they finally got there. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, that legislation was passed by this House, I think

unanimously, a year ago, and as of this morning, it's still not proclaimed.

Why is that legislation gathering dust a year after it should've been working to protect Manitobans?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I will remind that the Hells Angels who came into town when the Progressive Conservative Party did nothing about gangs in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Hells Angels clubhouse on Scotia Street now sits padlocked because the efforts of our Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit. It's now closed down, and we're moving to sell that property and we're moving to give the proceeds of that property to law enforcement and victims of crime in this province to keep working.

* (13:40)

With respect to the warrant legislation, of course, the member opposite, again, it's opposition by Google. He got on his computer and he thought he liked what they were doing in BC. But what were they doing in British Columbia? If somebody came in with—they would ask them when they're applying for social assistance, do you have any outstanding warrants? And if somebody said no, that was the end of it.

You know, maybe the member opposite will take the word of criminals, but, you know, Mr. Speaker, I don't.

Bills

Proclamation Timelines

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'm no longer going to take the word of this minister. You know, last year, he said this was important. Today there's no gangs on the schedule, and the legislation on outstanding warrants hasn't even been proclaimed, Mr. Speaker.

And, you know, there are only about, as of tomorrow, about three weeks left in the scheduled sitting of this Legislature. At best, there'll be five or six days, Mr. Speaker, left to debate 40 public and private bills, and no doubt the government will stand up and do what it did last year and say, it's urgent that we get bills passed, it's urgent that bills get proceeded on.

They said that about the gang legislation, and there's not one gang on there. They said that about

the legislation to stop taxpayers' money going to individuals who had serious outstanding warrants. That hasn't even been proclaimed.

Will they acknowledge that all they're concerned about is headlines?

They'll probably do the same thing this time, say it's urgent that things get passed with only five or six days left in the session, and then they'll gather dust in the corner of the Premier's office for another year.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm very proud of this government's steps, even in this session, to continue bringing in laws which help the safety of Manitobans, which will protect first responders from traps from animals which are being used by criminal organizations to shield their activities.

I'm very proud that we brought in The Missing Persons Act, which is going to give to police the tools they need to continue to move as quickly as they can to try and bring home people who go missing.

I'm also very proud, Mr. Speaker, that yesterday I stood in this House and introduced amendments to The Human Rights Code which will protect those who are socially disadvantaged and protect transgendered Manitobans.

I'm very proud of all those efforts that we're making on behalf of all Manitobans to make this a safer, a more tolerant and more inclusive community, and I certainly hope the member and his colleagues on the other side of the House will support these pieces of legislation.

Highway 75 Hydraulic Study Status

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, on March 18th, 2010, the NDP government announced it was commissioning a hydraulic assessment for the Red River in relation to Highway 75.

In its news release, and it said, and I'm quoting, we are moving forward with phase 2 of our plan, which is focused on addressing the complex set of challenges associated with PTH 75 around Morris. End quote.

It was reported in the media that this assessment would take about a year, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicate if this hydraulic study was completed early last year as promised?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess we're going to have to recycle the discussion from Estimates where this question was raised, and it was pointed out that last year and this year, we've had historic flooding—not so much in the Red River Valley, although I do point out there was flooding there last year—and as a result, we were very up front—pretty well every last hydraulic engineer in this province, whether it be our own staff or in terms of consulting engineers, was redeployed in terms of that.

And I want to indicate, as I did in Estimates, again, that we have begun that hydraulic work in terms of Highway 75, but, clearly, Mr. Speaker, the flood of 2011-2012 took precedence, and I think people in the Red River Valley understand that, because people in the valley know that when it comes to a flood, you put every last resource into, not planning for future situations, but dealing with the immediate flood.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, in question period on April 12th, 2011, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was asked about the state of planning to avoid closures of this vital highway, one that's critical for our economy, for tourism and, indeed, for emergency services.

And the Premier responded, and I quote, it's an area under which engineering studies are presently occurring, and further, he said, the reality is the study is going on. End quote.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Premier announced two years ago a study was under way. Then last year, he said studies were presently occurring, and now we learn that it's delayed, and they say it's because of the flood. But, clearly, if this had been done as promised, it would've been completed before the flood of last spring. This is just an example, another example, of this Premier saying that they're going to do something just to get a headline, and then do nothing.

Why is it that the Premier has been misleading Manitobans about a lack of any plan for Highway 75, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Ashton: I just can't believe that that member would talk about Highway 75 and not acknowledge that it was this government, starting in 1999, that took what was an embarrassment to Manitobans—I'll tell you, if you returned back from the, you know, a visit south of the border on Highway 75 in 1999, it was an embarrassment.

We've invested a hundred million dollars in upgrading Highway 75, Mr. Speaker. And I'll tell you what we're doing: we are investing that kind of money to build it up to interstate standards. And if she wonders about our plan and our commitment to Highway 75, she might want to watch the town of Morris where this year we're going to be finishing the surfacing through Morris.

I hope one of these times, Mr. Speaker, one of those members opposite will stand up and give this government credit for all the work that's happening, particularly on Highway 75 in southern Manitoba.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Estimates, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation admitted that this study, whose goal it is to find a way to keep Highway 75 open during major flood events, was never started as promised.

Two years ago, with great fanfare, the NDP announced their commencement of a study, and last year the Premier said in this House it was presently occurring. All the while, he knew it was never started.

It's just another reason why we can't trust this Premier, a Premier that, before elections, says he won't raise taxes, then he raises taxes. He allows a minister to get away with breaking the law. He allows another minister to politicize the civil service. He stacks boards with NDP donators. He has no credibility and cannot be trusted.

I'll ask the Premier now: When is this study going to get started? Because on Friday it wasn't started yet, Mr. Speaker. Why should we believe anything he says?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, as minister responsible for highways in this province, you know, on occasion we have detours, but that's about the longest detour I've seen in question period.

And just so the member knows, we do internal work. We presented—I went out personally to Morris, we presented, we narrowed it down from 63 options down to about three. That's the internal work. It was done, Mr. Speaker.

We indicated there was a flood last year. The member may not have known it, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take advice from the former minister. She may want to get her Lexus out and do a little bit of driving around Manitoba. We had a historic flood last year, and we make no apologies for fighting the flood first and still being committed to Highway 75.

We've quadrupled the highway capital funding, Mr. Speaker. A lot of it's gone to 75, but, of course, every time we do that, she votes against it.

Lake of the Prairies Water Levels

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike that unprecedented flood of 2011, farmers in the Assiniboine River Valley downstream of the Shellmouth Dam have successfully finished seeding their land this year. However, they are extremely concerned about the level of—the rising level, rather, of the Lake of the Prairies and the threat of artificial flooding on their land. Their skepticism arises from the NDP's mismanaged forecasting of these water levels in 2011.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the minister responsible provide an update on the current level of the water in the Lake of the Prairies?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): A series of questions were raised in Estimates. We actually had very, you know, extensive discussion—very important issues in Estimates.

I do want to put on the record, though, that in terms of the forecasting last year and this year, that we had historic flooding. We had in the range of one-in-350, one-in-400-year flooding on the Assiniboine, on the Souris, in Lake Manitoba, in Lake St. Martin and very significant flooding, by the way, in northern Manitoba and actually in the Red River, although it certainly was not at the previous level.

I do want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that the questions were also raised in terms of the Shellmouth, in terms of the potential impacts on homeowners in that area, and I want to be up front again. What I said in Estimates: again, there's been a delay because every last hydraulic engineer and technician in this province has been oriented towards fighting the flood. But I do want to assure the member that one thing we will do, by the way, is follow through on the Shellmouth.

It was this government that brought in legislation for the first time to deal with artificial flooding in the Shellmouth valley, Mr. Speaker. So I want to—again, hope that the member opposite will give us some credit for making a real difference—

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

* (13:50)

Shellmouth Dam Reservoir Capacity Level

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't get an answer to my question.

The Assiniboine valley producers told me that last night the water level was 1.4 feet from uncontrollably flowing over the Shellmouth Dam. Mr. Speaker, the Assiniboine valley farmers are deeply concerned that the water will begin to flow over the Shellmouth Dam spillway in the next week even with little or no more moisture. This'll put their crops at risk.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why the Shellmouth Reservoir was allowed to get so full this spring that it may now jeopardize the Assiniboine valley farmers' seeded land in the area from Brandon to the Shellmouth Dam?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member is more than aware, or should be aware, of the management processes involved with the Shellmouth Dam.

He should also be aware that the Shellmouth Dam last year played a key role in our ability to manage the flood. There would have been a lot more damage if it hadn't been for the pre-emptive work that was done by our technical staff based on the forecasts.

I do want to point out, by the way, that we are in a spring runoff. It may pale by comparison to last year, but we're dealing with the runoff that's in place.

And I do want to stress again, by the way, that one of the things that we have done—it took people in that area decades before they got this, but it was an NDP government that brought in the legislation that provides them—it provided, in 2009-2010, coverage, Mr. Speaker, in terms of any artificial floodings related to Shellmouth.

Once again, I hope the member would give us some credit for listening to the people in that area and responding.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, the Assiniboine valley flooded farmers know full well what happened in 2011. These farmers are desperate for answers when it comes to the proper management of this valuable water resource. They're exhausted from the—too often being the scapegoats of this NDP government's mismanagement. In spite of a very dry spring, these producers believe they are in danger of losing their

crops to artificial flooding this year. It's this year we're asking about.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister assure these concerned Assiniboine valley flooded farmers that they will be compensated if they're artificially flooded this summer as a result of this minister's ineptitude to manage the Shellmouth water levels, or is it his intention to just let them fend for themselves again?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important—and perhaps the member may wish to talk to the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart)—that this structure provides two purposes. One, it's very useful in terms of flood situations, but it's also important to maintain a supply of water in the case of droughts. And many areas of this province in 2012 are faced with a drought, and this—and the Shellmouth Dam provides a critical role in supplying a significant part of the agriculture in the member from Portage's area and, in fact, throughout southern Manitoba in around the Assiniboine watershed. So we have to balance both needs.

But if the question is, will there be coverage, I just said it in the previous two questions. Thanks to the NDP, thanks to Legislature which approved this—I'm not sure if members opposite voted for it, they might have on this one—but, you know, in this case we have guaranteed coverage for any artificial flooding in the Shellmouth. But we're also going to be there to provide water supply in a drought situation to a good part of the value-added production in southern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Shoreline Restoration Strategy

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the 2011 flood has left a devastating legacy for landowners and residents around Lake Manitoba. Now that the water is finally starting to recede, all the damage is evident. Thousands of acres of crop and pasture land contain scattered debris. Thousands of trees are dead but still standing and must be destroyed. Even more concerning is the hundreds of kilometres of damaged shoreline which is left exposed to wave action and continued erosion.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain what this government has actually done to green the fields and help them come back more quickly, as he claimed in a recent interview?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I'm hoping the member from Portage la Prairie will get together with the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and agree on the priorities. We agree with you. We have to pay attention to these flood-related issues.

Under the disaster financial assistance program, there is work that can be done to repair these damaged lands. We put forward on our own initiative last year a greenfields program; unfortunately, we haven't seen federal participation in that. We've gone ahead with a hundred per cent funding of that program from our end of the table.

We will continue to invest in rehabilitating land, restoring shoreline, putting record resources into helping people get their homes back in shape and, for the first time ever, we also have resources available for cottagers.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has admitted there are a lot of environmental issues related to the flood. Valuable wildlife habitat around Lake Manitoba has either been destroyed or badly disturbed. The lack of protected living vegetation has left hundreds of kilometres of shoreline vulnerable to ongoing destruction. An immediate restoration strategy is needed to prevent further damage and allow this fragile environment to begin healing.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister finally commit today to implementing a restoration strategy?

We could take a lesson from stakeholders like conservation districts, who use strategies like planting willows or trees to protect vulnerable shorelines.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, I will give credit where credit is due, and I think it's a worthwhile suggestion from the member.

We do have a number of areas in the province where we have been working with 'municipalities' and other stakeholders, in particular with conservation districts. In doing this, I do want to credit work of the conservation districts.

By the way, another thing I'm very proud of is that it's this government that's doubled the number of conservation districts in the province. And this kind of innovative approach to, yes, what is a natural situation in many circumstances, shoreline erosion, but that can be aggravated by floods, I think, is very worthwhile. And it's certainly something this government is prepared to work with the

conservation districts, municipalities, and individual Manitobans, and I do want to thank the member for raising that question.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had an opportunity to fly over Lake Manitoba and to witness first-hand the ongoing impact of the 2011 flood. The damage is widespread. Vegetation along the shoreline is badly damaged; there is debris in the marshes along the shore.

Valuable crop, pasture, and hay land will not be productive for several years unless some type of restoration strategy is quickly implemented.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this government again: Where are the extra resources the Premier has identified to help green the fields and put them back to production? It's critical that the recovery process is implemented in a timely manner.

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member from Portage la Prairie for the question, and as he knows, the first and most significant thing we did was build the additional channel in the Lake St. Martin area, which has resulted, Mr. Speaker, in Lake Manitoba being about three feet lower than it would otherwise be in the absence of that channel. That has made a gigantic difference—that has made a gigantic difference on Lake Manitoba.

In addition, we announced last year a greenfeed program that will allow restoration of land that's used for productive purposes around Lake Manitoba that's a hundred per cent funded by the Province of Manitoba.

We invited participation from the federal government; they did not see their way clear to fund that program. We will continue with that program.

We also have additional programs in place, like the Riparian Tax Credit. We will work with producers and people around the lake to restore that area, and we will work to keep the lake down, below what it achieved last year.

Mandatory Legislative Reviews Auditor General's Recommendation

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for seeing fit to adopt one of the policies of our five-point alternative budget plan, Mr. Speaker.

Last night at Public Accounts, it was revealed that the government will be making public sector compensation disclosure reporting for Crown

corporations and other government reporting entities more accessible to the public. This increase in transparency is part of what we have been calling on this government to implement in Bill 211.

Mr. Speaker, also at Public Accounts last night, the government appeared to be at odds with one of the Auditor General's recommendations. The recommendation calls for the Department of Finance to help co-ordinate, with the government departments, on implementing mandatory legislative reviews. This makes sense and would create more transparency and accountability for this process.

Will the government agree to implement this recommendation, and if not, why not?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I appreciate the question because I think, first of all, it—I think it allows all of us to underscore the importance of working with the Auditor General to make sure that the advice that she gives us is incorporated into as many aspects of government as we can, Mr. Speaker. That's been our approach. That's been the Department of Finance's approach in working with Ms. Bellringer and making sure that that advice is appropriate.

The member for Tuxedo is partially right, but she's partially wrong, Mr. Speaker. We are monitoring, in this particular aspect, we are making sure that we're putting in place a system that is decentralized so that each and every department has the accountability of these reviews and this approach.

It's not that we disagree with what the auditor—provincial auditor's saying; we are saying we're going to get to the same goal, we might be doing it slightly differently—*[interjection]*

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

Mrs. Stefanson: If there are ways to make government more transparency and—transparent and accountable and if there are ways to streamline and help government departments in this review process, I would think that members opposite would embrace that policy, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:00)

Instead, the Minister of Finance is passing the buck, saying it isn't his job. Well, clearly, the Auditor General disagrees. This really should be a no-brainer, Mr. Speaker. It helps government. It helps the public. It's a win-win.

Why does this government disagree with the Auditor General and refuse to implement this recommendation?

Mr. Struthers: The Auditor General and our Department of Finance have no disagreement in terms of the final goal by which—which we want to meet. There's no disagreement on that, Mr. Speaker.

We're saying that we have put in place a framework that is decentralized, that puts the accountability on every single department, who know these rules and their departments the best and are best situated to make sure that this final goal is met, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General recommends a more centralized approach. Mr. Speaker, that's fine. We think that we have a—even a better framework that's in place, a more rigorous framework and a framework that is more transparent and more accountable. But I want to make it clear we're always open to advice from the provincial auditor.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, maybe he should take her advice on this one, then, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the departments are looking for guidance in this area. The Auditor General has come up with a recommendation to help them out and make the whole process more transparent and accountable. Right now, only 56 per cent of the mandatory reviews of regulations were undertaken. Someone must act in a—as a co-ordinator of all of this to ensure that all mandatory reviews are completed, not just 56 per cent of them.

The Auditor General has made a recommendation to help this process along, yet the NDP government is refusing to implement that recommendation.

Will the Minister of Finance show some leadership and agree to implement the Auditor General's recommendation?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, what was evident last night in chapter 7 of what we were discussing, we were 19 for 19 in terms of implementing the Auditor General's recommendations. In chapter 9, we were in—working on and agreed to complete the recommendations that she had put forward there.

In the chapter that the member puts forward, chapter 8, we were two of three in terms of the recommendations, and we—and I have explained in the previous question the one recommendation in

which we think we've actually gone further than what the Auditor General has recommended for us.

I don't want members opposite to try to leave on the record that things aren't being monitored. I don't want them to leave on the—try to leave on the record that things aren't being co-ordinated, Mr. Speaker. That job is being done in every single department in this government.

Mining Sector Government Development Strategy

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, today marks the beginning of Mining Week in Manitoba. While we should be celebrating the industry, it is clear this government has turned its back on the mining sector.

The latest mining sector survey shows Manitoba has dropped to 20th place in terms of jurisdictions in which to do business. Compared to our neighbours, Manitoba ranks as the second worst province in Canada to do business.

Mr. Speaker, what will this government do to turn this around and make Manitoba more competitive in the mining sector?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member's reporting—is indicating the report by the Fraser Institute, which is a self-reporting report that is often used by individuals to make certain points on certain ideological frameworks.

I'd like to indicate that this year we're projecting for the most recent figures investments in mining of \$115 million, which will be the second highest since the record year of 2007, Mr. Speaker, and we're very pleased with the rebound of the mining sector investments in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's hear what the mining industry across the world is saying about Manitoba.

I quote from the latest mining sector report: Manitoba, on the other hand, seems to be on a steady decline, going from ninth spot last year to 20th this year. Until this year, Manitoba was consistently in the top 10 and just five years ago was No. 1. End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the lack of a concrete framework to allow development, Manitoba is losing investment and development to other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: When will he develop a positive policy to attract investment to this province?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I already indicated to the member that we're looking for the second-highest investments since the precession of 2008 of \$115 million. And I might add that the MEAP program has attracted over \$20 million worth of investment as a result of the program that was introduced by our government.

And I might add to the member that he might take a look at the Lalor mine, which is the largest mining project ever developed in Manitoba, which is under way, as we speak, in—near Snow Lake. And if the member wants any further confirmation of the climate in Manitoba, he ought to go to southwestern Manitoba and see the record petroleum development that's occurring in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: The fact remains that Manitoba is the second least attractive province in Canada to do mining across this country.

Mr. Speaker, it's not that we don't have the resources; it's the fact that this government stands in the road of investment and development. Exploration expenditures are 30 per cent lower than they were in 2008, despite record global interest in finding new mining deposits. Exploration is the cornerstone for the future of the industry, but people simply won't invest in Manitoba because of this government's policy.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear we're headed in the wrong direction. Which concrete steps will the minister take to turn this trend around?

Mr. Chomiak: The introduction of the MEAP grants this year has made a significant impact; \$1.5 million in geoscientific geography is taking place, as well as further investments. And as we speak, Mr. Speaker, the Lalor mine is a \$750-million investment. It is going on in Manitoba as we speak, which is one of the reasons that it's gone from exploration to actual investment in a mine.

And I again reiterate to the member, the figures coming in for last year are \$115 million, which is the second highest in history, which is a perceptible increase from the downturn after 2008. I invite the member to look at the mining statistics that are coming out this year, and he will see a significant increase for the province of Manitoba.

Water Management Policy Government Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): For 12 and a half years the government's pursued a drain, drain, drain water management policy. The amount of drainage on this premier's watch is enormous. The effort in water retention, by comparison, has been miniscule. The volume of water coming off the land's increased dramatically; the result's been increased flooding, increased phosphorus going into Lake Winnipeg, increased algal blooms and a situation where Lake Winnipeg is now recognized as an international ecological disaster.

Will the Premier acknowledge the disastrous impact his government's water management policies have had to increase flooding and to worsen the situation of Lake Winnipeg?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): This is the government that invested about a billion dollars in preventing flooding in the Red River Valley over the last decade.

We took the protection for the city of Winnipeg from one-in-100-year protection to one-in-700-year protection. We worked with communities in southern Manitoba to do ring dikes around all the major communities. Properties outside of those communities had their floor—their lip—they were elevated two feet above the '97 levels, and all of those investments have made a very significant difference in the ability to withstand floods in the Red River Valley, which allowed us to concentrate our resources on the Assiniboine valley—River Valley during last year's unprecedented events.

And the member knows full well that we are doing marsh restoration on the south end of Lake Winnipeg, as well as on Lake Manitoba as well. We're looking at all measures necessary to not only restore the ability of our land to retain water, but the quality of water that we have in our lakes.

Mr. Gerrard: Greg McCullough, an expert in this area, has shown that the increased flow of water off the land, as a result of the Premier's policy, leads to a very—the very increase in phosphorus causing so much trouble for Lake Winnipeg. Earlier this year at a symposium at the University of Manitoba, the Minister of Conservation acknowledged that there needed to be a completely new approach to water management, acknowledging the failure of the government's past policies.

I ask the Premier, once again, to acknowledge his government's water management policies have been completely misdirected and to tell this Chamber when he'll have new, well-funded approaches to place a better approach to water retention, preventing flooding and reducing 'algal blooms' on Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member. He will know that we brought forward save Lake Winnipeg legislation last year, which addressed issues of biological nutrient removal in our sewage system; which addressed issues of ensuring that septic fields and underwater systems are properly registered, properly regulated, properly inspected; which dealt with issues of phosphorus and having detergents phosphorus-free—we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to do that; with—dealt with issues of waste from hog operations to ensure that they're safe and are dealt with properly.

* (14:10)

All of these measures are for the purposes of ensuring that we do not have eutrophication, excessive eutrophication on our major lakes, like Lake Winnipeg. And, in addition, Mr. Speaker, we've put in place measures, like riparian tax credits, other measures to ensure that water doesn't flow where it doesn't need to flow. But where it does need to flow, to allow people to have productive use of the land, we've taken those measures as well.

Lake Winnipeg Environmental Initiatives

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, at Matheson Island earlier this spring, a fishing derby involved hundreds of fishermen who went out and spent hours and hours fishing and caught one solitary fish. Now, that's not normal. The area had severe algal blooms in the region. The algae were dying, probably causing a big dead zone where there's no oxygen. It's an example of what could happen on a much larger scale on Lake Winnipeg.

I ask the Premier: With the Experimental Lakes research centre being terminated, what is the Premier doing to ensure the already tragic ecological catastrophe on Lake Winnipeg doesn't progress any further and is reversed?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We do fund, at a record level, research with the *Namao* ship on Lake Winnipeg. We do have a relationship with the international institute of sustainable development to

look at how we can use natural methods of reducing nitrification on the lake, including the Netley Marsh on the south end of the lake.

We are very interested, as I've discussed with the member from River Heights, on what we can do to preserve the Experimental Lakes research. It has made a very significant difference, not only on the Great Lakes of Ontario, on Lake Manitoba, but lakes all around the world. So we are looking at measures we can take to ensure that that research retains an important part of our future ability to ensure that our lakes have a healthy quality to them and that everybody can enjoy them and that they 'provard' a productive purpose, including for fisherpersons that use those lakes. The fisherpersons on Lake Winnipeg have a very substantial revenue that comes off of that, in the order of a quarter of a billion dollars a year. It plays a very important role for recreational fishing in this province and all of our lakes, our hundred thousand lakes in Manitoba, are worthy of protecting. The member knows that we'll continue to work on that, and we invite his participation in that process.

Manitoba Hydro Place LEED Platinum Certification

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, there was an announcement in Manitoba Hydro Place today that was a first for Winnipeg, a first for Manitoba and, in fact, a first for Canada.

Can the minister responsible please tell the House what happened today at Manitoba Hydro Place?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to reply to the fact that Manitoba Hydro Place received the LEED platinum certification as the most energy efficient office tower in North America and the only office tower in Canada to 'resteeve' this—to receive this prestigious rating.

And the interesting thing about this building is that, compared to conventional office towers, Manitoba Hydro Place has achieved reductions in energy use of 70 per cent. That is \$500,000 in savings a year in energy savings.

That's the creation—the easiest way to create energy, Mr. Speaker, is to conserve energy, and this building is the best example in North America, and I'm very pleased that Manitoba Hydro was a leader. And I'm only saddened by the fact that members

opposite have opposed that building, have opposed Manitoba Hydro from the time it commenced—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Lyme Disease Patient Long-Term Disability Access

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, numerous cases of Lyme disease has been reported in Manitoba. If not treated in time, the disease can manifest itself into many different symptoms and can have am—harmful effects on the life of the patient. Several patients have contacted my office, all with stories of being rejected from long-term disability, all on account of their condition with Lyme disease. These patients are unable to work or lead a productive life, yet this province will not provide with them with assistance of any kind.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask this Minister for Health: Why are Lyme disease sufferers rejected from long-term disability in this province?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has spoken to me about a particular case involving an individual that has had a diagnosis of Lyme disease and is pursuing multiple supports. I know that my office has been in contact with that individual and we're working through with the individual to ascertain which supports might be available to this person.

The member opposite now has referenced several patients have come to him. If he could work with me to make us aware of any others that are having difficulty, I want to let him know that we would be happy to work with him.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, we've seen an increase in the Lyme disease all across the province, that the minister and the Health Department had rejected claims for long-term disability, even when the patients cannot work or provide for themselves. This government should be responsible for helping people. Patients are getting sick and demand answers. While politicians can doubt science, no one can doubt that these patients are incredibly ill.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this minister: Why are these patients being rejected for long-term disability?

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, in the case of the individual that the member has brought forward, we are working across departments to ascertain the details of the case, to find out which specific supports might be most appropriate. We know individuals that are debilitated by any kind of

illness have opportunities in Manitoba, as they do in other jurisdictions. We want to clarify these situations. Certainly, in this individual case, we want to make sure that all the facts that are being presented are indeed fully explored, and we are already in contact days ago with this individual. We're going to continue to work with that person, in addition to building our complement of public health providers that can do the best possible that they can in the treatment and the long-term recuperation of those living with Lyme disease.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, since this case has come to light and has been raised in this House, there's been many, many more people that have come forward and that had been rejected and have had to go outside the province for tests.

Mr. Speaker, this illness has robbed the people of their livelihood and of their everyday life. Many patients are left unable to speak, to work or to live a productive life. This department rejects cries for help. That's what they've done. This department allows these patients to sit on the sideline of society, and they have done that all the way along, and for their life to be taken away.

I ask this minister once again: Why won't something be done for the sufferers of Lyme disease?

Ms. Oswald: I would instruct the member, as I have previously, that we have been working with our public health professionals and, indeed, a very active group of Lyme disease advocates. The deputy minister and public health officials, chief public health officer, have met with this group on numerous occasions. Indeed, they've taken their advice on many occasions. We're working on public communications; we're working on exploring the science and, indeed, one of the key members of that group has told our deputy minister and our department that they're very grateful for the reception that they're getting, the advice that we're taking. I believe in the words of this individual member, Manitoba is the only province that is listening to them.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Pride Winnipeg

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Pride Winnipeg. Pride of the Prairies, an ever-growing

festival of events celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer community.

Mr. Speaker, over the course of 10 days, Pride Week will feature a host of events, from sports tournaments to cocktail parties and coffee house performances by some of Winnipeg's LGBTTQ artists. This week kicks off tomorrow with the Pride flag being raised at Winnipeg City Hall and the week ends with a rally at the Legislature on Sunday, June 3rd, followed by a parade through downtown to The Forks festival grounds, and then dancing the night away at the official dance party.

The Pride parade has grown to encompass large numbers of people, both within the LGBTTQ community and those who are allies, including friends and family.

The original Winnipeg Pride parade was much different than it is now. Legally and socially, the world was an oppressive and homophobic place. Many people in that first march wore paper bags over their heads to conceal their identities. Today, over 30,000 people participate. Members of this government would be proud to participate in Pride Week events.

There are many dedicated people over the 25-year history that have served on the Pride Winnipeg committee who deserve a lot of recognition, and Barb Burkowski is one of those people. She has served as the chair of Pride Winnipeg for the last five years and has made sure that the 25th anniversary of Pride in Winnipeg will not—will be one not soon forgotten.

* (14:20)

Pride Week is an important time to reflect on the gains that the LGBTTQ community has made, while remembering there is still much to be accomplished. It is also important to remember that many within the community are discriminated against, and Pride Week serves as an opportunity to work towards positive change.

I urge all members to support this celebration of Winnipeg queer history and, most importantly, to honour those who have fought so long for LGBTTQ equality and human rights for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

John Usackis

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I rise today to honour Mr. John Usackis, an avid competitor,

enthusiast and supporter of curling at the local, provincial and national level. In May 2008 Mr. Usackis was inducted into the Manitoba Curling Hall of Fame and he continues to compete in senior and masters men's curling bonspiels to this day. As it stands, Mr. Usackis has been curling for over 60 years.

Mr. Usackis was introduced to curling at the age of 11 when his school organized an extracurricular program to teach young students to play. However, he became interested in curling one winter when the local hockey rink was shut down. Once he had learnt to play, Mr. Usackis's lifelong passion for the game had begun.

Over the next several decades, Mr. Usackis competed in over 46 provincial championships, won three provincial titles and he sits second in total games played in the history of the Manitoba provincial championships.

Mr. Usackis is a great proponent of local curling in the—in Lac du Bonnet, and he is a Lac du Bonnet Community Centre representative. He was instrumental in bringing the community centre to Lac du Bonnet in the late 1990s, and I admire him for his role in that. In fact, last year the community centre had printed up 1,000 fundraising calendars and Mr. Usackis had sold over 700 of them himself.

Mr. Usackis is an admirable Lac du Bonnet community member who pursued his passion for curling 'nearling'—nearly all of his life and in doing so made an immense contribution to his community, his sport and the organizations around him. I think we are all deeply moved when we hear the story of Mr. Usackis and his lifetime of service.

That is why I take great pride in recognizing such an amazing individual who has made such an amazing contribution to the sport of curling in Lac du Bonnet. May he continue to inspire others as he inspires me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Henri Dupuis

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct honour today to acknowledge and congratulate an exemplary teacher from the River East Transcona School Division. Recently, the Manitoba School Library Association named Henri Dupuis MSLA Outstanding Teacher-Librarian of the Year. This award honours practising teacher-librarians who are making an outstanding

contribution to school librarianship in Manitoba. As libraries form the heart of our schools, I think it is important to recognize teacher-librarians like Henri who make certain that school libraries and the services they offer provide learning supports for teachers, our students and their families.

Henri Dupuis has been a teacher-librarian at Springfield Heights School for the past six years and throughout his 26-year career has exemplified the service and dedication of teachers in our province. His library faces certain challenges as Springfield Heights is a triple-track school with programs in English, French and Ukrainian. For many, this may mean triple the work, but for Henri it means more chances to demonstrate the power of the library to students from different backgrounds and to help foster and nurture learning and student achievement.

As if running a triple-track library were not enough, Henri is also involved in many different extracurricular clubs and programs to help promote literacy and learning among the students. For the library this includes two French literacy clubs: *Je lis tout*, for grades 4 to 6; *Lis moi tout*, for grades K to 3; alongside MYRCA club for grades 5 and 6 students; and the annual I Love To Read month activities. In addition, he helps manage Springfield Heights' K Kids Club, a group of global learners dedicated to helping the community. They accomplish this through fundraising, volunteering and raising awareness on a variety of issues. All these programs demonstrate Henri's commitment to expanding the horizons of the students at Springfield Heights. His energy is so evident not only in the library, but throughout the school, in classrooms and hallways. And I have seen how wonderfully the students respond to this energy.

Henri's commitment does not end with the school day. On Saturdays he hosts a French language and culture radio program called *La musique pour tout le monde*—

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

Does the honourable member have leave to conclude her remarks? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Braun: Thank you—*La musique pour tout le monde*. On it, he brings in grade 5 students as guest reporters to profile French singers and helps grade 6 students plan, research and perform a pretaped segment of the show called *La ligue de radio scolaire*. By bringing his passion for education to the

airwaves, he promotes education and French cultural literacy.

Mr. Speaker, Henri Dupuis's dedication to education inside and outside of the library proves that he richly deserves the MLSA Outstanding Teacher-Librarian of the Year Award. Henri Dupuis is in the gallery with us today and I ask all members to join me in congratulating him and to thank him for his commitment to helping students grow, learn and flourish.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Missing Children's Month

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, May is Missing Children's Month, a month devoted to increasing awareness about the serious issue of missing children.

Missing Children's Month originated in 1986, after Kristen French from St. Catharines, 'ontaria'-Ontario, was unfortunately abducted and murdered. Every year since, Canadians have come together during Missing Children's Month to show support and concern for missing children and their families.

Today, Missing Children's Month provides a vital opportunity to raise awareness in Manitoba and Canada. Across the country, individuals and businesses participate in many activities, such as fingerprint clinics and neighbourhood canvassing, to raise important funds. Proceeds generated from these initiatives enable the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, formerly Child Find Canada, to fulfill its mandate of assisting in the search for missing children and educating both children and adults about the importance of personal safety.

Every year, more than 50,000 reports of missing children are made to police in Canada. Within Manitoba alone, approximately 4,000 children are reported missing every year. Due to the good work of the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP and other community and government organizations, the majority of these children are safely recovered. Of all children reported missing, one in six are located as a direct result of a published photograph. In taking just a few seconds to view these photographs, we can all play a critical role in the recovery of a missing child.

Many cases, however, remain open for years and some children are never found. I ask all members in this House to join me in wishing those children who are missing a swift and safe return to their families and friends.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Transcona Political History

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Mr. Speaker, on April the 12th, Transcona officially marked its hundredth anniversary as a community. At the official ceremony the Premier (Mr. Selinger) gave an eloquent history of Transcona and the role of the NDP and the CNR in shaping it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to further reflect on Transcona's political history, one that is clearly intertwined with the railway.

As far back as 1920, Arthur Moore was elected as the soldier-labour MLA for Springfield. He was twice—he was a twice-wounded soldier during World War I and later went on to serve as Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion.

In the provincial election of October 15, 1945, George Olive was elected as the CCF MLA for Springfield. He was employed by the CNR, and previously served as the mayor of Transcona.

On June 8, 1953, Russ Paulley succeeded Olive as the CCF MLA for the Kildonan for Kildonan-Transcona. Paulley was born in Elmwood, he was an upholsterer by trade and was employed by the CNR Shops as foreman of the upholstery division. After serving as mayor of Transcona, Paulley was first elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 1953 and rose to become the NDP leader. Under the Schreyer government as Labour Minister, Paulley was responsible for the introduction of higher minimum wages, reduced weekly hours of work, workplace health and safety act and other progressive legislation.

In October 1977, Wilson Parasiuk was elected MLA for Transcona representing the NDP 'til 1988, serving as the Minister of Energy and Mines and later Minister of Health.

And, of course, in 1990, Mr. Speaker, you were elected as MLA for Transcona and have been serving the good people of your constituency ever since.

Federally, Transcona was exceptionally represented by the Honourable Bill Blaikie, who served the residents of Elmwood-Transcona for 30 years.

It's good to be part of a government that continues to support Transcona through projects like the Transcona Centennial Square and major road projects that benefit the citizens of Transcona, such

as the rehabilitation of Regent Avenue and Dugald Road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Swan (Acting Government House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if you could call Committee of Supply.

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

HEALTHY LIVING, SENIORS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

* (14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs.

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

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): Before we start, I'd like to introduce my staff at the table. We have Cindy Stevens is the DM; Alex Morton, who is new today, she's the ADM of the Consumer Affairs Department; we have, of course, Dave Paton, who's the exec director of finance; and we also have Jennifer Hibbert, who's the director of finance.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister and his staff for being here with us today. This is my first time as a critic for Consumer Affairs in Estimates, so I'd ask the patience of the Chair and the committee in that regard and I will get started.

I'd like to start off with a couple questions that were left over from my colleague from Charleswood

that had asked the minister on Tuesday, May 22nd, regarding the Health e-Plan website where if users sign up to this site, they could win prizes, and what were these prizes on the website? And—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll go through the prizes. Basically, there's been a lot of users who logged in. As I mentioned the other day, no MLAs or government officials were able to win prizes. There was 3,675 prize ballots were entered in the rewards program. There was 212 people won rewards. A third party randomly selects the winners, and there's no sharing of personal information between the operation and the people who win.

The rewards include Canadian Tire gift cards. They're \$20 gift cards. There was 16 of those. Another \$10 gift card, there's 19 of those. There was some reusable in motion shopping bags. There was about 20 of those. Reflective leg bands, which are used for biking, there was 19 of those. Reflective zipper tags for the coats, there was 20 of those. Some stress balls, which could have been used here but they weren't. They were used in in motion. Sorry. And there was 13 of those. There was 24 pedometers. There was 60 Goldeye tickets. There was 20 Bombers tickets and then there was the Jets tickets, the 90 of those.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, the information that was collected from Manitobans who went on the website, can the minister indicate whether the province has access to this personal information?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Smook: The first thing I'd like to start off with here is Let's Make a Better Deal. Could the minister comment on that? Like, it's a five-year strategic plan and what has been done up until now and what are some of the future things the minister plans to do with?

Mr. Rondeau: The Let's Make a Better Deal program—I have to commend my predecessor. He's done a very, very good job, and all of the staff who've worked on it. What it was, was a comprehensive consumer protection strategy. It started out on May 11, 2010. Basically, what we're trying to do is make sure that there's a good balance and understanding of the marketplace and there's fair treatment for the businesses and the consumers and that we have—make sure that businesses will have confidence in the regulations that are reasonable and make sure that we have the consumers who know

what they're going to expect and be able to expect good performance from business.

* (14:40)

So far the accomplishments to date are the automotive system. We have been working with a motor vehicle disclosure regulation that came in place in 2011. In 2010, MPI began publishing the names, locations and individuals of businesses that received administrative sanctions.

The motor—sorry, the 2011 motor vehicle disclosure regulation came into force requiring dealers to provide consumers with specific information on a vehicle's condition and history, whether it was in an accident, et cetera.

In the financial system, in 2010, we brought in the payday loan lending rate regulation into force and established the lowest maximum interest rate in Canada. We also, in 2011, we established a payday borrowers' financial literacy fund that was established to promote financial literacy and support for people. In 2012, a new regulation was passed to protect consumers by banning upfront free—fees and setting fee maximums for debt settlement agencies. That has just been through.

The housing real estate area. Amendments to The Real Property Act in June 2011 provided better protection for property owners and lenders and reduced the risk of real estate fraud. An enhancement of the residential offer to purchase, effective August 1st, 2011, improves transparency in real estate transactions.

The establishment of a independent advisory adviser helps tenants and landlords through hearings and dispute resolution process. That was done in 2010, and I understand that's been very, very positive.

We are also looking at the cellphone regulations coming into place in September this year. So it's September 2012. And what we now have is the March 15th Consumer Rights Day.

We also are working to amend and improve the enforcement of The Consumer Protection Act. We've got some that you've been briefed on; some things on that.

We also are moving forward on the car repair legislation, and that, again, the briefing, and we're moving forward in that area. And then we're also working on a way of better communicating issues and warnings to the public.

So I have to admit it's a small branch, but mighty, and they've certainly done a lot of work. And I—it's all been very, very positive and they've had good consultation between businesses and consumer groups.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, but do you also have any plans for the future in this? Like, or it's too early to—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Rondeau: There's two things I'd like to say with that.

First, yes, we are looking at other things in the future. Some things, like, we're doing is, of course, working on now, the motor vehicle repair protection. We're looking at travel fairness and we're into the discussion on travel fairness and warranties and stuff like that. We're looking at a review of gift cards.

And the other thing that's really important to note in this area is it's the one area that you, as critic for Consumer Affairs, and myself, as minister, will hear about in public. We'll listen to the media who'll bring us the information and issues. We'll listen to the complaints from the Consumer Affairs office. And the other thing we'll hear is we'll hear what people are talking about when we're out for coffee. I found that there was one or two discussions at McDonald's when I go there occasionally to listen to the issues that people who go to McDonald's have, I hear about issues there.

And so it's one that we're working on those right now. Currently, we're looking at others, and we'll keep our ear out to make sure that if there's something in the future we need to address, we'll address it.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, in one of the bills that's coming up—I know he had discussed this a little bit earlier and he said to bring it out here if I was interested—96.1 of Bill 16, does it only apply—it'll apply to the payday lenders portion of The Consumer Protection Act or does it apply to all parts of the act and will this waiver be for any waiver that there is in Consumer and Corporate Affairs?

Mr. Rondeau: That's a very good question.

Section 96.1 on the Bill 16, it applies across the board unless it's expressly removed. In the car protect—repair section, we have a part there that says that people can remove the whole thing about getting an estimate.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, people sign waivers every day, whether it be with the chiropractor, with the, you know, there's the number of waivers. Now,

are there enough provisions in that act or are we going to be looking at, down the road, having people challenging waivers?

Mr. Rondeau: There's a difference between waiving your rights and waiving your rights under The Consumer Protection Act. What we found was the issue on the—waiving the rights Consumer Protection Act, there were certain businesses that were, actually, have part of their provision was to waive your rights under The Consumer Protection Act. That wasn't actually legal or appropriate. So what we said is The Consumer Protection Act deals with consumption, the transfer of goods and services, and in that case people can't right—waive their rights under that specific act, under Consumer Protection Act. And that's the financial waiver of saying that they're still protected. There is still protection under the things that we say they need, like simple disclosure, plain language in certain contexts, et cetera.

Mr. Smook: Could the minister provide me with a list of all political staff in his office?

Mr. Rondeau: We actually talked with your colleague about that. I can—or I can send the same list to the two of you, if that's okay.

Mr. Smook: That would be fine.

Mr. Minister, there's also a few other questions in regards to that. Are they full time or part time employees?

Mr. Rondeau: The political staff that I have, there's two of them. Basically, it's Sinda Cathcart, who is new, if memory serves me correctly, in February this year. She's my new special assistant. My executive assistant, Esther Hiebert, has been working for about 10 years. Thank you, from November—memory wasn't perfect—November 2003, so nine and a half years. So she's there. That's the two political staff in my office.

I do have ministerial staff which are not political, which are Huguette Lacroix, who is my correspondence secretary; Janean McInnes, who is the admin secretary 3; and Marina Portz, who is the admin secretary, and those are non-political. The only two political, of course, are Esther Hiebert and Sinda Cathcart.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, are those all the people that are implied—employed in your department?

Mr. Rondeau: No, they're not the ones that are employed in my department, but they are my—in my

ministerial office. We just have the two political staff. And one is my special assistance and one is my EA, executive assistant, out in my constituency.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, can the minister provide a list of all the agencies and departments this minister has responsibility for and their locations, the addresses?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm sorry, I missed that. You'll have to repeat that question.

Mr. Smook: Can the minister provide a list of all the agencies and departments this minister is—has responsibility for and their locations, the physical locations, their addresses?

Mr. Rondeau: Sure, I'll send it to you. I'm not too sure. They—there's lots of them.

* (14:50)

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, have any moves occurred in these departments over the last year, and what were the costs associated with those moves?

Mr. Rondeau: Are you talking about the reorganization or are you talking about physical moves?

Mr. Smook: The reorganization.

Mr. Rondeau: There's been no physical moves of any offices or parts or branches, so we've all remained in their current place. Although there has been some budget transfers between us, a lot of that has been a move from the Youth department went to Kevin Chief, the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities, so there's been lots of movement there as far as we've provided them with the youth grants and programs when there was a change between Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors to the current program. So no physical staff, no new offices, no new expenses, but there was actually a change in responsibility between the two ministries, actually a creation of a new one.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, have—so, then I take it from your answer that there've been no new staff hired in 2011-2012? *[interjection]* Can the minister provide me with a list of them?

Mr. Rondeau: We'll go through it. *[interjection]* I'll go through it. Basically, there was nine direct appointments. Basically, there was seven open competitions. There was one person who's in an acting status right now. There's some—two people who moved from term to temporary within the ministry. There was three temporary appointments,

one order-in-council, and, to save you a question, that was probably Sinda Cathcart, who's my special assistant. And then there was two direct appointments which deals with career development, employment equity, difficult to recruit, or regular to acting—acting to regular. And so a total of nine people were moved into that. Basically it was a normal program; things like consultants, policy analysts, outreach program, program managers, et cetera, and a program co-ordinator for bedbugs.

So there you are. So that seems to be what they've done. So, basically, it's just regular staffing.

Are these vacancies? *[interjection]* Oh, I'd better go through the whole list. All right, there are—been some direct appointments; I correct myself. We have Linda Wray, who's in an acting status; Joanne—help me with the name there, Zarichney—I'll provide you the list.

There's a—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20—20 people who have been direct appointments; in OICs there's one, two, three, four, five. Most of those were new appointment to—and most are acting to regular appointment.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

What is the current job vacancy rate in the department?

Mr. Rondeau: Would it be acceptable for you that we provide it in the written package because we said that to Myrna, and we don't want you fighting between the two of you.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. That will be acceptable.

Next question here: How long does the minister expect the vacancy rate to go on?

Mr. Rondeau: It's actually interesting, because I've been blessed with a department with lots of experience. And thus what I find is that when people decide to leave because they want to retire, other things—other opportunities—open, then they leave, and what we find in government is sometimes it takes a little bit of extra time to get good people into the position.

So sometimes you're looking for very specific skills—especially in the Consumer, Corporate Affairs you're looking for specific experience—so when people retire, leave, there's a normal period where you then start looking how you fill; if you fill from

within, then that starts a domino effect, so you backfill.

And so it seems that with the current demographics of a lot of people between the ages of 50 and 60, we do have retirements and people live—leaving, which creates vacancies. And, you know, Human Resources takes a little while to fill it, to then, usually, backfill it, and then finish up all the staffing. So I expect, as demographics get towards more and more retirement age, we're going to have vacancy because people want to retire.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are there any projects in the department being delayed because of lack of staff?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Smook: Thank you. Have wages of departmental employees been frozen?

Mr. Rondeau: There is a collective agreement under which we abide, and so we follow the collective agreement. So I understand part of the collective agreement over the last couple of years had zeros; now, there's some increases. We generally follow the collective agreement. Ministers—we don't have a collective agreement, so we took the 20 per cent cut in pay, which is one of the decisions we made.

But, no, we don't have a mandated freeze. We actually believe in bargaining in good faith and following that process.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, if staff is entitled to a raise, for example, what are some of the merits that are—the raises are based on for wage increases?

Mr. Rondeau: What happens is there's normal program and 'persel' evaluations. Supervisors do evaluations; they 'determine' whether the person's performance is there; and then they usually recommend whether there's a step increase or not; and then it's followed. It's a normal supervisory role—normal administrative role—that happens within the department, and, generally, the supervisors do it without any interference by myself or any other people; they—they do it themselves, and it's part of their management goal. *[interjection]* The recommendation comes up to the deputy, and she's really knowledgeable and aware of how to move forward.

Mr. Smook: Have any positions been relocated from rural Manitoba to Winnipeg or Brandon, like, staff? Has anybody been brought in from?

Mr. Rondeau: No, we haven't done that. A lot of our services, actually, what we're trying to do is—through Consumer Affairs and all the rest, we're trying to make sure that we have some of the information on the web, more and more web-friendly, plain language stuff, so that no matter where you are they're accessible.

So I would invite you to go to the website on some of the branches and the special operating agencies. They do a really good job of trying to communicate to the public. And so, we think that the web is a good equalizer, and so we're trying to offer a lot of good services online.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Has the minister travelled out of the province at all on provincial business in the last year, I would say?

*(15:00)

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, I have. *[interjection]* All right, I attended to the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of Health and Healthy Living on November the 23rd to 26th in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Do you want the details? I spent \$886.68 for the flight—booked it early; \$126.60 for other transportation that was basically cabs, et cetera. Accommodation, meals, phone calls and everything else was \$359.30. Other was \$52 for a total of \$1,424.58.

And so that was the only thing. I haven't travelled anywhere else outside the province as far as work.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister tell me if any staff accompanied him on these trips?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, my deputy at the time accompanied me.

Mr. Smook: Did the Premier (Mr. Selinger) travel with the minister on that trip or any trips?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, there's a low-vacancy rate in Winnipeg in the rental housing market. Does the minister have any ideas on how to address this?

Mr. Rondeau: I think what we want to do is make sure that we have good opportunity for housing to be built. I think that's why we changed the law a few years ago to ensure that the residential tenancy rates had a break so that they weren't immediately applicable; they had a certain period of freedom where they could charge whatever the market could bear.

We also have a commitment through Manitoba Housing to build additional affordable housing units. And I'm concur—I continue to encourage the feds and other levels of government to get involved in building houses. But I think, if memory serves me correctly, that we've had an unprecedented amount of housing constructed in Winnipeg over the last two to three years. And I think that's a good sign. Shows our economy's healthy and people are moving to Manitoba.

Mr. Smook: First thing I'd like to do is apologize to the Chair for calling him Mr. Speaker; I'm used to the House. It's my first time in this. So I'd like to apologize for that.

Mr. Minister, could—does the minister know what the vacancy rate is in Winnipeg right now, and if you could provide us with that, say, over the last three years, what it's been?

Mr. Rondeau: In October 2010, it was .8 of a per cent, and the vacancy rate in October 2011 was 1.1 per cent. I only have the two years.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, do you have any idea of any—how many new rental apartment buildings have been built in the last year?

Mr. Rondeau: In 2011, there was 812 rental starts, which is more than the total number for 2008 and 2009 combined. It's the highest number of starts on an annual base for at least the last 20 years. So we've had about 812 rental starts this year, which—or 2011, which is phenomenal.

Mr. Smook: Could the minister provide me with a list of complaints—this is—we're moving on to the consumer protection—a list of complaints broken down by department? How many complaints has the Consumer Protection Office received with different categories?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll go through the annual report and the type of complaints, okay? And this is for 2010-2011. Under automotive, it's 145. Under payday lender, it's 135; home improvement, it's 120; electronic sales, services, manufacturing, including cellphones, is 118; collections, 92; personal goods and services, 46; financial, 44; home furnishings and accessories, 37; direct sales, 34; and other, which I do not know, is 311. So that's a total of 1,082 complaints.

Mr. Smook: I believe that the Consumer Affairs produces a yearly calendar. Where could a person get a hold of one of those calendars?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll send you one. Is that okay? I believe that there's lots of requests for this calendar. It's been very popular. It has lots of consumer tips. I actually got about four or five of them, and I notice when I got them home everyone sort of made comments on how good they were and they were actually very practical. So did you want more than one? Let me know, I'll send some to your department.

Mr. Smook: That was going to be my next questions. How many were printed and how were they distributed?

Mr. Rondeau: There's approximately 30,000. There was some discussion whether it was 30,000 or 32,000, approximately 30,000 in year 2010-2011. What we do is we issue a news release. We have a whole bunch of partners that help pay for this. So what we do is we have a whole distribution route through the partners and they help pay for it. People who help pay for it are people like the addiction service, RTB, Canada Revenue. They're distributed through organizations like seniors' organizations and many other organizations and, apparently, they're distributed through multiple channels, phone calls to the branch, through the partnership organizations, through people who just call, et cetera, and organizations that actually want to promote what we're talking about, so they also help distribute it.

And I don't mind, if you want some to share with your colleagues I don't mind sending some. Do we still have? We have—still have some to send out so we can send you some for your—all your colleagues, if you wish.

Mr. Smook: How many calendars do you have left?

Mr. Rondeau: Right now there's some still left. They're usually not all—they all—usually all go out. But right now we have some left and we usually try to make sure that we have some for (a) consumer week—or consumer day, and what we also do to distribute them is whenever we're in organizations or we—I go to groups or other group people make presentations on consumer rights, et cetera, we actually try to hand them out. Why? It's because whether it's near the end of the year or beginning of the year the consumer tips are very valuable and so it becomes a really good selling point on what's going on, how consumers can make themselves aware, how they can protect their identity, how they don't get into the scams, and what we find is these are very cost-effective. If you can save one consumer

\$10,000 or one senior \$25,000 for not being ripped off, it's a very, very good advertising program.

* (15:10)

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would imagine the minister and his staff will be able to—like, he had mentioned where they're distributed and all—but he could provide me with a list of that and also what the cost of these calendars was.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, I'd be pleased to bring the cost and what the partners bring to bear.

What we've been doing in communications in this department, very, very strongly, is bringing partners—natural partners to bear, so they help pay for the cost of the production and the distribution. And they also help getting the message out there. So, whether it's the Seniors Directorate, whether it's Consumer Affairs, et cetera, we're looking at multiple avenues. We're looking at cost-effectiveness, and we're looking at bringing in partners to help decrease the cost that the branch itself pays, and so therefore we're trying to make it as cost-neutral as possible.

So I'll get you those—(a) the cost, and I'll also let you know the amount of money that the partners provide to this project.

Mr. Smook: In a discussion with the minister the other day, he had mentioned that there's acts that they need to update all the time. In—on page 3 of the Estimates book, the statutory responsibility of the minister, are there a number of these acts that you will be targetting over the next year or so that do need updating? Or—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Rondeau: We'll look at what needs to be updated. The branch regularly looks at the acts, comes up with recommendations. We come up with new acts in areas that we'd like to work in. I know there's two or three that we're contemplating, such as the consumer act on travel protection and other things. We haven't come up to details.

Now, one of the neat things about the acts, though, is that if there's a little detail that needs to do, then you have the—there's one big statute amendment act which still comes to the House every year.

Some of the ones that we're working on right now besides the consumer protection are the surveyor act, the cemetery act, life lease act. I think The Non-Smokers Health Protection Act is being amended, right as we speak. And so there's some that we're looking at now, and we'll continue to look at.

There's three ways it comes through: one from the department, one from the government, and one from the general public, and we hope to remain agile in seeing what we need to do, because there's a lot of acts here.

Mr. Smook: Moving on to vital statistics. Mr. Minister, in the Estimates books, for vital statistics agency, have the agency taking in \$411,000 this physical year. That's up from \$66,000 last year.

Mr. Rondeau: I'm just looking for the number where you've got the \$400,000. Where is it, because I want to—don't want to get it wrong. What page is it on?

Mr. Chairperson: Member for La Verendrye.

An Honourable Member: Or, what section in your book?

Mr. Smook: That's a good question.

An Honourable Member: Don't tell me. Don't tell me this. This in the Estimate book? There's expenditures—I'm looking. Residential Tenancies, Public Utilities Board, Addictions—70? Vital Stats.

Mr. Smook: Yes, it's income from other operations.

An Honourable Member: Oh, okay.

Mr. Smook: Page 70.

Mr. Rondeau: That's the difference between the revenue and expenditures, so it has to do with what the agency's bringing in, and what they're spending and, I assume, very good management.

Mr. Smook: On page 71, there is a list for inventory, and it shows a loss on inventory. Like, I've worked with books before, and I'm kind of a little bit lost at how you can show a loss on inventory.

Mr. Rondeau: Actually, that's a reconciliation change. It's not really a cash change, so they just reconciled their books differently. Apparently there's less and less cash being generated. It's becoming a more cashless society.

Mr. Smook: On page 70, under revenues, it's showing the actual revenue for 2010-11 at \$359—or \$3,000,529. And the 2012-2000 Estimate, is at \$4,000,025. What does the minister attribute this increase to?

Mr. Rondeau: There's some—part of it is, we are going to increase some fees through the year. An example would be the birth certificate, and I'm trying to find it right here. We have a birth certificate fee

that's going to be going up—increased. *[interjection]* Thank you.

A certificate, birth certificate, death certificate, marriage certificate; for a certified copy of the registration, the increase will be going from \$25 to \$30. What'll—by the way, the last time this happened was about 20 years ago. Basically, the fees were last increased in 1995. It went from \$20 to \$25, and the government of the day said it was about time to do that, because their fees hadn't been increased prior to that. It seems that about 17 years later, we looked at it again and said that it would be appropriate to increase the fees by \$5, and that fee translates to some of the income difference.

Mr. Smook: Also on page 70, there's—under the expenses or income loss from operations, it says transfers to the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Rondeau: That's revenue sharing, and that money gets transferred to the Province of Manitoba, as has happened in previous years.

Mr. Smook: So is that why the Vital Statistics would show a loss of \$314,000?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, because it's moving the money from a special operating agency to the Government of Manitoba, but I'd like to let the member know that if you look at the closing balance at the bottom of the sheet, it's \$1,000,066.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, how long does it take for someone to—having requested to receive a birth certificate or a death certificate? Is that taking longer than it did in previous years?

* (15:20)

Mr. Rondeau: Thank you very much for the question. I learned something on the answer.

Right now, it's about eight working days, 11 days for genealogical information. To give you a historical perspective, four years ago it used to be about four or five weeks. Registrations of births or deaths are done within a couple days, too. So it's been very, very efficient. They're working to make it a very efficient, very lean organization. And, on my visit there, I was very impressed by the professionalism and how responsive they were to the public.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Can the minister provide me with a current cost, like, of birth certificates, marriage certificates, death

certificates? What were those costs, and what they've gone up to, in this last budget?

Mr. Rondeau: The birth certificates, death and marriage certificates were \$25 and they've gone to \$30. They haven't yet; they haven't gone to \$30 yet but they're going to be going to \$30 in October. And, I can provide you that in writing if you wish.

Mr. Smook: Yes, Mr. Minister, providing it in writing would be fine.

But, if he could also provide me with a total list of all the fees of all the different licences or whatever, you know, things that have gone up, whatever that his department is in charge of. *[interjection]* Like, all the different fees that you would collect—sorry. *[interjection]* No.

Mr. Rondeau: You want all the fees that have increased or all the fees, period?

Mr. Smook: All the fees that this department has charges for, and the ones that have gone up and by how much.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll provide that in the package.

Mr. Smook: Does the minister have any targets for, like, turnaround times in different departments? Are they changing? Like, you had mentioned that you have some fairly good turnaround times on the different departments on—that I was talking about. But, do you have any targets across your whole—

Mr. Rondeau: Each area of the department have different targets.

Addictions Foundation—I have certain waiting times that we've reduced drastically in the last little while, along with other addictions organizations.

We have other areas that have turnaround times for correspondence that we're trying to continue to exceed so that we have short turnaround times.

We have—most of the SOAs, special operating agencies, have specific targets. They're very, very professional organizations and they continue to push the envelope, to make sure that they're trying to exceed expectation.

So, we do have targets. I don't direct them. I believe I have very, very competent staff, as DMs, ADMs, in the different organizations. And they're—been pushing the deal—pushing to make sure that they respond to the need. So, an example, with the Vital Stats, four to five weeks response time to eight

working days. It's been a very positive change in just a very short period of time.

Mr. Smook: The property registration, some of the fees have increased by quite the—quite a bit. Could the minister explain to me why?

Mr. Rondeau: We've been moving on the Property Registry to bring in a multi-year plan to improve client services. We're trying to bring the—and I say this jokingly, we're trying to modernize the 1988 computer-era Land Titles Office and some of the technologies that was state of the art 35 years ago to current standards.

And so we do have a—where we're trying to be more user friendly, we're trying to offer services online, we're trying to make sure that we have appropriate technical services and computers of this century. And so what we've been trying to do is invest in the system and modernize it. And so what we've done is we've increased fees. The effect of the fees on a typical residential real estate transaction will be an additional \$20 for a purchaser and about \$39 for a seller.

I note the prices of houses have gone up a couple hundred per cent. What we've done is we've decided to invest in technology and efficiency and make sure that we are as state of the art as we can be.

Mr. Smook: On page 75 of the Property Registry, at the bottom it shows that in 2010-2011, I believe it's \$8.298 million was the actual accumulated surplus, and the accumulated surplus for 2012-2013 is \$5.333 million. Could the minister tell me why?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand we're spending about \$2 million a year on capital to bring us into this century.

Mr. Smook: With the increases in fees, like, could the minister explain to me, like, there should be a fairly substantial increase in the revenues but yet the—at the end the surplus is not.

Mr. Rondeau: Part of it is that, if you look on that non-financial assets on page 75, it'll show capital assets where we had about a million dollars in actual in 2010-11. But we have about \$2.3 million in 2011-12, and you'll notice \$3.7 million in '12-13. That's starting to bring us into—the trouble with it is that the technology is expensive. The programs are expensive. We have to make sure we get it right, because this is huge money and it has to be secure. It has to be done right. And so we're spending or, I would like to say, investing a huge whack of money.

So, between 2011-12 and '13, you're talking about \$5 million, and that's a lot of money. Now, that's what the software, hardware and investment's going to cost to bring us to what we need to do. I don't feel comfortable having a 1988 computer system.

* (15:30)

Mr. Smook: Could the minister provide me a list of some of that expenditures that they're spending?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, I've seen it. I don't know what it means but I've seen some of it so I can send you the sheet. I'm sure that it will mean the same to—because it's got all the technical programs and the computer stuff and so we'll give you that, a list. I don't know whether I can provide you the actual cost of just the software because it might be proprietary. I'll provide you what I can as far as either a summary of what we have or the actual costs. I just—I'll get you what I can on that.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I do have a couple of questions for the minister in regards to addictions and those addictions—individuals that are sent outside the province. Could we get an update on the number of individuals that are sent outside the province of Manitoba for treatment?

Mr. Rondeau: I can't give you the names. I can give you the number of people who have been referred but that's actually through Health. What we do is we actually don't pay for it out of Health. What they do is they get referred to—by medical people and then it goes through the Health Department on out-of-province travel. So it's not really in our department. We refer and then Health actually has a process which they engage our staff with, but I can give you the numbers that we have referred to the out-of-province travel system.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I'm certainly not interested in the names, just the numbers.

Also, I would like to—what's the formula, or is it through your department, Mr. Minister, through you to the Chair, for treatment within the province of Manitoba. As the minister well knows, we have a addictions centre in Teulon that—been bringing a number of people from outside the area. Not a lot from Manitoba but what is the process that we need to do to see that facility move forward?

Mr. Rondeau: What we've been doing for the last number of years is we've been looking at areas where we need further enhancements for our program. I

believe it's enhancing our system was one of the five key points of our strategy. What we found is areas that we were weak in and we built on. So one was women's addiction, which we've improved. We used to have a huge waiting list of years for women in treatment. We've cut that down drastically with the new area in Selkirk, and that was very positive.

We looked at prevention. So we were a little bit light on prevention initiatives and early intervention initiatives. We've worked on that. We've worked very, very hard on the transition program. What we found was when people got their treatment, they were let out into the same environment, and often they'd fall back into the same pattern. So we focused on the whole transition into the community and support for people who've had treatment getting into the community. So we focused on that.

Right now, what we're focusing on is centralized intake system which is linking all groups together because what we found was there was—let's say that one person or one organization was treating something. There might be something similar and we wanted to make sure that people would be referred to the most appropriate treatment. We would handle the wait-list if there were any, most appropriately, and we would create communications within this because we had 16 groups that were doing addiction treatment but they weren't linked. So now we have a group that meets on a regular basis, all the EDS, executive directors, and we are actually working through a communication and central intake and central evaluation process. That seems to be working now.

The waiting lists have dropped drastically. In fact, in certain areas where—there is virtually none, and what we're dealing with is we now have enhanced the system. We're evaluating where we need to go in the future, and right now, the system is proceeding quite well as a unified group and working together. So it's the first time that we've actually brought it in. Instead of 16 separate jewels, it's now one crown all connected together and talking, and that's been a very, very positive step. And I have to say thank you to the federal government who actually brought some money to the table to help us do that.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, for that response. In regards to just following up with the number of addiction centres, could we get an update on those that are in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: Can I send it to my critic and then he'll give it to you?

Mr. Eichler: That'll be just fine.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll send you the list of the organizations that we fund, okay?

Mr. Eichler: Also, just one follow-up question in regards to those, the number of—that are sent outside the province of Manitoba. I guess it's twofold: One is, what is the current cost for rehabilitation per day for those individuals that are treated within the province of Manitoba, and the rate that we pay for those that are going outside the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Rondeau: The rate that we pay for organizations varies considerably. Like, right now, what we've got is we actually fund a number of transition programs which provide room and board, and a little bit of support. So their cost of operation per day is very small. We fund some outreach programs, such as St. Raphael, which is low, because it's doing evening, weekend and support out in the community as an outpatient sort of system.

We have others that are very intensive, and we have others that are funded through the RHAs, such as the detox system. So some are very, very expensive, some are very inexpensive, and everything in between. And so—and an example is there's thousands of people who receive intervention in schools and in the community and in the outreach programs for—at lotteries during—at the casinos, thousands of people. It's very inexpensive.

So we go from very, very expensive treatment on detox, medical detox, at Health Sciences Centre, which Health funds, all the way to school programming. So it's a huge range. What I can tell you, I can give you a list of the programs that we fund. But it's huge, because what we've done in the last few years is we actually have people who work with school divisions who actually intervene and do outreach and workshops and all that with kids, very inexpensive with lots and lots of people, but it's a totally different costing than a residential treatment or anything else. So it's a very big range.

Mr. Eichler: Perhaps if the minister could send that to the critic, I would be fine with that as well.

Also, on the same thing on—staying on addictions: Do we have participants coming—coming from other provinces to Manitoba for our

services, and is there remuneration back to the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: I don't know offhand. I can find out whether there is any transfers on this. There might be for Nunavut and northwest Ontario. I'm not aware of that. I'll make inquiries and find out if there's actually people who are funded from out of province. I don't know that.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, minister, for those answers. I'll now turn it over to my other colleagues.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Yes, page 6, item No. 3, Seniors and Healthy Aging. The minister has declared that he received two Jets tickets from a personal care home.

Could he tell us which personal care home that was?

Mr. Rondeau: I didn't receive any tickets from a personal care home. I received some tickets from a personal friend of mine who owns a number of seniors housing complexes across Canada, and so it was not an organization we funded. It's not an organization that receives any money from the province. It was a personal friend of mine who gave me two of his season tickets because he had to go to Brandon to look after another property.

I'd also like to know that, no, he does not receive any provincial government contracts, and I also made a donation to—I walk for Camino de Santiago for diabetes for the cost of that ticket. So no problem on that issue.

Mr. Schuler: Yes. The minister also mentioned that four tickets were delivered to his office for the former minister of MLCC.

Whatever happened to those four tickets?

Mr. Rondeau: They were sent from my office to the former minister's office. I don't know what beyond that—I understand that he's paid for those tickets. They—he has paid for the tickets, so no taxpayers' money was spent on those tickets.

* (15:40)

Mr. Schuler: So is that—the former minister of MLCC—who was that?

Mr. Rondeau: I believe it was Minister Mackintosh, but I'd like to let the member know that the tickets were compensated. The price of the tickets were compensated for MLCC, as per our policy.

My tickets were not ever used by either MLs. I never used a ticket from MLCC or any other Crown organization, and, in fact, when I even got tickets from a personal friend of mine, who does not receive any contracts or money from the Province of Manitoba, I even made a donation. And so I think that's appropriate, and so we made sure that that would pass the sniff test.

The other thing that I'd like to note is that it was also made on my conflict of interest declaration openly, what happened to the tickets and where we went with the money and the donations.

Mr. Smook: Thank you for the answers, Mr. Minister.

A couple of questions in regards to the retail sales tax, that the government decided to apply 7 per cent retail sales tax to 'previoly' exempt services. Like, that is something that nothing can—it doesn't pertain to this department?

Mr. Rondeau: You'd have to talk to the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) on that issue, because it's something done through the budgeting process. It's not something that's directly applicable to this department.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Sunday shopping. This initiative to open up Sunday shopping seems to come rather quickly and from nowhere in particular. Did your department receive a lot of correspondence from, say, consumers or the public in regards to it, like for—in your Department of Consumer Affairs?

Mr. Rondeau: The Sunday shopping issue would fall under the Minister of Labour's purview. She would be very responsible of responding to that issue, et cetera.

I do know that we get general complaints on customers who are unhappy with their products, unhappy with their electronics or unhappy with their trips or their car repair and all that. So that's where we get them. We do not report what day of the week they come in or anything else, we just deal with the complaint.

Mr. Smook: What kind of initiatives are being funded by the financial literacy fund?

Mr. Rondeau: Basically, the fund is used to help consumers become aware of more appropriate financial services. They can make more smart decisions about their money. It's all about promoting

financial literacy; \$1,500 from the fund has used—has been used for an environmental scan on financial literacy programming and curriculum available to Manitobans' identified needs and gaps; \$10,000 has been used in organizing the Creating Community Options for Financial Services—a two-day conference taking place on July—sorry—June 13 and 14th, 2012. It'll explore opportunities and appropriate community-based lending alternatives to payday loans, and the current balance in the fund right now is \$56,500.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Does the minister intend to increase or—any other initiatives for the financial literacy fund?

Mr. Rondeau: I think that what we want to do is listen to the people who've come together, the professions come together from the banking, community services and the NGOs that come together on those two days. Listen to them.

I know that there's been other initiatives that we've been talking to with financial institutions and partners. What we hope to do is with this money and this fund we look forward in—to moving forward in some of their partnership with them in partnership to deal with the whole payday loan issues, providing alternatives and looking at what options we have in the future. I think what we want to do is learn. Like, in Toronto they've done some interesting experiments. In Vancouver they have done interesting experiments. But, as a recent book, which I would recommend you read, has said that there's the unbanked, and those are people that really need assistance because they're not part of the financial community. And I think we have to be very, very innovative in reaching out to those people, giving them appropriate banking services at an appropriate price. It'll mean partnerships. It'll mean being innovative. And I think what we want to do is say, how do we support the most vulnerable and the least able to afford the financial system by providing appropriate services?

So this will be an interesting journey. If you have, or any of your colleagues have suggestions on how we can get the unbanked banked that becomes important, because when I was in Cranberry Portage the bank there moved out of town. And, when the bank there moved out of town, that had a huge effect not just on the bank, but businesses got hurt, the amount of cash people had, everything got killed because of that. So it is a huge issue and it's not just in inner city of Winnipeg; it's in small rural

communities; it's in northern communities; and I think we really need to explore it because sometimes these—the poorest people are paying the highest fees.

Mr. Smook: Residential Tenancies Branch—what new initiatives has the Residential Tenancies Branch undertaken in the past year?

Mr. Rondeau: What the—the one that I like the best was they actually have an advocacy group which is talking about working with people, help mediate issues and deal with issues. They've also gone and they've really started to move forward on really good communications. So an example is is that they're trying to put the regulations in plain language. They're trying to make sure that they're using appropriate forms that are understandable. There's the Independent Advisor Program which has been absolutely fabulous because basically what's happened is that people who have issues can come to that office and try to get them resolved. And basically what we're trying to do is inform the property owners and the landowners so that we have less disputes. And so part of what we talked about in your briefing on the act is we're trying to get it so that plain language is used, standardized forms are used, people understands their rights and obligations and we make sure that we're trying to decrease the amount of disputes because of miscommunication, and so that's all that they're doing.

I have to compliment the staff and the management because they've done an amazing job, because there's lots of people who are very passionate about their positions who talk to the branch. They have lots of issues and there's lots of mediation. So I think they have the patience of Job and they've really done an amazing job in dealing with a tough group of individuals in very highly stressful environment. So they do a good job. I appreciate it and I think that they deserve a good commendation.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. For the Residential Tenancies Branch, how many complaints were received last year?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll go through the 2011 stats and you'll now understand why I'm complimenting these people. The branch has a high volume of activity. Request for general information alone totalled 64,000 requests. This made up 55,500 telephone calls, 5,000 walk-in clients and over 4,100 email requests.

* (15:50)

Now we get into the claims. Claims against tenants are the most often related to outstanding rent, cost to repair damage, extraordinary cleaning costs, et cetera. Tenant claims against landlords usually deal with damage to personal property, compensation for loss, other issues.

Now, of the 1,212 claims filed for 2011, 204 cases were resolved through mediation, 217 were withdrawn before the hearing date. There was 1,870 applications for orders of possession. These orders are sought for mainly non-payment of rent. Mediation is offered in an effort to maintain harmonious relations between the landlord and tenant. In 2011, 4,422 issues resolved informally at the first stage of contact without being formally opened. Applications for rent increases—there was 327 applications for above-guideline increases affecting 21,471 units. Applications for whole building renovations, there were 80 affecting 2,492 units, and so rent compliance regulation discussions were 685.

So the repairs, there was 802 issues on repairs: enforcement was 114; utilities was 104; requests for determination, which I still don't know what that means, is 54. And so, when I say the branch is busy, I can't believe how busy they are. So that's why they got the verbal commendation.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Chair, I would imagine that the minister's department under tenancy or Residential Tenancies Branch would get a number of repeat offenders, whether it be tenants or landlords. Does the branch keep a list of these for future reference when they're solving disputes?

Mr. Rondeau: Okay. They deal—I understand they deal with each dispute on its own merits. However, there is a list of orders that have been given. When they have a determination, it's called an order, and there is a list of orders that are out there, and the final orders on individuals or addresses is kept.

Mr. Smook: You may have answered this already, Mr. Minister, but have there been any staffing changes in the Residential Tenancies Branch?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand there has been, but I don't have the list with me. Do you need the list or do—would you just want a number?

Mr. Smook: Mr. Chair, if you could provide me with the list, that would be great.

Mr. Rondeau: Sure.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Chair, a year ago there was a rather extensive bill in regards to the condo act was passed. Have all sections of that act been proclaimed?

Mr. Rondeau: They're continuing to consult on the regulations before we bring in the act. Generally what happens is the act is written, it's drafted. You then, once it's—the act is passed, then there's extensive regulations. We're talking right now to the people in the condo community to finalize regulations. Once the regulations are finalized, we'll proclaim the act.

Mr. Pedersen: Now, if I remember correctly, there was a number of sections to that bill. So have the regulations been written to any particular section or are doing, still working on regulations on all sections?

First of all, let's just ask how many different sections there were of that bill, so you can refresh my memory.

Mr. Rondeau: The package to the act—and, by the way, yes, I have been going through all my acts, and it is a rather extensive piece of legislation—it did a few things. One, it's got a new condo act—it's got changes the existing condo act; it's changes The Residential Tenancies Act; changes The Municipal Act; changes to the condo conversion act. And so, parts of it had been moved forward. The condo conversion, municipal act, and residential tenancy act have all been proclaimed; regulations are there; it's been done.

The new condo act and changes to the consisting—of the existing act, those are things that are still ongoing; I anticipate them in due course. What we'll do is we'll continue to work with the industry, with residents, with people who own the condos, and then we'll get those out. It is a rather extensive change, and it will take some time to make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Pedersen: And what would be a definition of in due course?

Mr. Rondeau: One of the things I've learned is that in doing something when you have a person's condo there—which is often the biggest investment they have, the highest cash they have—you want to make sure you have good, solid dialogue, and people understand it; they are informed about the regulations—what they mean.

So we're going to take our time to do it right. I don't want to rush it. I think if we rushed it, we would get people excited. What we want to do is have good dialogue between the industry and government and the people writing the regulations, and proceed with necessary caution, because often it's the most expensive thing—investment—that people own. And we want to be prudent about how we proceed.

Mr. Pedersen: So what was the emphasis of the bill, then? If you're doing consultations now, wouldn't you have done those consultations prior to the bill being introduced?

Mr. Rondeau: The way I look at it is the legislation is the large brush strokes. They're the general parameters, they're the big picture, and they give you the principles and ideas. The regulations is when you get down into the weeds and you want to make sure that you have the specific details appropriate.

And so, like, an example is when you're talking about the amount of money that they have to—in their renovation budget—their capital budget—you want to make sure that you have a practical situation for condo units of 500 or condo units of five. And so, the details become important.

So what we're working now is with all parties, whether it's large condos or small condos or whatever, to make sure we get it right. And those take time, and the reason why they take time is because this is people's homes, and you want to make sure you do get it right.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I don't want to belabour the point, but I guess I'm going to. If there wasn't a problem, what are you trying to fix? And if there was a problem, you shouldn't be taking that long to do the regulations. You should have identified those problems—the regulations. You should have done your consultations first. I get the feeling that what happened here—and I remember parts of this bill now, because I did take it over as critic. It was very extensive, and yet you're telling me now that you're doing consultations on how to write the regulations—

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order. I would caution the members—like, well, consider each other a third person; don't address by second person; don't say "you"; consider "the minister" or consider "the member," though. That's the process I requested you to go that way. Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you—doing a fine job, Mr. Chair.

So the department should have been doing this consultation to discover problems, or potential problems, before the bill was introduced. However, what, Mr. Chair, what I'm hearing is that the department wrote a bill and now is doing consultations to figure out how to implement these or what the problems they're trying to solve. It seems to be a little bit backwards here.

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to thank the member, Mr. Chair.

What happens in the development of a law is you—Mr. Chair, what happens in development of a law is you find out that there's might be issues. There might be issues on reserve requirements. There might be issues on how you show the ownership of condos. You might have a new sale and insurance on—so you find out the general issues. That you do before you start the bill. Then on the bill, you have a general dialogue of the broad brush strokes. So you say, we might have problems on reserve or declaration of reserves; we may have problems on insurance; we may have problems on—there's lots of things that you may wish to discuss. Those are in the bill.

Now, when you get down in the specific details, which is the normal process of passing a law and then developing regulations, you then work through one step further, one more step in detail, and you get into the basic regulations. You might say, how do you show or portray the reserve requirements when you sell the condo? How do you—those are the details that are in the regulations, not the legislation. And those are the ones that you really want to talk to the actual people who are going to be affected directly.

Now, we have, on the broad strokes; we have, on the development of legislation, opened the dialogue. We're just making sure that we continue that dialogue in partnership with the owners of the condos because that's the appropriate way to do it.

Now, the member may disagree that we have—we might have too much consultation. I think, as a public organization, you want to consult with the public. You want to get it right, and you want to make sure that you're sure-footed, people are engaged with the process, and you—and yes, I have read the law, and you go through it and you realize that's the brush—the large brush strokes. Now you get

into the details, and that's what we're doing here, and I think it's appropriate way to do it.

Mr. Pedersen: So who specifically is the department consulting with to develop these regulations?

Mr. Rondeau: Here's some of the people that we're talking about. The first one is, of course, the condo owners. There's also a condo owner organization. There's also the insurers. There's the lawyers, the engineers, property managers, the condo association, and then, again, the general public. In that, that's the external organizations.

Internal, we want to make sure our lawyers are engaged. Other groups that might be involved, i.e., other departments, are engaged. So it's rather extensive.

This is a complete rewrite of the condo act. It is a large undertaking and it's going—you want to make sure that we move forward very sure-footedly. We want to get it right. It's not often that you get a complete rewrite of an act of this magnitude. I think it was a good undertaking and I think it'll bring good fruition, but we want to make sure we're sure-footed. So you want—the owners, the unit holders, engineers, lawyers, property managers, the working group and the condo association are just the start. So it's a large group of people who are involved.

Mr. Pedersen: So the minister ran through it fairly quickly. So do I understand correctly that the municipal portion of the act and the condo conversion portion of the act are now proclaimed?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes.

Mr. Pedersen: So that would leave the condo act—which three sections, then, remain to be—that you're working on regulations that are not proclaimed then?

Mr. Rondeau: There was two basic part—well, two parts to it: one was the new rewrite of the condo act—that was the big, thick document; then there was the second part of it, which was changing of the existing condo act, residential tenancy act, municipal act, and the condo conversion act—and The City of Winnipeg Charter, sorry. So those are the pieces that have been proclaimed, the smaller pieces that dealt with the other acts. The big whole act—the new writing of the condo act—hasn't been done yet because it will require time to do appropriate regulations.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): In terms of the Residential Tenancies Commission, I just want to get a little better sense of how that—how the commission

operates. Could the minister explain, then, the role of the commission?

Mr. Rondeau: The commission—there's two different parts: there's the branch and the commission. The commission is a quasi-judicial specialist tribunal that hears appeals from decisions and orders of the director of the Residential Tenancies Branch under The Residential Tenancies Act. The Residential Tenancies Commission composes of a commissioner, some deputy commissioners, panel members, and Residential Tenancies Commission staff. And basically, what they do is if somebody disagrees with the branch, they can appeal to the commission.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, thanks. Just so I understand the process, then. If someone has a complaint, they come to the branch first of all, and then, if they're not satisfied with the direction that they're getting from staff, then there's—they have the ability to appeal to the commission, and that's my understanding.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, they have a very specific terminology. What happens if there's a dispute between the landlord and the tenant, they have it taken to the branch. If it's not mediated, then there's an order issued, so somebody wins. If someone doesn't like the order, they can take it to the commission and appeal to the commission about that order.

Mr. Cullen: Is there a time frame that the commission has to respond, and if there's then an appeal to the commission?

Mr. Rondeau: They try to issue an order, I understand, with reasons within 30 days—right—30 working days—I always get confused between 30 days and 30 working days—30 working days. I understand there's not a backlog right now of their hearings, right now.

Mr. Cullen: Does the minister then appoint the commissioners and the people that sit on that—on the commission?

Mr. Rondeau: The commissioners are appointed through the OIC process—order-in-council process.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, if the minister could just back up, then again, there's a—how many commissioners are appointed?

Mr. Rondeau: There's—this is approximate because sometimes there's vacancies or there might be changes, but I'll give you what I have right now.

There's a chief commissioner, which is a full-time position; a deputy commissioner, one full-time position; there's 21 part-time positions; and there's 32 panel members. Of the panel members, about half represent the landlord, half represent the views of the tenant. And there's about six and a half permanent staff on the Residential Tenancies Commission staff.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, thank you. So then all the panel members—those are appointed by the minister as well.

Mr. Rondeau: I don't have that much power. It's done through—Mr. Chair, it's done through Cabinet, through OIC.

* (16:10)

Mr. Cullen: And once an individual or company comes through to the commission, how many people actually sit on the review commission at one time?

Mr. Rondeau: That's a good question because I actually didn't have an answer. Now I do on that one. There's a difference depending on what is being heard. One is the deputy chief alone can hear of things and make an order, or the second option is having three people, one landlord rep, one tenant rep and a deputy chief that does the hearings. And then—so there's the two types of hearings.

Mr. Cullen: Is there criteria for the difference in those two hearings? There must be, through regulations or something, that there's a difference between the two types of hearings?

Mr. Rondeau: The act actually tells you when it's one versus three. So it's a statutory division.

Mr. Cullen: Does the commission then, in turn, provide advice to the minister and to the department?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that they have an annual report, but they don't give me advice from the—to the minister directly. And I just got handed the 2010 annual report.

Mr. Cullen: So, then, the annual report will just provide, probably, the numbers that the commission undertook throughout the course of the year?

Mr. Rondeau: Absolutely. Now that I'm reading it it actually has the cases of significance. It actually talks about the number of appeals. It talks about significant decisions. And, yes, it's talking about orders of possession and it's talking about the numbers of decisions that were made forward and made by the branch—or, sorry, by the commission throughout the year.

So, an example is, they're talking about claim for security deposits. There was a whole bunch of them. There was about: total appeals, closed, were 39; disputes, none; enforcement, there was a bunch; hearings, there was 144 hearings from the previous year; there was 353 appeals received. So about 500 cases.

There's a table—it's tabled in the House. So if you want a copy, I guess, I can get you one. I hadn't looked at it.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I guess it's been an education for both the minister and I today. So that's—I'm glad I could be helpful.

In terms of Manitoba Housing property, does the commission get involved in anything to do with issues arising in Manitoba Housing properties?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, they do hear about appeals from Manitoba Housing either for and against. So they do hear—come to a dispute resolution.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that. You know, I think that's all the questions I have on that particular section unless the minister has a follow-up comment.

Mr. Rondeau: Just one of the things I've learned is most quasi-judicial bodies, you treat them as such. It's hands off; you appoint the members and you trust them to be professionals and do their jobs, and I think that's appropriate. So, no, I haven't had a lot of response other than the fact I met this man today. And so I think that that's appropriate way of dealing with it because that's—they are quasi-judicial and we don't want to directly run the organization.

Mr. Cullen: I guess the question is, if the commission provides an order then there has to be a mechanism to make sure that that order, that recommendation, is followed. Could the minister walk me through the processes? Is it up to the commission to act as the policeman, or is that become an issue that staff within the department have to deal with?

Mr. Rondeau: The way it would work is if there was a dispute, usually, is it would go to RTB, Residential Tenancies Board. There would be an order made. Someone would dispute the order. It would go to the commission. The commission would do the hearing. They would do yet another order, and if they were having troubles enforcing it, they could enforce it through the courts. And that's the way the system does—basically, the reason why it was

established in the first place as I understand it, and it's different than other provinces.

What we do is we have a quasi-judicial system so that we do not have a huge amount of RT—residential, or tenancy branch arguments in the courts. And so what we're trying to do is get a) mediation, at the board level, a good resolution at the board level or then at the commission level, and if not, then a few cases to the—goes to the courts, but the vast majority are solved in the first tier. Some are solved in the second tier, and a few go to the courts. And so we're just being very efficient as far as court time. That's accurate.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Minister, for answering some of the questions here. Just to refresh me a little bit here, the tenancy—Residential Tenancies Branch, those are all people that are employed by your department, correct?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, RTB is part of the department.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, when a—when the Residential Tenancies Branch doesn't or can't solve a problem, it goes on to what is the commission now, correct?

Mr. Rondeau: Generally the branch will try to get mediation, solve the problem. If they can't, they do a hearing and then there's an order. If someone disputes the order, then they can go to the commission.

Mr. Smook: Could the minister give me a list of who sits on that commission?

Mr. Rondeau: If it's okay, I'll put that as part of the package because I don't think we have it exactly right here.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could the minister give me what criteria for determining who sits on this commission?

Mr. Rondeau: In all cases, what I tried to do is find good people with good judgment, and so I often try to find people who have worked in—well, the landlord reps generally are landlords. The tenant reps are familiar with people who have tenant issues and understand renting issues, and then you want people with good judgment. Generally, there—and when we do—all of the boards and commissions actually have the hope of desirable expertise, it's called. So here's the phrase: experience in the field of residential tenancies, familiarity with interpreting legislation, and a background in adjudicating or resolving disputes. No formal education requirement, however,

potential panel members should be able to demonstrate an understanding of residential tenancy issues including, but not limited to, issues of cultural diversity, disabilities, human behaviour, and in effect, a panel member must be able to read complex written material, analyze written, verbal information in order to ascertain facts and apply relevant legislation to this written and verbal information. And you want them to have good judgment and you want them to have a positive world view so they understand what's going on. And so that's what you want because you want a person who has good, solid judgment and can look at the disputes and come up with the appropriate wisdom to be right.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. On a yearly basis, I believe the landlords are allowed an increase in rent. Who determines what the annual increase will be?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand the guidelines are determined by Cabinet regulation.

*(16:20)

Mr. Smook: Could the minister give me a list of what the criteria would be for that determination?

Mr. Rondeau: I believe that that is usually done by providing information to me as minister. It's ministerial information, and so it basically has to do with utilities, property taxes, other expenses and general increases or decreases in costs of goods. It is provided to me as a 'ministerial'—ministerial advice, and then I provide it to my Cabinet colleagues for a discussion and decision.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, is it possible for someone to be barred from renting in Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: The branch wouldn't make that type of decision.

Mr. Smook: If a repeat offender, whether he be a tenant or a landlord, is just constantly making repeat offences, is there any way that that would be allowed for people to find out about?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that there's an order registry, which is—which can be made public or—people can see it, and so there is—for anyone who has an order registered against them, there's a registry of these orders. Some people may appear more than others. Some may—people may never appear. But the orders are—there's a list of the orders that are kept.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answer, but where would a person get a hold of this list?

Mr. Rondeau: People could get a hold of the list through RTB—[interjection] They can search the registry after dealing with the branch, right?

Apparently, there's an order registry in the office. People can go see it in their office or they can subscribe to the information.

Mr. Smook: On your websites, are there any place on those websites where some of this information may be—or information towards this—these—this information would be available?

Mr. Rondeau: People could not get the information on orders on the website. They'd either have to come in or chat with the branch on how to get that information.

Mr. Smook: What I mean is, on the website, is there any information on there, like, for tenants or landlords to inform them of how to get this information?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that there's information that there is a registry and there is information on how to get the access to the registry on the website.

Mr. Smook: We were discussing bills that have not been proclaimed. How many bills that have not been proclaimed that are to do with your ministry?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll have to get that to you.

Part of it is not the fact that there's entire—lots of entire bills that haven't been proclaimed. Sometimes it's certain sections, sometimes it's certain pieces of a legislation, so it's not as simple as just saying, has the bill been proclaimed or not proclaimed.

So pieces like the tobacco recovery act, et cetera, may take a little while to proclaim, others, no. So parts of it may move forward faster than others. So it's like the condo act. Pieces that amended the municipal act, amended the condo act, et cetera, we're fast to proclaim. Other pieces, you were waiting for regulations, but I will endeavour to get you a list of all the acts that have—that have not been proclaimed or sections of them that haven't been proclaimed.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

As I said earlier, I'm very new to this position and I'm involved with four bills with this minister,

and I'm just wondering, like, how long will it take before these bills actually become law.

Mr. Rondeau: Well, the hard part is, Mr. Chair, is you can't assume anything passes at any specific time. Assuming that they pass, which I hope they do, we'll, say, take the helmet bill that we just introduced yesterday. Well, what we want to then do is this summer we're going to, hopefully, if the bill passes, we're going to do a lot of encouragement to make sure kids are wearing helmets and, you know, working with IMPACT and different organizations. Then what we're going to do is quickly work through the regulations. My intention would be to hopefully proclaim the law sometime in January, February—not a big bike season, but that's certainly a good time to proclaim it. That way, when we do the school bike sale people will be able to buy the helmets for ten bucks in the daycares and the schools and get the helmets cheap and all this, and be ready for the next year's bike cycling season.

So that's an example of how a law would proceed, where you start now with the law, you write the regulations 'til, hopefully, January, February, proclaim the bill February, March, move forward with the actual implementation the bill. Sometimes you may take certain pieces of a bill and not proclaim them for a year or two. That's normal practice. So it depends on the bill, and it makes—it depends on how smoothly or how complex the issue is. As you get a bigger bill like the condo act, it gets a lot harder. When you get a single issue bill, it's much more simple. And so it becomes much easier if you have a single, small issue bill versus a very complex bill.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that answer.

Mr. Minister, you just mentioned a helmet for \$10. Is that something that you will be bringing in with this new bill, as well, that people will be able to buy the helmet for \$10?

Mr. Rondeau: Actually, although it's not part of our Estimates, I will say that what we've had is in the last seven years as part of our promotion of safety and injury prevention we've had a helmet program where we've sold very inexpensive helmets in daycares and schools. I'm going by memory here, because I don't have the people. I think we sold 80 to 82 thousand helmets at \$10—and some of them are really neat-looking—and I think we've given away about 8,000. And so it's a program that we're working with.

We also work in conjunction with places like Red River Ex, KidSport, Canadian Tire, et cetera, to get more cheap helmets out there. Sorry, I've been corrected, it's 73,000 as of last year. I was counting the 8,000 free ones too. So sorry. Numbers get confusing after a few years. So 73,000 free helmets, with 8,000 given away, for a total of 81.

So that's what we're trying to do. So it's not a program that costs us money. We get the helmets at a very inexpensive way and we sell them through the daycares and schools. We've been doing that for seven years.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, those helmets like at \$10, would that be at least—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I think that that should be discussed during committee, not at this point. This is not the part of the Estimates. Member for Spruce Woods.

Mr. Cullen: Not to say anything against your ruling there, but, I mean, I guess the point of the discussion is, you know, if there's going to be a fee—if the Province is picking up a fee, you know, that \$10 that the Province is picking up should be reflected somewhere in our Estimates book. So maybe we could get some clarification from the minister on that.

*(16:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Well, I think that's for the future, but I—if the minister want to answer it, and he can answer.

Mr. Rondeau: Actually, it's not a fee. What's happening is that we're actually selling the bike helmets through the Healthy Living Department. We work through Materials Distribution to sell the bike helmets to people in Manitoba, and we do it where we're not—it's not costing the department money. It's not a loss, and so it's been very positive. But if you want to—that's not Consumer Affairs, but I apologize for steering us wrong under the bike helmet area, so I'll get back onto the Consumer Affairs part.

Mr. Smook: In regards to funerals, now, how far along is the implementation of The Grieving Families Protection Act?

Mr. Rondeau: The amendment was passed last year. It's part of the grieving families act. It was passed by my predecessor, and right now the Funeral Board is actively consulting with the industry and people in the field and—on the development of regulations and on how the regulations are rolled out, so that's now in

process. An example of, again, us passing it and now developing the regulation in co-operation with the industry.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Does the minister have an idea when the final cut of the legislation may be?

Mr. Rondeau: No, I don't as yet. We're still in the consultation process. One of the things I've learned is that when you're doing something new that affects families, and especially in funerals, you want to make sure that you have as much dialogue as possible, you have as much consultation as possible. I've actually had—the chair of the board has done consultations in different communities, I understand, throughout the province, and I think that this is coming, but I don't want to rush it, again.

One of the things we want to make sure is we do these regulations right, and listen to the people, and listen to their opinion, and I, personally, have had a few meetings with organizations, and I've actually talked to the Funeral Board about this and other issues.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. In the Estimates book, on page 6, when we look at the Estimates of expenditures for 2012-2013 and compare them to the Estimates of expenditures for 2011-2012, we notice that at the bottom they come up to the same number. But if you go column by column, the administration and finance expenditures for 2012 and 2013 are—the only one that is larger than 2011-2012 is administration and finance. Could the minister explain that?

Mr. Rondeau: Sure. What these are—the number went from \$638,000 to \$646,000, and I understand what that was was normal salary increases in that area.

Mr. Smook: The Healthy Living has gone up from 23,114 to 23,118. Can the minister give me an idea of what's involved in that?

Mr. Rondeau: Healthy Living is a very interesting part of the portfolio. It deals with food. It deals with in motion activity. It deals with chronic disease prevention. It deals with keeping people healthy and—you know, falls prevention, all that sort of thing. So that's more the area of Healthy Living, and so it's a very, very big area. If you look at it, we basically have been focusing on it.

The biggest increase, as I've been told, is for SafetyAid. What we do is we contract with Age and

Opportunity to do a seniors falls prevention thing. They actually go into different houses do an evaluation, for seniors' houses they check to make sure that there's no places people can slip. They pick up those silly scatter mats without rubber on the bottom because they're so slippery. They make grab bars or handholds for people in the bathroom et cetera, and I'm pleased to say that we're increasing \$32,000 to provide the SafetyAid with more capacity. Age and Opportunity delivers it to us and they do a very, very good job in that.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Consumer and Corporate Affairs has gone down from 12,682 to 12,675. Could the minister comment on that, of what that partakes of?

Mr. Rondeau: Apparently, it's a removal of \$10,000 as a one-time project funding, and so that's all it is. So in a smaller department \$10,000 does make a difference.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. On December 18th, 2011, I believe most ministers received a letter from a Barbara Dryden in—to do with the 2011-2012 expenditure management and in there there's several items that are requested of the different departments, and one of them is slowing down programming. Could the minister comment on that? Like did you have to slow down any of your programs? What you did.

Mr. Rondeau: What we've been doing is we've continued to move forward. I look at the Consumer Affairs branch, they're going gung-ho. I look at the whole area to Healthy Living, I think we're still pushing a lot on Healthy Living whether it's food, whether it's activity, whether it's other things. I think that when you look at addictions, we've had a huge increase in addictions. I think, if memory serves me correctly, and again it's memory, I think we've gone from \$10.5 million to 27 to 28 million dollars in addictions funding. I even look at where we're talking about the Property Registry where we're trying to bring it from 1988 into 2015 by 2015. I think those are—we've been rather aggressive across the board, and I think what we want to do is always look at the end product, and the end product is we're trying to get healthier food, healthier eating, healthier population and support people out there.

And I look at it this way with the seniors' organizations. Yes, we do get a lot for our money, and as a frugal Manitoban I'm pleased with that, but I also know that the senior secretariat and other groups are doing a phenomenal job for the people of

Manitoba. I'm pleased with the results that the staff have got and I do have to compliment them. They're innovative and they do a great job.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister for those comments.

In regards to the same letter, it states: maintaining a minimum 5 per cent vacancy rate while not affecting front-line services.

Mr. Rondeau: Part of the difficulty we have right now is we have a department that's getting older. We all have a choice. We either get older or the opposite. We don't like the option so we are getting older. People are retiring. It does take time to replace people who are retiring.

* (16:40)

As I said before, one of the biggest issues with our department is often the domino effect where you have a senior member who is an—in an institution that has a huge amount of knowledge and talent and skill. So what'll happen is one of the senior members will go away because they retired, and then one person will follow, and it will keep going, and that's good. But it's also very tough because it may take a period of time for the entire organization to stay wise yet again.

And so I know that we'll be experiencing that as the demographic gets older of the civil service. I don't know how you do it, because you don't know who's going to retire exactly when, and when they do it does have an effect on the organization. So—and it does take a while to backfill and continue to backfill down the organization. I know that we do have vacancy management, where we have vacancies. But I'm certainly not, as the Minister responsible for Seniors, I'm not going to tell people they can't retire.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for that answer. In that same letter it also talks about limiting rehire of retired employees. Did the minister have any rehired employees?

Mr. Rondeau: I don't believe so, but I'll have to get you that information. Basically what we tried to do in our organization, one of the questions I asked when I became minister is what happens if this person leaves, and often we have really skilled people, really talented; they're excellent. But you're always trying to figure out how you're training the next person down and the next person.

So you're trying to do cross-training. When I come to every ministry, my first question is, how do

you replace everybody almost, because you want to make sure that there is no person who is irreplaceable, so we're trying to share skills. We're trying to cross-train, and we're trying to make it so that we're prepared for people when they do retire because that's inevitable.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Minister. On this letter it also states of restricting out-of-province travel. Did the minister have to not go on any trips or any conferences because of this?

Mr. Rondeau: I've learned something, Mr. Chair, about government business travel, and one is you leave and you work almost 17, 18 hours a day. You sleep in a different bed and all this. I used to be in a job that I travelled 120 days a year for travel. I like being home.

I travel if it's absolutely necessary. If I had a choice between travelling for business or staying home, I would much rather stay home, sleep in my own bed, and have my stability. And so after being in a job for 18 years that travelled for 110, 120 days a year, I'm pleased to say, by my choice, I would much rather stay home. I did attend one federal-provincial conference for Health and Healthy Living ministers. If—I do travel when it's absolutely necessary, but if it's optional, I know which option I'd take.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, I see reading the Estimates book that the Public Utilities Board now fall under the responsibility of the minister. So I'd just like to get a—ask a few questions in terms of the relationship between the Public Utilities Board and the minister's office.

First of all, I'm assuming that the, through the minister, through the—through order-in-council that all the members of the board are appointed through order-in-council. Could the minister tell me how many are on that—assigned to that board?

Mr. Rondeau: I think there's currently five or six. I'm looking at bringing the board up to a complement of nine. And we're endeavouring to find people who would be qualified to fill the vacancies that are currently existing.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, would the minister be able to supply us the names of the people that are currently sitting on the board?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, I can. However, I anticipate there's going to be some changes in the future.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to indicate why he is looking at increasing the number of board members to nine, and if there's any change in the legislation required to do that?

Mr. Rondeau: What's happened is that there's been a lot of not-long-term-serving PUB members, and the Auditor General has suggested that people shouldn't sit on boards or commissions—excess of 10 years. And so some people are retiring and changing areas. Some people have said that they want to retire, period. And so there's some vacancies.

Historically, there's been nine people on the board. What the member might not know, Mr. Chair, is that now more and more they're doing more water and sewer hearings, they're doing more other things, and so I figured it was just prudent to put it up to nine people: (a) for succession planning and succession; and (b) to continue to increase the expertise on the PUB.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, clearly, the board deals with a lot different issues and a lot of different legislation they're responsible for. Is it the responsibility of the board chair to determine who sits on those various review panels? You know, if you have that number of members on the Public Utilities Board, I just wonder who's responsible for assigning the respective board members to the respective areas?

Mr. Rondeau: I actually don't get involved, and it's a quasi-judicial. I appoint the members through OIC and then it's basically hands-off. The chairperson of the PUB, actually does all the assigning, does the coordinating. They actually have a staff that works within it and, basically, it's a hands-off board, because you don't want to get involved in it.

So, basically, I appoint the members through OIC. I recommend the members, they're appointed through OIC and then the chair of the board runs its operations.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I trust, then, there must be regulations in place that would dictate how the board operates under those various guidelines and in terms maybe, you know, some of the legislation that they're also responsible for.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, PUB has its legislation and regulations.

Mr. Cullen: I guess the other thing, then, is the reporting mechanism. How does the Public Utilities Board report back to the minister?

Mr. Rondeau: I've been informed, yes, they have an annual report. They send it up and I table it when they send it to me. We don't deal with it other than that. It's a public document and I'm sure we can get you a copy, but I haven't seen it yet.

Mr. Cullen: Does the minister have regular conversations with the chair of the Public Utilities Board?

Mr. Rondeau: I actually met the chair of the Public Utilities Board and that's the extent of our relationship as of now.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. Has there been any changes in the mandate for the Public Utilities Board, either additional legislation that they've been asked to look at, or on the other side of the coin, has there been anything deleted from their purview?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that some things on the pre-arranged funeral bill will be moving to the funeral board. That hasn't quite happened yet, because I haven't—the act hasn't been proclaimed on the pre-arranged funeral act.

They also were given the mandate to set the rate for payday loan cheques—for government cheques for payday loan—no, just government cheques? Government cheques. For government cheques—rates.

Other than that, there hasn't been any changes for a number of years.

* (16:50)

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I reference page 52 of the Estimates book, if they would. Just for the minister, I reference page 52. I'm looking for an explanation of the bottom line on page 52 under the expected results for the PUB, and it talks about holding 20 to 25 public hearings per year, and conduct public paper-based review of other applicant filings to the board. Could the minister explain to me what that means in layman's terms?

Mr. Rondeau: I have the answer. Apparently, what they're trying to do is have the different parties submit their arguments by paper, not having a hearing, and then just having the order made. And so, that would be a cost-effective and efficiency activity.

Mr. Smook: Just a couple more questions for you. On page 10 of the Residential Tenancies Branch, it shows that there's 64.3 FTE for a total of forty-three—\$4,000,363. And the comparison to the year before,

it's the same amount of full-time equivalent, but it's four hundred—\$4,000,389. So there's a decrease in there. Would the same people—and if there's been no change, is it—what would account for that?

Mr. Rondeau: I would assume staff turnover. When senior people leave, they're paid, usually, at a maximum grid. When new people come, they're not paid that much. So therefore, you save some money.

Mr. Smook: Also, on that same page, Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission, does it only handle MPI claims in this, or?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that commission hears MPI personal injury appeals. I heard—I think you heard it from Alex originally, didn't you?

Mr. Smook: If a person gets injured out of the province, it's not associated with MPI, but is still a claim where there's an injury in an automobile or whatever. Is the person able to go to this commission for help, or is it just strictly MPI?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand, Mr. Chair, it's only if MPI has made the decision. So it's not with other insurers.

Mr. Smook: [interjection] We'll have to discuss that.

Being the time of, I believe, 5 to 5, I believe we would—be ready for line by line.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department. I will now call:

Resolution 34.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$23,118,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, Healthy Living, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 34.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,712,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, Seniors and Healthy Aging, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 34.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,625,000 for Healthy Living—sorry, I will read it again.

Resolution 34.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$12,675,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, consumer affair and corporate affairs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 34.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,492,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 34.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$219,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 34.1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 34.1.

At this point, we'd request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item—last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Okay, as I don't hear any question, resolving—

Resolution 34.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$646,000 for Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs.

The time being 4:58, I am interrupting proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

* (14:30)

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

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

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It's—talking about adult literacy, I figure we'll do a little bit of a switch up here. Adult literacy, it's—we see that we funded 41 agencies and 45 adult learning centres in 2010-2011. It's great to see that all these people are accessing the adult learning centres and the literacy programs.

Does the minister know what Manitoba's current adult literacy rate is?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): I wonder if we could just get a clarification—rate of what, specifically, that the member's looking for?

Mr. Ewasko: The percentage of Manitobans whose—as far as—how many people are attending adult learning centres.

Ms. Selby: And it is a great pleasure to speak about adult learning and literacy. The member probably noted that there was some adult learners in the gallery today. I have such admiration for people that have the courage to say, I'm going to go back to school, particularly when they're going back to one of our adult learning centres, often to pursue high school education, sometimes just to get a credit. In the case of literacy, of course, it takes a lot of courage to say that I don't have as strong a literacy skills as I would like to have. And so I have nothing but admiration for people who are accessing our adult learning and literacy centres.

I think it's really important and—which is why this government has increased the funding by 93 per cent since we came into office. As the member was saying, there are a number of adult learning and literacy programs around the province, serving both urban areas and rural areas as well.

As—the numbers I have that would be most accurate for the member would be that in 2010-2011, we had nearly 12,000 adult learners attending one of Manitoba's adult learning and literacy programs. In 2010-2011, adult learners in Manitoba completed 12,855 courses for high school credit. Of course, some adult learners don't go back to finish the entire high school diploma. Some just go back for a particular credit that they need for work. But of those, 1,438 graduated with a high school diploma.

Mr. Ewasko: What is the process for determining who will receive funding in regards to the different adult learning centres, and what is the criteria?

Ms. Selby: Criteria used to register the adult learning centres and determine the grant allocations are as—the follow. It's rather a detailed list, but I'll read it in for the member.

Centres must have compliance with the requirements of the adult learning centre registration—this is a little complicated here—as per section 8 of the adult learning centre act. But, to explain that a little more, that would include provision of an educational program that meets the purpose of an ALC as stated in section 3 of the ALC act: demonstrated evidence of the need for a centre; demonstrated evidence that the program is responsive to learner needs; an availability of sufficient financial resources to support the centre's operation. They must show demonstrated evidence that the centre employs an appropriately qualified director and teaching staff. They must show evidence that they have an accepted—acceptable, rather, enrolment policy, demonstrate evidence of appropriate facilities and, where applicable, provision of an acceptable partnership agreement. The member may well be aware that adult learning centres are associated, in some cases, with local high schools, sometimes with a post-secondary institution.

They also must have qualitative and quantitative evidence of their program's effectiveness, adhere to sound adult learning principles. They must have done a regional analysis to determine areas of greatest need and in congruence with the strategic priorities of the department.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer. So, in regards to the effectiveness, who judges that after the fact?

* (14:40)

Ms. Selby: The member is correct that it is important to, of course, gauge the effectiveness of the programs. That is in part why adult learning centres do have to apply annually for their funding. There is a follow-up with that including site visits, a report on results. We make an assessment of the statistical evidence on student progression. That assessment involves some decision making on the funding, sometimes with suggestions of where improvements may be needed or where we could see more gain. Of course, it's always important to, while you're looking at the statistical evidence, to also keep in mind that,

as I said earlier, some of the students are going back to finish an entire grade 12, others are just going to get a course or two that they may need for employment or other circumstances. But, definitely, the department works quite closely with the adult learning centres to make sure that they're keeping up all the standards and seeing progress.

And as I said, we know from the 'stistical' evidence from 2010-2011 that nearly 13,000 courses for high school credit were completed in the centres around the province.

Mr. Ewasko: Since the funding is re-evaluated every year, the assessment or the audit on a yearly basis, that's done by the department and, then, if done by the department, who, specifically, from the department goes out and checks per each site?

Ms. Selby: That assessment, evaluation and site visits, analysis of the statistical evidence is all done by the department of the Adult Learning and Literacy folks.

Mr. Ewasko: At this time, I'd like to give the opportunity to one of my colleagues to ask some questions.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Yes, and thank you very much through you to the minister.

The last time we were in committee on May the 17th in Estimates, in a question that I asked the minister basically was, was she offered a Jets ticket by Red River community College? She responded by saying, and I quote, I think it's important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students. And seemingly, the minister had to go to a Jets game to meet with students.

So my question to the minister is: At Red River community College Rebels men's basketball champion team for '11 and 2012 season, did she make any of those games?

Ms. Selby: And, unfortunately, no, I haven't been able to attend one of the Red River College basketball games. I'm sure they put on an exciting performance and I'm sure that there were plenty of excited fans.

And I would like to point out, though, that the member perhaps would want to, when he reads into statements in *Hansard*, read in the entire statement where I clearly stated that I do meet regularly with students and with the presidents of all the public institutions. I think it's important that I do. I also very clearly stated in that same discussion that the

member and I had that I did accept a ticket from Stephanie Forsyth to attend the Jets game with her. Although, at the time, the policy was that we were to claim gifts over \$250, I did put that down on the conflict of interest, and I have since paid back the ticket as the policy that has now been issued in our caucus has asked us to. And I think that it's important that the member continue to read the entire statement when he's reading a portion of it.

Mr. Schuler: One of the justifications that the minister gave for taking freebie Jets tickets from Red River community College was, and I quote: I think is important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students. I was wondering if she ever got around to meeting the students who play on the Rebels women's basketball team, which happened to be the champions for the season for 2011-2012? Did she ever make any of those games?

Ms. Selby: And I must send my congratulations to the athletes who have obviously shown a remarkable ability in the game, and I admire it because I have to say that basketball is not something that I'm a particularly good player at, but I know that we do have other caucus members who are certainly skilled on the basketball court. I would like to say that it would be fantastic, and I can't say for sure if I've met any of those particular students.

I do attend events as asked to go to, including convocation, and I'm looking forward to convocations beginning. I will be at the access convocation tonight at the University of Manitoba. So, I can't tell the member if I've for sure, have met any of the individuals on the basketball team. I'm not sure if I've come across them in various meetings or various outings or events, but, unfortunately, no, I haven't had a chance to attend one of their basketball games.

But I perhaps should try to make that a priority in the next season, being that I have three daughters who are particular basketball fans right now, and looking forward to attending some clinics this summer to improve their game. And I know that they would be enthusiastic to attend basketball games, soccer games, hockey games of any kind at all the post-secondary institutions. And I particularly think that if they're attending a game with some of the female athletes, that I can't think of better role models for my daughters to be looking up to.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, the minister seemed to have all kinds of time to take freebie tickets to a Jets game. I was wondering if she took the time to go to the

Rebels men's volleyball—any one of the games. In fact, the volleyball team made second place. The minister mentioned basketball wasn't her favourite, so volleyball might be. They placed second for the 2011-2012 season. Did she make any of those games where she—as she said, and I quote: I think is important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students. Did she have a chance to make any of those games?

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the minister, I will gently remind members of the committee that we're dealing with Estimates, and there is a way to link certain questions to the Estimates, but I might ask members of the committee to draw that connection, just so we can be in keeping with the due processes of the House.

Would the member for St. Paul care to rephrase his question, or—?

Mr. Schuler: Yes, actually, we did agree to global, but page 9, item No. 2, Support for Universities and Colleges: I think it's pretty clear that the money, and it says clearly support for universities and colleges—that would include Red River community College, and as part of her duties as minister, because she certainly funds—the government funds a lot of the activities there, one of the things she could do is, rather than taking free Jets tickets, she could actually make herself available to men's volleyball game, and a great team, the Rebels men's volleyball team placed second in the 2011-2012 season. Did she make any of those games?

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the member for St. Paul for that newly reworded question. Now recognizing the minister.

Ms. Selby: And I should remind the member that I paid for that ticket, but I—and I would say again that I have great admiration for athletes of all abilities.

My talents lay more in the arts area where I've studied a lot of dance but unfortunately have not played a lot of volleyball or basketball.

But I believe that looking at my daughters' interests, I'm going to spend a lot more time at basketball, volleyball, and soccer games in the next few years, as that's where their passion seems to lie. And the member's pointing out that there are a number of wonderful athletics teams in our province. I know that we've got things to be proud of at all of our post-secondary institutions in terms of the successes of our teams, but also, I would say, just the participation.

And I think the member rightly points out that perhaps I've been missing out on some great entertainment in this city, and we'll try to make it a point of attending more of our post-secondary education's athletic achievements because it sounds like we've had some exciting players coming to our colleges and universities. But this is, I guess, just because of the fact that we have seen enrolment go up dramatically in the last 10 years since we've been in.

* (14:50)

So I suppose, as enrolment goes up, we also attract a number of athletes and it sounds like they've been really working together in terms of team 'playing' and we've seen success because of that. But of course, I will congratulate them all on participating, not just on their successes, but for getting involved in the first place. It's wonderful.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, I would probably point out to the minister that, before she got here, there was also history, and I have a feeling that Red River community College teams did well back then too. I wouldn't throw all those teams under the bus necessarily, but she might want to do that. I wouldn't.

Page 9, item No. 2: When it comes to support for universities and colleges, the Rebels women's volleyball team, in the 2011-2012 season, came in third place. What about the Rebels dance team, minister? Did she make any one of those? For as she said, and I quote: "I think is important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students."

Instead of going to Jets games on the Red River community College, did she have the opportunity to attend any of these games?

Ms. Selby: And again, I'll remind the member that I paid for the ticket that I attended the one Jets game with.

I think the member points out that there is a lot of great athletic achievement going on at the post-secondary institution and, no doubt, at the K to 12 as well.

Certainly, would look forward to making sure that I fit a few more of those sort of events into my calendar. I will be at the convocations in the next few weeks and will look forward to seeing that and will, no doubt, see many of those athletes go on to success. And I congratulate them all for their participating and for being such fantastic role models to the young people around the province.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, Red River community College has a fantastic soccer program that is just started up and I, certainly as one Manitoban, am incredibly proud of the basketball, volleyball and all the other teams and the fact that Red River community College decided to also get into the soccer program as well. In fact, the Rebels men's soccer got second place; the Rebels women's soccer got third place, 2010-2011.

Minister mentioned she's got three children. Should she avail herself of any of these games to do as she said in *Hansard*, and I quote: "I think it's important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students."

Did she have the—take the opportunity to go to any of these games as she did to get a free ticket to go to a Jets game?

Ms. Selby: And I'll remind the member again, that I did pay for the Jet ticket that I attended with the president on her invitation.

And I would like to thank the member for taking the time to read in to *Hansard* all the winning teams that we've had this year. I mean, it's really incredible when you hear them read into record one after another. And I would thank the member for his enthusiasm and support of what we're doing in post-secondary education, particularly with the athletes who, I think, play an important role in being role models on campus. But, of course, as I said, certainly for my three daughters, I love the opportunity for them to see what some of the young women are doing at the post-secondary education in terms of athletics as well.

So I do thank him for taking the time out of his schedule to read all those winning teams into *Hansard*. I think it's really important that we recognize the excellence that's happening at our post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Schuler: Well, and I appreciate the minister's comments because somebody has to do it while the minister is going to free Jets games. Some of us are actually doing a lot of the youth sport and being involved in it.

I have a question for the minister and it deals with page 9, section 2, of the budget.

A lot of funding goes to these organizations and, one would think, if the minister took as much interest in going to Jets games perhaps at the University of Manitoba, and I will just list them; Bison men's

'basketptall'; Bison women's basketball; Bison cheerleading; Bison men's cross-country; Bison women's cross-country; Bison men's football; Bison golf; Bison men's hockey; Bison women's hockey; Bison women's soccer; Bison men's swimming; Bison women's swimming; Bison men's track and field; Bison women's track and field; Bison men's volleyball; Bison women's volleyball; Bison men's curling; Bison women's curling; all who place phenomenally across the country.

Did the minister ever take a little bit of time out of her schedule, other than going to Jets games on the Red River community College dime? Did she ever take the opportunity to go to any one of these sports games at the University of Manitoba?

Ms. Selby: And I'll remind the member again, that I did pay for that Jets ticket.

And I think the member points out something really exciting—that when you increase funding to universities by 90 per cent in the last decade, it shows that they cannot only grow the excellence of our universities, but also increase some of the other areas of participation for our athletes.

We know that operating grants to our colleges have increased by 142.7 per cent since we came into office, and I'm pleased to say that that money goes towards, of course, excellence in teaching. And I'm very proud of the teaching that goes on at our post-secondary institutions. But it also goes to making sure that students have an enriched life while they're there, that they have the opportunity to play sports, to attend events.

I was at an event this morning at the University of Manitoba, invited to attend the beautification day there, and I'm always pleased to attend any event that the universities or colleges would like me to be there for, because I think it's not only an important thing to do, but it's certainly a really fun thing to do, to see the fact that our campuses around this province—you can't go to a campus in Manitoba that hasn't seen growth in terms of our enrolment, but growth in terms of new buildings, in partnership with the federal government, through the KIP program.

We have been putting up new buildings right across this province, and it's fantastic to see the difference when you maintain affordable, quality and accessible education, you do see things like more athletics. You see people excelling in whatever area, and that's a perfect opportunity for whether it be folks who excel at athletics or folks who excel in

academics or are doing both at our universities and colleges across the province.

Mr. Schuler: And I appreciate the minister paid for her Jets ticket after she got caught.

And page 9, section 2, I mean the Province does fund a lot of activities at universities, for instance, Brandon University, the Bobcats men's basketball, Bobcats women's basketball, Bobcats men's volleyball, Bobcats women's volleyball. In fact there used to be hockey team out there before the minister slashed their funding. Too bad they lost that.

How about the University of Winnipeg Wesman men's volleyball, Wesman women's volleyball, Wesman men's basketball, Wesman women's basketball. University of Winnipeg decided to also start up a soccer program. I think they're one of the most successful groups in the country. In fact, they were moved up an entire tier in one year. The men's and the women's soccer at Wesman, Wesman men's wrestling, Wesman women's wrestling, Wesman men's baseball; Providence University and Seminary Providence athletics men's basketball, women's 'basbeta', men's volleyball, women's volleyball, men's soccer, women's soccer. Canadian Mennonite University the Blazers men's basketball, women's basketball, men's soccer, women's soccer, men's volleyball, women's volleyball.

Did the minister avail herself of any one of those games, even one, or did she only have time to get free tickets to Jets games which, after she got caught, she then paid for?

Ms. Selby: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I think the member's confusing his own party's record on post-secondary education with ours. This party's actually increased funding by 90 per cent. We haven't cut or frozen funding for five years straight. That was actually the Filmon government did that. He's a bit confused.

We've also maintained affordable tuition. We're not the party that saw tuition fees skyrocket by 132 per cent. We have legislated that tuition will raise at the rate of inflation. So I believe the minister, or the member, is rather remembering his own party record, which was brutal. I admit it that they cut or froze funding to universities for five years straight. Tuition fees skyrocketed by 132 per cent.

The difference here is that we have block funding for universities. The University of Brandon saw their grants increase by 5 per cent last year, 5 per cent this year and we'll see it increase by

5 per cent next year. Since 1999 we've increased funding to the university of Brandon by 92.7 per cent. But certainly in the '90s they did see their budget slashed, but that would have been the member's party, not this one.

Mr. Schuler: Interesting, the minister went to a game and there was another woman who went along on one of the free tickets. This is a couple of months ago. The minister can't remember that individual's name, but has a very good memory of the '90s. So short-term memory seems to be going but long-term memory still seems to be there. Maybe she should have that looked into.

I'd like to see the minister page 9, section 2, 50 post-secondary sports teams in six institutions have been playing sports in the last year, 2011-2012. And they've done a very good job. A lot of them have won their divisions, have won scholarships and not once—not once did the minister ever avail herself of one of them. But as soon as she was approached—as soon as she was approached for a freebie, to be wined and dined at a Jets game, she was in, hook, line, sinker, paid for the ticket after she got caught.

*(15:00)

Not once did the minister think to go and support a sports team, and she puts stuff on the record like the kind of stuff she's done until now. None of it true. None of it factual. I mean, the facts that she should have had at her fingertips, like who did she go to a Jets game with three months ago. Well, that little detail she can't quite remember. But, she says, I went to the Jets game because I think is important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students, and promptly never met with one.

When it went to sports, the only thing she had time for, the only thing that she cared about, was going for a freebie at a Jets game, and 50 post-secondary sports team—never once did she ever grace them with her presence. Never once did she have time for that. But a Jets game she did have time for, and that is what this is all about, is the misplaced priorities, and to sit at committee and talk about the '90s and all the rest of it—you know, she can do that.

What about present day? What about all these young people, put their heart and their soul in what they do? And, yes, to anybody at this table, I am there and I am at these games and I go to these as many as I can. And you know what? I cheer for them. I cheer because they're doing such a great job. And the least the minister of post-secondary

education could do is show up for one game. I guess the question should be how many university students from any one of these universities did she actually talk to on the Jets team, because she says, I went to the Jets game, I think it's important is for me as minister to meet regularly with students. Which student from any one of these institutions did she talk to at that Jets game who plays for the Jets? And yet here, one team after another, all under her purview, they would love to see a minister there. They would love to see somebody there. They love it when the MLA for St. Paul goes to these games. They love it when we're there.

But the minister goes to a freebie Jets game—pays for it, absolutely, after she gets caught. That, she has time for. But she doesn't have time for any one of these games, any one of these athletes. She never showed her face, and that is what is the disgrace about all of this.

Could she please tell this committee, on the Jets team, which one of these university students did she actually meet with?

Ms. Selby: I have a degree in communications. I don't have a degree in biology. But my understanding of long-term memory is that it can be affected by trauma, and if something particularly difficult happens in one's life, that can affect how they remember things. So I can assure the member that I'm not the only person who was a student in the '90s who remembered what it was like to go to school in the '90s.

The member spoke about the fact that there are many of our athletes and students who are at school on scholarship and bursary, and while that's true nowadays, there was no bursaries in the '90s because the member's party cut bursaries in the '90s. They got rid of them.

We brought them back, and that is why we do see that students who have the passion to learn are going to school, because we want students to go to school because they have the passion to learn, not because of what's in their pocketbook, and that's why we re-established the bursary program. It's why we have tuition legislation, certainly different when I was in school in the '90s.

I also would like to point out that I'm very pleased that the member has read into record all the things that are happening around our universities and colleges. I think that when you increase operating grants by 90 per cent in the last decade, it shows that

universities and colleges are able to better supply a quality of life to students on campus, that we know that the quality of education improves, but so does the quality of the life experience, which is what we're looking for in post-secondary education, is that we want to see people get a good education, but also become good citizens of the world as they come out. And I think the member points out, rightly so, that there's a lot of exciting athletic opportunities, both as players and as audience attendance, and I will be at universities and colleges around the province quite a bit in the next few weeks as I attend the convocations, but I certainly will make time to see a few more of these games because, as I said, I've got three daughters that are very interested in athletics, and I can't think of better role models than for them to attend a few of the post-secondary institutions' women's games in particular.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, is the committee ready to proceed with resolutions? All right.

We thank the staff.

Resolution 44.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$619,314,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Support for Universities and Colleges, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,551,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Manitoba Student Aid, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,197,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Adult Learning and Literacy, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,571,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Capital Grants, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$1,546,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$500,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Last item to be considered for the Estimates for this department is item 44.1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 44.1.

We'll, at this point, ask minister's staff to excuse themselves from the head table for the consideration of this last item, and thank them very much for their time during this Estimates process.

The floor is open for questions. Seeing none, we will proceed to the resolution.

Resolution 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,026,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

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

Doing a quick scan of the room, I don't think we have all of the players necessary for this. Does the committee wish to take a brief, five-minute recess? Okay, committee is in recess for five minutes.

The committee recessed at 3:08 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:15 p.m.

Ms. Melanie Wight, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

EDUCATION

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Education.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Yes, I do.

I'm pleased to be here today to talk about Manitoba's public education system, as it continues to be a cornerstone in improving the social and economic well-being of our citizens today and into the future.

Our government demonstrates its commitment to education by helping to meet the needs of parents, students and taxpayers across the province. In 2012-13 education continues to be a priority area as the Manitoba government is once again fulfilling its commitment to fund public education at or above the rate of economic growth with a 2.2 per cent increase to public school funding for 2012-13. This is consistent with funding increases to school divisions at the rate of economic growth since 2000-2001, including the year 2008-2009 when we made the largest funding increase in 25 years of \$53.5 million.

Mr. Chair—or, Madam Chair, 2012-13 is the 13 consecutive year the Province has met or exceeded its commitment to fund public schools at the rate of economic growth, and over the last 13 years funding has increased by \$411.6 million or 53.4 per cent. Over those 13 years, funding to public 'schools' has grown by over \$1.1825 billion.

This increase—excuse me—in funding to public schools is being made despite difficult economic times. It reflects the co-operative work with school divisions, encouraging restraint in order to ensure that the expenditures are managed carefully and property taxes in support of education remain affordable.

The following are some examples: according to Stats Canada, average property taxes in Manitoba have increased by only 7.4 per cent since 2000, the smallest increase of all of the provinces and significantly lower than the national average increase of 37.9 per cent. Elimination of the education support levy on residential property is complete. The education property tax credit has increased by \$350 to \$750 since 1999.

This year's budget sees every school division receiving at least the same level of funding as last year, which provides stability in the face of reassessment effects on funding and enrolment declines.

Some of the highlights of this year's funding include: \$1.2 million in new funding for English as an Additional Language, which includes an additional \$100,000 for intensive newcomer support; \$1.8 million in new funding for numeracy and early literacy intervention in order to build a strong foundation in math skills and improve reading and writing skills of students; \$1.2 million for the new learning to age 18 co-ordinator grant to keep students in school or engaged in educational programming instead of attending school; \$2.1 million in funding for the Community Schools Partnership Initiative to support schools in low socio-economic communities to enhance education through strong partnerships; \$2.4 million for the Early Childhood Development Initiative to help school divisions provide services for preschool children that increase readiness to learn prior to entry to school; and \$1.3 million in new funding for the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant to help school divisions deliver programs that target academic success for Aboriginal students.

Following up on our commitment to provide parents with more accessible, understandable information on their child's academic process—progress, 'scuse' me—and achievement, templates for a new provincial report card have now been released and training is under way to support school divisions in their implementation.

One of the most important benefits of the provincial report card is consistency, consistency in the language used to describe students' academic achievement no matter where they live or go to school in Manitoba. A provincial oversight committee representing our education partners from Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba School Boards Association, Manitoba Association of School Business Officials and the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils was instrumental in guiding this initiative. Many thanks are owed to the members of the committee for their incredible participation and input. This government recognizes the importance of the connection between early years' learning and long-term school success.

In September the Premier (Mr. Selinger) announced the kindergarten to grade 3 class size reduction initiative. Over the next five years, K to 3 classes will be limited to 20 students, and government will fund the corresponding increase in the number of early years' teachers as well as additional classroom spaces to accommodate lower enrolment classes.

* (15:20)

We see this as a very positive step to build a strong academic foundation for our youngest learners by enhancing the student-teacher connection, which we all know is so critical at that age.

I'd like to again take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the members of the provincial oversight committee for their invaluable assistance in working with my department on the policy and implementation questions, which are part and parcel of such an important and exciting initiative.

Madam Acting Chairperson, from my comment—from my comments it'll be obvious that our government strongly supports public education. We've invested more than \$737 million in public school capital projects to date. We have built 18 new schools, 13 replacement schools and completed extensive renovations and additions to existing schools. This year's record investment of \$94.2 million represents the third year of a record \$366.2-million, four-year funding commitment to our public schools.

This year, Manitoba Education will commit \$41 million to support the ongoing infrastructure renewal of mechanical, roofing, structural and accessibility systems in public schools and facilities. As well, work and investment continues on construction of three middle schools in La Broquerie, Steinbach and Schanzenfeld and two new high schools in Steinbach and Winkler.

As well, design and planning continue in preparation for the construction of the new replacement school in Woodlands and a new early learning to grade 8 elementary school in northwest Winnipeg.

Of particular note, design and planning are under way for the first group of projects announced last year under the Active Schools Fund, a five-year, \$50-million capital funding commitment to ensure quality gymnasium facilities are available for healthy living and high school graduation in our public schools. Projects under way include École Saint-Avila, Queenston School, George Fitton School, Fort Richmond Collegiate, Lord Nelson School and École Bonaventure, with others to follow later this year.

The 44 projects announced under the science classroom renewal fund, a five-year, \$25-million capital funding commitment to improve teaching and learning facilities in the sciences, are under way and scheduled for completion by September 2013.

We are also taking important steps to link early learning and child-care facilities to our public school building facilities by making room for child-care spaces in both existing and new schools with the support and co-operation of school divisions and local communities.

We continue to monitor the need for schools from both record levels of immigration across the province and from the robust residential development in Winnipeg and Brandon. We can see that stable, increased funding for education pays dividends over time.

Steadily increasing rates of high school completion demonstrate the social and economic benefits that can result from consistent investment in education. Increased resources to support the hard work of teachers and administrators, trustees and parents, in partnership with the provincial government, have helped improve graduation rates and helped to evolve more 'alternative' approaches to increased student success.

School and community partnerships provide a wide range of innovative programs to engage, encourage and mentor students, ensuring that schools are safe and accessible places to learn.

Schools collaborate with many partners to support those who are up-underrepresented in our system, working closely with immigrant, war-affected and Aboriginal students at risk of dropping out of school. These combined efforts have seen Manitoba's graduation rate increase by 17 per cent in the last decade, from 71.1 per cent in 2002 to 83.5 per cent in June 2011.

There is considerable research that tells us when that students are engaged with learning and their school, they are more likely to successfully complete high school. We know that reaching graduation and acquiring a high school diploma is absolutely critical to participating in our economy, and we are very excited that we have more young people graduating from high school.

I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to answer questions in Estimates. I welcome my Education critic from—a new Education critic, and I'm very pleased that he is a teacher, a former teacher, I understand—music teacher, and it's a wonderful community that he lives in, and I've had a opportunity to be in the community many times, and I just want to tell him how proud I am of all of the staff, the superintendent, the trustees; they're all

wonderful people in his community and I certainly look forward to an opportunity to answer any questions that he has about our departmental expenditures.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Thank you. We thank the minister for these comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Thank you, and I am pleased to have been given the responsibility to—as the critic for Education. As the minister has indicated, my background actually is in public education and fine arts, and I was a teacher in the public school system for 12 years before moving on to other pursuits. In any case, I am new to this role and I look forward to the challenge and each of us a role to play, and I endeavour to be constructive and effective in this role and to take it seriously, just as I recognize that the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) and her department takes the task very seriously.

And, while we won't always agree, I know that we will get something meaningful accomplished along the way. And so, as a new critic and new at the Estimates process, I do ask for the patience of the Chair and other parties, as I endeavour to learn this role as quickly as I can. But, in regard to the departmental expenditure Estimates process, and I'm sure that you will show the same graciousness to me as was shown to you when you were new to your role.

And, as I mentioned, as a former teacher, I want to make mention of the fact that teachers do work very hard to provide students with the quality education. They go above and beyond what is required of them contractually. The vast majority of them are constantly working and they complain that there are never enough hours in the day to accomplish their tasks in preparatory work and instruction, in assessment, in home and school communication, in special events and inventory management and budget management and extracurricular involvement, area groups and professional development. And we know that they don't do it for the money. They do it because they're passionate about teaching and they care about kids, they care about education and they understand the principle that whatever we invest in students and youth, we invest in the future of our province, the future of our communities and the future of our homes.

I also want to mention, as well, we know there are many other stakeholders in the system, in principals and school administrators at the divisional level, educational assistants, school board trustees, parent councils and parent council volunteers. All of these groups have an interest, they have a passion and they do tremendously important work to advance discussions, get work done, move us along, tackle problems and formulate solutions, and then act on that to put in place systems that work, better and better.

And, also, I want to recognize the important contribution that the deputy minister and the staff members make, the department thank them for their hard work and their leadership, their expertise and their commitment to this enterprise. And it is no small thing to have the responsibility for the direction of education for a province on your shoulders. And I know it's a weight that the responsibility of that rests heavily on the department and I thank them for the leadership that they provide.

We're all working together to give children educational opportunities; opportunities to allow them to be—to go on, to be productive and capable citizens, to make contributions to their communities and to their chosen fields and to society. And we know that we have challenges that we have to address in the province of Manitoba. We have province—challenges pertaining to student achievement, to graduation rates, to First Nations educational opportunities. We know that certain regions of this province are growing in population and that is putting demands on school infrastructure.

We know that newcomers to Manitoba require additional language resources to be successful in the transition. It will take a lot to meet these challenges; it takes careful examination of the problems; it takes commitment to a broad consultations of stakeholders and experts in the field; it takes careful and ongoing measurement to see if our methods are having the desired effect; it requires that we keep our eye on the ball and we constantly look to the bottom line and ask ourselves whether what we are doing is accomplishing what we are intending it to.

And, for the sake of our children and for the sake of the next generation, I believe that we can do this. And we don't do it in isolation, but we do understand how inextricably the educational prospects of students are linked to the welfare of our province. With a rise of a knowledge economy, a strong education system is critical to Manitoba, to our

competitiveness, to our prosperity. If we are to meet our fiscal challenges, someone said, we have first to meet our educational challenges.

* (15:30)

There is no single investment the state can make in children and youth better than a good public education, and so my first challenge is getting up to speed as critic for Education, and I have enjoyed, in the last number of months, the opportunity to meet with many stakeholder groups to come to a better understanding of the important perspective that they offer into the challenges that we face and into educational policy and practice.

And there are many areas of departmental Estimates that are being considered, even some others today and going on into next week, and all of them are important, but we, in this room, agree that Education is among the most important areas to be considered. Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 16.1.(a) contained in resolution 16.1.

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

Ms. Allan: I'm delighted to introduce my deputy minister for the Department of Education, Dr. Gerald Farthing, and I am also pleased to introduce Claude Fortier, who is the executive financial officer for finance and administration branch. And I don't know if other senior officials from my department are going to join me, but I understand they're not. We think we're—that we're pretty confident we can handle this on our own. *[interjection]* They're instantly reachable, I'm told.

So we look forward to the dialogue about Education, and I would just like to thank the Education critic for his remarks—his opening remarks. I believe they were quite thoughtful.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Thank you. Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically, or have a global discussion?

Mr. Friesen: I would make the suggestion that we proceed in a global manner.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Thank you. Is it—is that agreeable to everyone? [*Agreed*]

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Friesen: I do want to welcome the deputy minister here and his staff that is appearing. And, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I do thank the department for the important work that they do, for their expertise and the seriousness with which they take the challenges that face us. And I know that the deputy minister gets very little rest out of this; having just concluded the last Estimates in Advanced Education and Literacy, and now we continue straight on into Education. And so I thank him for his resilience and his ability to bounce back and jump right back into the chair and join us here today. And I'm sure that I will have a chance to see and put faces to names for other members of the Department of Education as we continue throughout today and then into the days that follow.

At this time, I would like to proceed, or to commence, by asking the minister if the minister could provide a list of all of the staff that are included under executive support, and ask her to provide names as well as their position and the FTE—the full-time equivalent—whether they are full-time.

Ms. Allan: Well, in my office—and I just want to clarify, are you asking for the secretarial staff in my office?

Mr. Friesen: At this time, I'm just looking for the names of the executive support that you have. So not, like, a personal assistant. I'll be asking the minister just to provide names of the positions that are, like, executive support, a management professional, whoever she has for administrative support, those kinds of positions.

Ms. Allan: Thank you very much for the clarification. Obviously, I have a deputy minister, Dr. Gerald Farthing, who I know the MLA has met. I have also—we have providing support to the department as an associate deputy minister, Rory Henry. We have a technical-vocational executive director, Peter Narth. We have a head of our Schools' Finance Branch, and she's our acting director, Lynne

Mavins, who took over the role about a year and a half ago from an incredible person that had been in our department for many years, Steve Power, who retired and moved on, and Lynne is doing a terrific job. We have the head of our Public Schools' Finance Board and that is the executive director, Rick Dedi. We have the director of education administrative services, David Yeo, who was in the briefing with the MLA the other day; and we have also our assistant deputy minister who is Aileen Najduch, and Aileen is the assistant deputy minister who is responsible for Schools Programs Division; and we have another assistant deputy minister who is responsible for the Bureau de l'éducation française division, and was in the meeting with us the other day.

And then we have some shared services. We have an Aboriginal Education Directorate, and the director is Helen Robinson-Settee; and those are kind of the major positions, senior staff in my department.

Mr. Friesen: And I thank the minister for that response. Could the minister also provide a list of all other staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office?

Ms. Allan: I will start with my office. The admin secretary to the minister is Pearl Domienik; the administrative secretary to the minister is Debbie Milani; and the administrative secretary in my office is Melissa Bodman.

And I just need to tell you that you heard the other day in our meeting about long-serving people who have worked in my department for many, many years, and you need to know that these three women have worked in the Minister of Education's office for many, many years. In fact, Pearl might not want me to share this with many people, but—

An Honourable Member: You could be in trouble.

Ms. Allan: Yes, but I believe that Pearl has worked in probably the Minister of Education's office for maybe 20 years on and off—

An Honourable Member: And now it's in *Hansard*.

Ms. Allan: And, yes, she may not—but she's absolutely wonderful.

And in the deputy minister's office, we have Debbie Joynt, and she's the admin secretary to the deputy minister; and we have Rachelle Fiola, who is the executive assistant to the deputy minister.

And we have, as well—if you would like to know who my political staff are—I have Andrew Clark, who is the assistant to the minister; and we also have Carol Wenaus, and Carol is the executive assistant to the minister, and she works in my constituency office in St. Vital.

Mr. Friesen: And I thank the minister for that response. Could the minister provide as well the number of staff currently employed in the Department of Education?

Ms. Allan: Four hundred and ten.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for that response, Madam Minister. Could the minister also provide the names of the staff who have specifically been hired in the last fiscal year, including the information whether they were hired through competition or put in by appointment?

* (15:40)

Ms. Allan: I just want to 'clarify'—'clarify': I hope this gets better. I just want to clarify—and you're talking about senior staff, not all staff of the 410, I'm hoping?

Mr. Friesen: Would it be possible to provide a list of staff throughout the department who have been hired in the past year and whether they were hired through competition and appointment, if the minister could provide the information at some point?

Ms. Allan: We would have to put that list together and provide that to the MLA.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you. I would appreciate that list so I thank her for looking into that.

I would ask if the minister would be able to also indicate a description of any position within the Department of Education that has been reclassified in the past year.

Ms. Allan: We'd be pleased to provide that information as well with the other information that we're going to gather.

Mr. Friesen: To the minister, and could the minister also provide information to indicate if all the staff positions are currently filled or indicate otherwise what the current vacancy rate is for staff positions?

Ms. Allan: Our current vacancy rate is 10 per cent.

Mr. Friesen: And could the minister also provide a listing of all vacant positions for that 10 per cent.

Ms. Allan: I think—if—just to clarify, I think what you're asking is you would like to know what those positions are of those 10 per cent, those 40 individuals. You would like to know what positions they are, and if that's what you want, we will get that for you, but if it's not, you'll have to provide clarification.

Mr. Friesen: That's exactly what I need. If we could provide a list that would show what the job title is for the open positions because there wouldn't be a name attached if they were vacant positions.

Ms. Allan: We'd be pleased to provide that.

Mr. Friesen: I would just like to know, from the minister's perspective, how long does the minister expect to maintain the vacancy rate of 10 per cent among positions that are currently vacant in the Department of Education?

Ms. Allan: We—senior officials in my office have an ongoing responsibility, we believe, to manage this vacancy rate and to monitor it in regards to the human resource needs that we have in the department in relationship to the education reform that we're doing. We are involved in some hiring now in regards to some of the positions that we have. So it's—what we're concerned about is the balance between meeting the fiscal realities that we're in right now and filling our human resource positions so that we can manage the department in regards to the work that we have in front of us.

Mr. Friesen: I would also like to ask the minister if she could provide an indication as to what the percentage of vacant positions was, one year prior, and whether the minister has any concern in regard to the 10 per cent current vacancy rate, or if, instead, she would feel that it's within acceptable limits?

Ms. Allan: Well, as—while my officials look for that, the information in regards to what that vacancy rate looked like a year ago, I would just like to respond in regards to the question in regards to the manageability of that vacancy rate.

We have—we are actually going through incredible education reform right now here in the province of Manitoba and we also have, as you were mentioning in your opening comments, lots of challenges that we have to meet on a daily basis. We call education a very dynamic portfolio. When Dr. Farthing and I started—first started working together, I turned to him one day, and I looked at him, and I said, you know, there really is no horizon. And he said, that's exactly it, Nancy.

An Honourable Member: Who said that?

Ms. Allan: Dr. Farthing.

And, you know, we—it's just such a wonderful dynamic portfolio and, you know, we're constantly meeting the challenges of, you know, working with our education partners and meeting the challenges and working with everyone.

And, I do not have a concern about the vacancy management rate in our department. If you look at some of the initiatives that we have launched in the last two years, just the report card initiative alone, was a 'monumentous' task and we did that—senior officials in my department and their support staff, worked tirelessly because they believe that this is the right thing to do. And we've been working very hard on behalf of our public education system and I feel very comfortable that the vacancy management rate is manageable and appropriate.

And, in regards to the figure, the figure a year ago was—coming tomorrow. We will provide that to you tomorrow.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Can the minister point to any specific impacts that, as a result—impacts on the Department of Education, as a result of the current 10 per cent vacancy rate? Anything that she has flagged in importance or otherwise.

Ms. Allan: In the Department of Education, we've always had the challenge of 'priorizing' our work and having the challenge of reorganizing and being very strategic about the resources that we have in the department.

We need to match people's skills to those priorities. And, when we feel that there is a specific need, we will hire people in regards to those priorities, and, in regards to what we believe are initiatives that we have to launch or have to pay attention to. That—this has always been something that the department has done, and they're just—it's just really upped the game in regards to matching those people skills and being even more strategic and just being more careful in regards to what those 'priorizations' are in regards to workload.

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the response.

Could the minister also provide a list of staff who have retired from the department in the 2010-11 and the 2011-12 fiscal years?

Ms. Allan: Well, that could possibly be quite a few people. So what we—I—we will commit to get that to you, but I'm not going to commit to get it to you tomorrow in case Claude has to do something this evening. But we would definitely commit to get that information to you in the near future.

Mr. Friesen: And, yes, I'd appreciate it if you could get the information, and if possible while this Estimates committee continues to meet, it would be helpful.

In any case, could the minister also provide a list of individuals who have been hired on a contractual basis by department during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 fiscal years?

Ms. Allan: We are—we have—we want to have a look at that. We're actually—my senior officials are discussing this because we think that there might be a concern around confidentiality with third-party contract. We're not sure. We just want to have—we just want to analyze that a tiny bit. I know that not a lot of it happens, but—and that's not really our concern here. Our concern is whether or not there might be some privacy issues. So if you wouldn't mind letting us noodle on that, and I'll get back to you on it.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister. Of course, we'd want to respect the confidentiality, and if there are issues pertaining specifically to confidentiality, we'd want to, of course, respect the anonymity of those people. So when you can, let me know if you're able to respond on that item.

I wonder if the minister would be able to provide an indication of just the senior staffers who are under the three areas of Shared Services, Bureau de l'éducation française, and School Programs Division.

Ms. Allan: The—in shared services, the staff people are Helen Robinson-Settee, who is part of the Aboriginal—who is the director of the Aboriginal Education Directorate, and the Financial and Administration Services is Claude Fortier, who is sitting at the table with us, and then we have a Systems and Technology Services director, and at this time that position is vacant but we—that is a position that is actually in the process—that has a hiring process attached to it at this moment.

And then in the française division, Jean-Vianney Auclair, who the member knows, and then in Curriculum Development and Implementation, Jacques Dorge. And I have to tell you something about Jacques Dorge. His wife is an amazing kindergarten teacher and taught my daughter, Jessie, in kindergarten. And, in the education support services, director is Florence Girouard. And in the Official Languages Programs and Administrative Services director is Kassy Assié. And in the Library and Materials Production is the director, Lynette Chartier.

And then in the school—School Programs Division under the assistant deputy minister, Aileen Najduch; we have the Program and Student Services director, Joanna Blais; we have the Manitoba School for the Deaf principal, Kathy Melnyk; we have the Early Childhood Education Unit co-ordinator, Wenda Dickens, who—at any time you'd like to talk to me about that unit, I'd be more than thrilled—we have the Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment director, Darryl Gervais; and the Manitoba Textbook Bureau COO, Brenda McKinny.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that additional information.

I'm comparing the Estimates—the departmental Estimates for 2012-13, cross-referencing them against the 2011-12 departmental Estimates, and I'm also comparing these two documents to an organizational chart that I received as a result of a FIPPA request, and this organizational chart is dated February the 23rd, 2012. I notice that in the Estimates themselves here for 2012-13, of course, this organizational chart is dated April the 1st, so it is a more current organizational chart.

I noticed there is one discrepancy between the two documents, the February 23rd requested organizational chart and the April the 1st, 2012, version that appears in the Estimates book, and that appears under shared services where there seems to be an additional position indicated as human resource services and the director of that, his name is Butch Bérubé. And I wonder if the minister can indicate why this discrepancy is here and why—if the position has been deleted or whether this is currently being a position that there is a hiring process ongoing for.

Ms. Allan: Thank you very much for the question.

Actually, what has—Butch Bérubé works for several departments, and there has been some restructuring and now he works within the Civil Service Commission. And so he no longer is part of the shared services directly linked to the Department of Education. He is within the Civil Service Commission, but he still works for us. It's strictly a restructuring.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for that answer, Madam Minister.

So am I to understand, then, that the Department of Education still has someone doing the same amount of work in the area of human resources services only now that work is not specifically articulated on the organizational chart for the department?

Ms. Allan: Yes, very nicely said.

Mr. Friesen: As a result of the change to not identify that human resources services position under the Department of Education Estimates, has there been any additional decrease in the amount of human resources services being offered to the department or being undertaken by the department, or was this simply a logistical change to identify that staffer in a different place?

Ms. Allan: Thank you very much for the question.

That's exactly it. It's strictly a restructuring and linking that individual to the broader Civil Service Commission because of the—his responsibility for more than one department.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister, then, indicate the basis on which this position is shared between different departments or different groups?

Ms. Allan: Well, this has been long-standing in our government in regards to the shared services of individuals who deal with human resources. We do that because we really believe that just to have a human resources person specifically working directly with just one department, it's really a bigger job than that. So I—and the interesting thing about it is when I was in the Department of Labour and Immigration, Butch was my human resource person. So then, when I came to the Department of Education, it was really nice for me because it was the same person that was working in the Department of Education.

* (16:00)

I—I'm—I can't quite recall, off the top of my head, and it might be a question for the Civil Service

Commission Estimates, but I understand there's, I believe, three or four people that manage three or four departments. And it's efficient and it works and it provides continuity as well, and different portfolios for those individuals to work with.

Mr. Friesen: Then the question I would have as a result from that is just to clarify in my mind—I look back to the 2011-12 Estimates and that position does not appear there. Neither does the position appear in the 2012-13 Estimates, yet on the requested information that we received from the department on—in—it looks like in early March, that position is indicated there.

Why would the decision have been made to indicate that position under Shared Services for the purposes of the freedom of information request?

Ms. Allan: We're really not sure. We think it might be because it may have been specifically related to the—I mean, I don't know what the question says in—the FIPPA question said. It may have been an oversight or it may—we're not really sure, but it's the—this is the April 1st, 2012 document is the one that is most current in the official Estimates book.

Mr. Friesen: I'd be happy to read you, actually, the request that was written. It reads: Please provide the most recent organizational chart which reflects any changes resulting from the January the 13th, 2012 ministry reorganization.

So, on that basis, with that question being asked, I'm wondering why it would be the case that, if that position was not specifically identified in the 2011-12 Estimates, nor in the 2012-13 Estimates, why would it been identified in the February the 23rd FIPPA request. Just looking for a clarification of why that might be. And, perhaps, additionally, an indication of whether in the future that position might appear on future organizational charts.

Ms. Allan: We think it was an oversight. But, for sure, this is the page and we don't believe that in future you will see that box there again under the shared services.

Mr. Friesen: Just looking for one more clarification then. Did the minister indicate that in the future we would see the box appearing there, or we wouldn't?

Ms. Allan: Wouldn't.

Mr. Friesen: And thank you, Madam Minister, for that important clarification for me.

Ms. Allan: Ever.

Mr. Friesen: And I thank you for that additional clarification. That very precise clarification.

The only other difference that I see on the two organizational charts, the one that is furnished in the Estimates and the one that appears in the February 23rd information request, is just a small thing, and that is under the Bureau de l'éducation française, there is a position there listed as curriculum development and implementation director. In the Estimates for this year, that position is indicated as Jacques Dorge but in the FIPPA request the position is indicated by being occupied by Gilbert Michaud. And could the minister just comment on the discrepancy?

Ms. Allan: Okay, so moving right along. I'm going to be completely and totally honest with you. Apparently, we're no good at these charts whatsoever, and—I'm—it's really good that we're really good at programs and services in our department and report cards and all those kinds of things because, quite frankly, apparently we can't—we're having a little trouble with our boxes on our charts.

And we have received an email from Jean-Vianney Auclair, who is reminding us that Jacques Dorge retired, and he's retired with that lovely kindergarten teacher wife of his. And the new person is the person that you are reminding us is now in the position, so thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for that clarification, Madam Minister. At what time did the previous director retire?

Ms. Allan: We're going to get that date for you as soon as possible.

Mr. Friesen: The reason I ask the question is, I'm not certain procedurally what occurs if there is an error in the Estimates and information presented in the Estimates. And, if it was the case that Jacques Dorge was no longer in that position, and it should have indicated the other name as the director, then I'm wondering, what is the process by which a correction would be made to the permanent record of the departmental Estimates, and whether there would be a commitment to make that correction?

Ms. Allan: Well, we certainly are going to look into this. I mean, you know how fond I am of my deputy minister, but I think we might have to put a discipline notice on his file for this, you know, incredible, you know—no, I'm kidding.

An Honourable Member: My first one.

Ms. Allan: Yes, his first one. I'm sure this is his first mistake in 27 years in our department. I'm sure this must be it. But we—that's a very good question, and I thank the member for asking that, and we will look into that, and figure out how we rectify this, and what the process is for clarifying a mistake like this.

And, just to clarify, the retirement of Jacques Dorge was August 2011.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for that clarification. I think at this time I would like to take a look at—I'm going to refer to page 9 of the Estimates. And I wanted to ask for a clarification of some numbers, and as I mentioned earlier in my preamble, I am new at this process, and so it has certainly been a test of my math skills. It's been a very important brush up for me, to be looking at the numbers and to be adding columns and comparing and I'm noticing—or what I would like for the minister to provide is just an explanation for me. In looking at the Estimates, and comparing them to the previous year's Estimates, in some cases I'm finding a discrepancy in amounts in the column listed for 2012-13 and the column listed for 2011-12.

* (16:10)

For instance, if I could refer to page 9 on schedule 2 under Education, summary of programs, under No. 7, summary of Programs, costs related to capital assets, there is a number indicated, of course, in thousands, \$166,000, for costs related to capital assets, and this same line item is indicated as \$166,000 for the previous Estimates in expenditure for 2011-2012. However, if I then refer to the 2011-2012 departmental Estimates for Manitoba Education, I see a different number.

I'm just wondering if the minister can provide an explanation as to why I would see a discrepancy. That number in the 2011-12 Estimates, the same line item, No. 7, costs related to capital assets, it's reported as \$159,000. Yet in the Estimates for 2012-13, that number's reported as 166, identical to the 2012-13. Can the minister provide an explanation?

Ms. Allan: What happens, sometimes, is there is an adjusted vote on—and the number is adjusted. And I'm sure that the next thing you're going to ask is, you know, why—what was it, and we would be more than prepared to look into that and get that number for you in regards to the difference between the 166 and the 159 in the 2011-2012 year.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister just repeat that answer, again; I missed part of her response.

Ms. Allan: Sometimes—officials in my department are telling me that sometimes what's—what happens is there is an adjusted vote in regards to the number in the budget, and I'm sure that you're going to ask—*[interjection]* okay, and you're going to—and so the reason that there is a change from the 159 to the 166 is there was an adjusted vote.

And the adjusted vote was a transfer for amortization costs related to the purchase of new scanners from Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment branch to costs related to capital assets, which is an amortization expense, and a transfer for interest to costs related to the purchases of new scanners from Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment branch to costs related to capital assets, interest expense.

So those—one was \$6,000 and the other one was \$1,000, which is a—and that's the \$7,000, and that's the difference between the 159 and the 166. So it's an in-year budgetary issue where things kind of move and change a little bit.

Mr. Friesen: To the minister, is an adjusted vote a frequent occurrence within a budgetary year, or is it more rare?

Ms. Allan: No, it's not frequent, but it does happen from time to time. And, if you look at the bottom of page 9, you will see that there was three adjusted votes, and they're there—the allocation of funds from, and you see the 150, the 11 and the 340. And it's a—they call it the reconciliation statement. So they reconcile the figures to match the budget.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Acting Chair, and thank you, Madam Minister, for the response. The reason I asked the question is because—and I understand, too, that this is a, it's a small amount, the distance between 159 and 166. And every dollar is, of course, important but I mention it just so that I come to a better understanding of how to read the Estimates books, but also what to do when I see a discrepancy between the numbers presented in this book and the numbers presented in the previous book.

In this case, I did find more than three occurrences of discrepancies on page 9, still under schedule 2, Education, summary of programs. For instance I would just draw to the minister's attention that under number one, administration and finance. Again, if I look at the 2011-12, it's reported in this

year's Estimates as 1935, but it actually appears as 1894, last year. And then just down the page, under school programs, it's reported as 26,958, but in last year's Estimates it appears as 25,977. And I can point to three or four or five different examples of discrepancies. Now I understand that we carry down the page, so I may see one discrepancy and then as we add down the page and arrive at a subtotal, these subtotals will continue to report the difference.

But above the line to total the amounts in those first seven items, I do count five discrepancies between the estimates of expenditure 2011-12, as reported in the '12-13 Estimates and as reported into this one. I wonder if the minister could comment and explain the discrepancies for five areas.

Ms. Allan: Well, the top line is—are the totals in the program-related areas from one to seven that are within the department, and then the ones that are at the bottom of the page are between departments. They move in and out of the department. So the totals at the top of the page are totals that occur within our departmental budget, the Department of Education budget.

And, thank you very much, and for further clarification, I'm informed by my deputy minister that considering the financial size of our department, the five adjusted votes are not a concern to us in regards to the difference in regards to the dollar figures.

Mr. Friesen: To clarify though, then I would understand that adjusted votes can take place within a department, but adjusted vote could also take place between departments. Now the ones I identified in the first seven lines of the summary of programs, these would be considered to be adjusted votes within a department. Is that a correct understanding?

Ms. Allan: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Friesen: And just seeking to understand the process better and to understand the documents better, I'm not certain how often it is the case that an adjusted vote takes place. I understand that we are talking about some amounts that aren't hugely significant. And as we add down the page and, you know, I can recognize, too, that the amount is not hugely significant for the size of the department.

But I'm noticing as well that I do find similar types of discrepancies on other pages of the book. And I guess the reason I ask it is because these are small amounts that are listed here under summary of

programs, but I see a similar pattern in other areas of the book.

* (16:20)

And I would like to draw the attention of the minister a few pages later, to page 19 of the Estimates. And at page 19, I would just like to compare two numbers there. And I assure the minister that there are many numbers that I've jotted in the margins as I've been preparing for the Estimates process and been jotting down the differences. And I think, in some cases, if they are more significant numbers I may ask a question, and if they are small amounts I may decline to ask the question, understanding that the amounts are not hugely significant; they're often minute amounts.

But on page 19, under administration and finance, I want to draw the minister's attention to (b) executive support. And, under executive support, the Estimates of Expenditure for this year indicate \$841,000 as being the amount of executive support, and those—that same amount is indicated as 841 for the previous year's Estimates. If I turn to page 19 in the previous year's Estimates, I don't get 841; instead, I get a figure of 691.

And I wonder if the minister would be prepared to comment on the \$150,000—is my math accurate?—\$150,000 difference between these two amounts. And I'm wondering: Is there a threshold amount at which it becomes important to report an adjusted vote?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm informed by my officials in my department that a budget is a budget, right? And it, you know—I know my budget at home never really goes the way I want it to. [*interjection*] And, yes, it's—really, I don't know why that is.

And the normal—this is a normal accounting practice in government in regards to the adjusted votes. There is—in regards to the threshold amount question, the—there is no concern in regards to that amount. It is—this is—it is an amount that's put into the budget, and these things change. Things change in regards to what this year looks like, particularly with a budget, you know, when you have this kind of a budget that is—it is, I believe, the second-biggest budget in government. And, you know, sometimes these kind of things happen, but I'm—I understand from officials in my department that this is—there's nothing abnormal about these adjusted votes. These—this is normal accounting practice in government.

And if you look at the Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue in the 2012 budget that we tabled and you look in our overview, it says very clearly on page 16, in order to make year-over-year comparisons meaningful, adjustments to the previous year's Estimates figures may be necessary.

These adjustments reflect organizational changes as well as any other adjustments that may be required to provide comparability. Generally, the total of the previous year's Estimates of Expenditure does not change as a result of these adjustments. So—the total.

So there is kind of a little bit of an explanation there in page 16, on that overview page, that just kind of, you know, talks a little bit about, you know, some of the questions that you're asking. And, you know, we appreciate those questions and we'll provide—to try to provide as much information as we can around them.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Then my question for the minister—and the minister has indicated that in government—and these are budgets and, of course, things change and I recognize that as well. Things change and through the course of a budgetary year things happen and there's changes and there is flexibility to respond to things.

My question for the minister, as a result of her statement that things change, is in regard to (b) executive support, page 19, administration and finance, from \$691,000 to \$841,000, what changed?

Ms. Allan: Yes, the figure that—the difference in that line item is the new associate deputy minister that the—is on our organizational chart. There's been many questions for the previous Minister of Advanced Education in regards to the work that Dr. Rory Henry is doing for both of our departments, and we share Dr. Henry and his salary and benefits are in that line item right there.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Am I, then, to assume that the difference between those amounts, 691 and 841, would indicate that the salary for the new associate deputy director of the Department of Education is \$150,000?

Ms. Allan: No, the salary for the associate deputy minister is \$106,745.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response, and the differential between those amounts is explained how?

Ms. Allan: Benefits and some operating support.

Mr. Friesen: What form do those operating supports take, Madam Minister?

Ms. Allan: Well, they would be things like a cellphone and any other supports where we can—that the individual might need.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

And I'm glad that you did bring up the issue of the associate deputy minister because I would like to turn our attention to this position of the associate deputy minister that at least I would suspect has been created within the Department of Education. I'm comparing again the departmental Estimates for 2011-12 against the 2012-13 and it would appear in the schematic that the position of associate deputy minister did not exist a year ago, but it does now. And I wonder if the minister would provide an explanation as to why the decision was undertaken to create a new position of associate deputy minister, who undertook that decision and whether the process to bring the associate deputy minister in was a competitive process.

* (16:30)

Ms. Allan: Well, it—the—Dr. Rory Henry is shared between the Department of Advanced Education and the Department of Education. And what happened in the Department of Advanced Education is the deputy minister moved on to a new position. I'm—if I remember correctly, to the Manitoba Public Insurance industry, as one of the senior vice-presidents. And we—well, it's actually—you know, some days I regret the decision, but I talked to Gerald, and I said: You know, Gerald, you'd be fantastic as the acting deputy minister in Advanced Education. But now I do—I have to be honest, I do regret it because I don't get to spend as much time with him.

But we were looking at how we could manage—as you know, Dr. Farthing has been with the department for many years, and a lot of the work that we do in the Department of Education is seamless. You know, I talk quite often when I'm giving speeches—I talk quite often about the fact that we need to move the goalposts. We're just not the Department of Education; it's just not kindergarten to

grade 12. We talk about birth to career, and we believe that our education system needs to 'prioritize' young people at a very early age because we know that those investments in the early years is so important to the academic achievement of young people. Gerald has had long-standing relationships with the deans at the universities. He has long-standing relationships with people in the technical-vocational world. He was doing work with John Bobbette at the Winnipeg Technical College.

So we had also been working with Dr. Henry for several years in regards to some of our education reform initiatives, and we were trying to figure out how we were going to manage losing a deputy minister and putting Gerald in a position where he was going to try to manage two departments; you know, my deputy minister in my department, and the acting deputy minister in the Department of Advanced Education. It seemed to make sense, but we thought that we'd like him to still be alive after a couple of years and, you know, and at the time, Dr. Henry had been working with us for quite some time and it seemed to us the appropriate thing to do was to put that position in place to provide support to both of our departments and to our senior management team. Dr. Henry works with all of our senior management team in the Department of Education, and he works under the direction of Dr. Farthing.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that explanation.

I wonder if the minister could then indicate why the decision was not made to begin a hiring process for a new minister, or deputy minister—sorry—deputy minister for Advanced Education and Literacy, and why the decision was undertaken instead to bring in an acting deputy minister and then create an additional position shared between Education and Advanced Education of associate deputy minister. And who undertook that decision and what was the rationale for it?

Ms. Allan: Well, I don't think, really, the answer is much different than the one that I already gave the MLA. We have—we—I mean, I felt pretty confident that—I mean, we know that there's a lot of crossover in regards to cross—in regards to departmental issues, in regards to policy initiatives and, quite frankly, Dr. Farthing is highly regarded in our public education system here in the province of Manitoba and he's highly regarded in our post-secondary education system. And we felt that because of the work that he has done for many years in our public education

system, that he was the individual that would be best suited for the acting deputy minister job in the Department of Advanced Education.

So, once that decision was made, we needed to try to figure out, once—you know, how to manage the work that we were doing in Education and it made sense for us to put an associate deputy minister in place reporting to Dr. Farthing.

We believe that that was the best way to continue the education reform that we have been doing in the province of Manitoba for the last two and a half years. It's been a very busy two and a half years and Dr. Henry has been in a lot of—done a lot of work in regards to some of those policy initiatives, and we felt that that was the best way to move forward in regards to having a great deal of expertise that was already on board, in our department, familiar with the issues and familiar with the people in our public education system, in our post-secondary education system.

Mr. Friesen: And thank you, Madam Minister, for the explanation that you provided.

I wonder if the minister would comment on how set in stone this arrangement is. I believe the minister alluded to the fact that this is what they've chosen to do. It was prompted—the action was prompted by that deputy minister position in Advanced Education and Literacy becoming vacant. The decision was then made. I believe that Dr. Farthing was approached and then, perhaps, asked if he would like to take on this additional role.

Is this something that is going to be revisited on a regular basis? My concern here would be—and I'm sure that Dr. Farthing might share the concern, is how stretched he might get in now taking on the responsibility for two departments and whether there is a schedule in place, appointed time at which this decision will be revisited and whether the acting deputy minister position might disappear. We might see a—again, a deputy minister for Advanced Education and Literacy.

Ms. Allan: Well, it's a good question. I've been in this building since 1999, and these kinds of decisions are evaluated all the time. A lot of times it has to do with the movement of human resources. It has been done before.

In fact, at one time, when Drew Caldwell was the minister of Education, Drew Caldwell was the minister of Education for both departments and he had one deputy minister for both departments. And I

know we learned, clearly, from that experience, that it was an incredible amount of work, and I think it's—it kind of leads back to what we were talking about earlier in regards to our human resources challenges and our policy challenges and our education reform initiatives, is something that I think we always have evaluate.

We always have to make sure that we're looking at our human resources and what we're trying to accomplish, you know, with our policies and programs and what we're doing in regards to support to the field. We always need to be looking at those kinds of issues.

So, I don't think anything is set in stone. I think it's important that we continue to kind of evaluate these kinds of decisions, but we are certainly pleased with what is—that—what's going on right now. We're very pleased with the restructuring, and I don't see it changing for the foreseeable future unless I just get really lonely missing Gerald a lot.

Mr. Friesen: And thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Just in an attempt to understand better with this new organizational structure what the assigned duties and roles are, I would ask the minister to comment on what the specific duties and roles are for the new associate deputy minister, specifically within the Department of Education?

*(16:40)

Ms. Allan: Well, as you know, the associate deputy minister works with two different departments and he—in our Department of Education he—Dr. Henry is applying his considerable knowledge and experience to strengthen the quality of our public education system. As I know that he—you have been sitting in on the Estimates with the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. Selby) and you are familiar with Dr. Henry's credentials and that you know that he is well qualified for this position. And he has been working with us on a lot of our education reform initiatives that we've been implementing on the—for the last two years.

Before we started the Estimates process today, you were mentioning to us how important it is and how interested you are in in regards to common PD days. And, in fact, Dr. Henry brought that issue to me as minister and chatted with me about it about a year ago, and we started doing some policy research into that work. It seemed, you know, to be a no-brainer at first. But there was lots of issues around it

in regards to what different stakeholders felt about, you know—particularly the Manitoba Teachers' Society—in regards to professional development and what professional development they took and whether or not if those common PD days were held on different days, if that would cause them a problem in regards to the kind of professional development they were taking. So that's just one example of something that he has been working with us on.

We have also been working on our report card issue with Dr. Henry. He sits on the advisory council—or, excuse me, he sits on the oversight committee with senior management staff, the oversight committee that is working on the report cards, the oversight committee that is working on the 20K3 initiative. He's also working on our quality initiative. So there are—those are the files that I work directly with him on, and he also works with my senior management team on other specific issues which they deem necessary that he be involved in.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

And I think, certainly, when we're asking questions about the new position of the associate deputy minister for Education shared with Advanced Education and Literacy, I would want to make very clear for this Estimates process that I take no issue with Dr. Henry's credentials, that I take no issue with the fact that I'm sure he's been effective in the past in his position, and I know that we've had already some significant conversation around this issue. And the principle of the issue, I know for myself and for my colleagues is not bringing in someone who has an educational background to serve in a new capacity in a department of education. That certainly is not the issue.

And I know you're well aware, Madam Minister, that the issue in our mind is the appointment of a senior political staffer to the position of associate deputy minister of Education. And so it's not the background or academic training that is in question here, but it is rather something doesn't sit well with us when we see this example of a position created and someone filling it who has a partisan background and who's previous experience has been political. And, certainly, it seems to run against the grain of accepted principles within the civil service that someone ascends in rank on the basis of merit and impartiality, and those are the principles, the criteria upon which we take exception to this particular appointment.

And I wonder if the minister could just comment for the record so that we have a record of it: Where did Dr. Henry work previous to being in this position? I know that the minister did provide information to say how the individual did work in conjunction with the department, but could the minister comment on this particular individual's background with respect to the NDP Cabinet?

Ms. Allan: Well, Dr. Henry worked as a policy analyst in our policy branch, and that's how—and he worked with us on different issues. And I certainly understand what the member is saying about impartiality, but you really don't want me to go down that road in regards to the—what the previous government did in the '90s. We're not—I really don't want to go down that road, but what I would like to share with you is the fact that—I would like to share with you the fact that we believe that the files that Dr. Henry is working on are impartial files.

I mean, you have to look at a report card. Now—I mean, this report card was developed by an oversight committee, with all of the education stakeholders on it. And I just want to remind the member opposite that this is the first time in the history of this province that we are working with all of our education partners. This is historic and this is exciting.

And I know that the other day when I was in the House and I was chatting with the MLA, I told you about my history and my background in the Department of Labour. I told you that I passed 16 pieces of unanimous labour legislation—not all labour. I did a 30-year review of the Employment Standards Code; I did a 30-year review of the Workers Compensation Board legislation. We did a lot of legislation in the Department of Labour. And that legislation was supported by the Conservatives, and it was supported by the Liberals. And it was because we worked with all of our partners. We worked with employers and we worked with labour. And that, I believe, is very, very important for us as a government to work with all of our stakeholders.

And that's what we're doing here in the Department of Education. We are working with our—all of our communities in regards to what is best for our young people in our public education system. And we believe that Dr. Henry is working on files, and we are not concerned about his credentials, and I'm pleased you're not concerned about his credentials. And we are very confident that the files that he's working with us on, as part of our senior

management team, he is working on them with impartiality. He cares deeply about public education, and he cares deeply about students in our public education system and is working well with officials in my department and working well with our education partners.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response. I understand that the minister is saying that the associate deputy minister is now working on files that are non-partisan, but I would caution the minister that she doesn't understand the issue completely if she says that because he's working on non-partisan files, no harm, no foul. We have a hundred-year tradition in this country of the impartiality of the public service—of the civil service. And it is built upon principles, the principles being that you ascend in rank in the civil service on the basis of merit and on the basis of your ability to perform your duties in an impartial manner.

And I wanted to just bring your attention to a number of decades ago, Kenneth Kernaghan wrote that politics and policy are separated from administration, and public servants do not engage in partisan political activities, and public servants do not publicly express their personal view on government policies or administration.

* (16:50)

I'm reading from a document that's called Public Service Impartiality: Taking Stock. It's a discussion paper that was put together by the Public Service Commission. It was tabled in 2008, and it's a great read. And I would encourage the minister and I'd encourage any of the members opposite, actually, to read it. I've only brought in excerpts today, but I assure you that I have read the document.

And I guess what it says to me is that there's a principle here at stake, and one that I think is very important for us not to run roughshod over for a number of reasons. But I will identify one, and that is: The minister has indicated that because the associate deputy minister is not working on sharply partisan files, there's no harm in what's been done.

But I would suggest that simply because the individual has had a background—and I think he's been very effective in Cabinet with this government. I think he's been effective in his role. I think, certainly, even our leader indicated that he thought that in his dealings with this individual he'd been effective and someone good to work with, but I think

it clouds your ability to do the new job in front of you.

There's one other thing I'd point to you in this document that I'm referring to, and that is—it's the issue of priority appointment. And I did put comments on the record yesterday in the Chamber on this. And I know that the appointment of Dr. Henry to this role falls within the idea of the priority appointment, the idea that if an individual who is in the service in a ministry accumulates enough knowledge and ability, that on the basis of that knowledge and ability that that person could then be moved into a role in the civil service. The process of that is referred to as a priority appointment.

What I would bring to the minister's attention is the fact that in 2006, federally, the Federal Accountability Act closed that ability for an individual working within a political area to enjoy the opportunity of a priority appointment. They just deemed that it wasn't appropriate and they closed that ability for an individual who had worked in a minister's office to then transfer in.

The reason I say this is I believe that there's just—it becomes difficult for the public to then accept that things are actually being done. And it's not just the opposition that I bring to—the questions I bring up in relation to the appointment of the associate deputy minister. I think it's the greater issue of what the public then understands by this and what the other members of the civil servants are supposed to interpret from this, that someone with such a sharply partisan background is now in this new role as associate deputy minister.

I think what it does is it creates questions, and those are the questions that I am respectfully asking this afternoon, is that—simply, I think about the people who ascend through the civil service and who work their way through these channels and they do it in a non-partisan way and they do it in a way that they ascend in rank, and then something like this happens, and I think it could be very discouraging for them.

So, anyways, I would just ask for the minister's comments on this, whether she would feel that, in the same way that the federal government moved to close priority appointments in the Federal Accountability Act, if she would also feel that it would be reasonable for—in this case or should have been something that would have been kept in mind, to not allow a priority appointment, and, actually,

whether she would agree that what this is, in essence, is a priority appointment.

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm just—I know that the MLA is new, and so I'd just like to ask him if he is familiar with the name John Carlyle. John Carlyle was a deputy minister of Education appointed by the Tories. He was a previous superintendent in the River East School Division. And he—everyone in the province of Manitoba knew that he was a Tory.

And I think that that is something that I believe is something that—that is just one person that I can tell the new MLA about in regards to somebody who was not impartial at all and was a high-ranking Tory as—in a deputy minister position, senior bureaucrat in the Department of Education, responsible for hundreds of civil servants.

So I'm not sure why I'm getting this lecture today about accountability when those were the kinds of practices that went on in previous—in the previous government.

And if you want to talk about priorities, we have our priorities in the Department of Education. Our priorities are to provide investments to our public education system—and significant 'investments' in our public education system—so that we can make a difference for children and for young people, and we are doing that and that is a priority for us. And we believe that Dr. Henry is someone who will work with our senior management team in regards to making that happen, and I'm not going to apologize for it. It may be something that you and I are just going to have to disagree about.

And, you know, I want to talk maybe a little bit about the new legislation that we passed last June, changing the mandatory age from 16 to 18. It's the first time in the history of this province that the mandatory age has been changed since Premier Duff Roblin changed it in 1965. That was a significant policy area for us as a government, and we believe that that diploma and that education for that young person is absolutely critical so that they can participate in our economy and move on to post-secondary education, move on to training, move on to careers. We are moving the goal posts in public education. It's not K to 12 anymore, it's cradle to career.

This is a very dynamic portfolio and it's very, very important to us, and we're very pleased that—with the work that all of our senior management team is doing and, in fact, I know that I am

complimentary about my team all the time. I'm complimentary about my team in public every chance I get and I treat all of my team equally, because I believe each and every one of them is doing an amazing job. And I respect what the member has to say, but I'm sorry, it's just going to have to be one of the issues that we're not going to agree upon.

Mr. Friesen: And thank you, Madam Minister, for that response. And you're right, we—there will be the occasional thing that we don't agree on and I do thank you for your response. And I would just make the comment that, you know, in issues like this, I think we always have to be looking at best practice and that's the reason I bring up the Federal Accountability Act, because I know that you do the same in your department. You're always looking at best practice and ways to go forward and relying on what others are doing, and certainly I appreciate that we will both be involved with that constantly looking around to see—whatever the challenge is in education that we have, we're looking around to see what others are doing in that regard and how we can adopt models that work for us, and I know that we'll be having some considerable discussions in the coming days on exactly some of these matters that have to do with this.

So I do thank the minister for her response on that, and we'll perhaps transition into a different area of questioning at this time.

I'd like to turn the attention of the Estimates to the new report cards, and I wondered if we would be able to discuss the new report cards. And I know that the new report card templates for the province of Manitoba for primary grades, for middle school and for high school have recently been released and they're publicly available, and I assure you that I have been going over them and talking to folks and talking to parents and to students, and to looking at these and—

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): The time being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*(14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This

section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Local Government.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): I do and I'll be brief. First of all, it's always a pleasure to have the member as my critic, and I respect his views and his comments very much, and I'm looking forward to hearing some of those suggestions he might have during Estimates.

Let me just say, I'd like to start by acknowledging the hard work that a lot of the staff do within the Department of Local Government. They have, I would say, a very difficult job to do. There's 197 municipalities that they work with. Many are varied in size and makeup, and it's not easy to do that. And they work day in, day out, diligently, trying to help a lot of those municipalities and stakeholders to ensure that they're—that they are also able to work with their ratepayers and who they represent, and be able to pass on good information to them.

I won't go into a lot of the programs that we have and the funding—that support to municipalities that we've provided over the last, let's say, decade. I believe it's about \$1.6 billion since 1999 that have been provided to municipalities and an increase this year of over 9 per cent. And, yet, for many that is not enough; I understand that. But we are, you know, we are faced with difficult and challenging economic times and—but we still try to provide broad and generous funding support to municipalities.

And I know that they had wanted to ask for the 1 per cent of PST, and what we did was we made sure that they would have that \$240 million, that equivalent of the 1 per cent PST, to try to work with them, because we know the challenges that they have. And the department, that—have also acknowledged that, yes, we understand. But they've also asked for long-term predictable and sustainable funding support and that's what we've tried to provide them. And, we are not, as a government, prepared, certainly at this time, to be increasing the PST to 8 per cent and we've told municipalities this, and we've acknowledged that over and over.

And we were trying to also work with municipalities, with regard to the challenges they've

had over flooding, and many municipalities have been hard hit, dealing with their tax base. We understand that. And the department has also stepped up to try to assist them and provide them with some bridge funding and to be able to get past, certainly, this year, and try to assist them as much as possible, because they are receiving a lot of pressures on that side.

As I said—as I mentioned before, I'm not going to go into talking about roads and bridges, program, or waste water, or the Convention Centre or public policing policy and the extra police and cadets that we've provided, firefighters, or mosquito control program and so on. I will—I believe that I will try to give my critic as much time as possible to ask the questions. I know there's a lot of departments, still, that have to go through their Estimates.

So, with that, I would just want to conclude by saying, again, thank you very much for all the hard work that the civil servants and the people in my department do day in, day out. They—the people of Manitoba should know—sometimes what they hear come out of the Legislature is not necessarily positive. But people of Manitoba should know that their civil servants and the people that work for them do so in a very, very diligent and hard-working manner and fashion that I think anyone would be proud of. And, sometimes, I don't believe the civil service gets the recognition they should.

So, with that, I just want to conclude my introductory comments. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Agassiz, have any opening remarks?

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Chair, I want to follow somewhat the minister's remarks on acknowledging the staff and the—in Local Government, that's—I know them all, or know pretty well all of them from the president from past years. A number of the ones I knew really well are retired now. But the legacy is carried on and I know the hard work they do on behalf of municipalities.

* (14:40)

I—if I had one complaint, it would be that there aren't enough of them there now, as compared to

when I started on municipal council. There was a lot more municipal service officers, and there were a couple of extra financial people that were very helpful to municipalities back in those days. And I think we're putting, maybe, a little bit too much load on the few remaining ones now, but they do seem to handle it.

It's always been a pleasure for me to be the critic dealing with Local Government—and municipalities, as you well—are well aware, are near and dear to my heart, and it's just great to be able to act somewhat on their behalf as the critic. I know the minister doesn't always agree with everything I bring forward on their behalf, but at least we're quite often—and I do thank the minister—quite often on the same page on things—little different view and a little different pressures from other people in our caucuses and, in his case, the Cabinet.

You know, the minister mentioned in his opening remarks, and we'll probably get into this later on, but the increased funding to the municipalities being at 9 per cent, and we'll get into those figures a little later, but we were a province that had provincial-municipal tax sharing, which is now rolled into the grow—building Manitoba, I believe it's called. And so there would have been some growth anyhow because that provincial-municipal tax sharing was a growth tax—or growth fund, and it was started many years ago in this province. I don't even know what government it was started under, but it was a—it was something that when I used to go to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities meetings that the other provinces and other municipal leaders were quite taken by. And we were the only province that had it, and we had it for years and years and years. So there would've been some growth anyhow. I'm not sure what portion of that 9 per cent, but there would've been some.

I have quite a number of things that I want to get into in a little more detail with the minister, but I thank him for the time we're going to have here this afternoon, and I guess it's probably time to bring in staff if he wants staff in here. So thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the critic.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of

line item 1.(a) and proceed with the consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and staff from the Official Opposition to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we will ask that the staff in attendance be introduced.

The Honourable Minister, to introduce his staff, please.

Mr. Lemieux: I'd like to introduce Linda McFadyen as my deputy minister; Laurie Davidson's the assistant deputy minister, Provincial-Municipal Support Services; Ramona Mattix is assistant deputy minister, Community Planning and Development division; and, also, Brian Johnston's a chief of Financial Services.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

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

Mr. Briese: Global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. We'll proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Briese: I have a number of the housekeeping-type questions to begin with.

I'd like to know how many Cabinet committees the minister is on and what—which Cabinet committees the minister's on?

Mr. Lemieux: The Neighbourhoods Alive! committee of Cabinet is the only one—other one that I'm on besides Cabinet.

Mr. Briese: Could I have a list of all your political staff, including the name, positions, and the—whether they're full-time or part-time?

Mr. Lemieux: I have two new full-time political staff, those being Eric Plamondon, who's my special assistant in the Legislature, and Amy Pouliot, who is my constituency—in my constituency office and in Dawson Trail, and she is a executive assistant.

Mr. Briese: Do you have any project managers in Local Government?

Mr. Lemieux: No, no.

Mr. Briese: Could I have a list of all the staff in the minister's and deputy minister's office? That's not the political staff; it's the other staff, please.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, in addition to the previously mentioned political staff, I have office staff. My appointment secretary, ministerial secretary, Ann Tardiff, Margaret Ali, administrative secretary; Kayla Garipey is assistant—is administrative secretary.

In the deputy's office, we have my deputy minister, Linda McFadyen and Amy Jordan as an assistant to the deputy. Debbie Goodfellow is a deputy minister's secretary. Meg Lonsdale is admin secretary and Shaunda Hyatt is a half-time admin secretary, and that's in the deputy's office.

Mr. Briese: How many staff are currently employed in the department?

Mr. Lemieux: The total number of staff is 264.9. I haven't met that .9 person yet, but I can't wait, which is a .05 staff-year increase over the previous years' adjusted vote, a half staff person more. The half-staff-year increase was to make a half-time position in Brandon full-time for the Brandon Regeneration Strategy. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: Things are improving, you know, obviously. Last year that was a .4; you got it up to a .9, so you're getting close to a whole person there. So how many new staff were hired in the last year?

Mr. Lemieux: There are 48 new positions, or newly hired positions.

* (14:50)

Mr. Briese: And were they all hired through a competition, or were some of them appointed?

Mr. Lemieux: Sorry, Mr. Chairperson. There were 39 positions filled during the 2011-12 through competitions, and there were nine direct appointment positions. And often those positions are direct appointments because some—you know, there are people who are often in an acting position and they might have been in that role for six months or a year or maybe even longer, and they have really fulfilled that position, so it makes a lot of sense to make them full-time in that particular position. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: Have any of those positions been reclassified in the last year?

Mr. Lemieux: One vacant position was reclassified and also one vacant position was classified upwards and the other one was downwards. So one was lessened a bit, and one was increased.

Mr. Briese: Can you tell me what those two positions were, please?

Mr. Lemieux: One was my capable deputy minister, I believe was upwards, I hope, and not downwards, and I will have to—I'll have to endeavour to find the other position that was downwards. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: What is the vacancy rate in your department right now? Pardon me, I was just looking for last year's here and I can't find the figure, but I'm looking for a comparison.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes. The—as of April 20th, there's a 10 and a half per cent vacancy as of that date.

Mr. Briese: So I actually did just find the figure, and last year you'd given me 12.5 per cent, so you've obviously filled some spots that were vacant before.

So how long do you expect to stay at that kind of rate? Is that fairly normal rate in the department, or—I know there's always reasons why there's some vacancies, but is that a fairly normal number?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, in my experience over the 12 years, no matter what department it is, this is a relatively smaller department compared to the last one I had, but, having said that, vacancies are always scrutinized all the time. You look at the positions and you try to 'prioritize' where you need staff and that's what you try to address. And I would say, in Local Government, at least since I've been the minister, the number has been pretty—I think pretty well the same. The vacancy rate is about the same.

Mr. Briese: Can you tell me if any positions have been relocated, and by that mean—I mean from rural to urban or from northern Manitoba into southern, the relocations of jobs in your department?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes. Maybe it's a good time—yes, last year I know that, I believe, there were two staff that were seconded from rural Manitoba to Winnipeg. But I just want to point out that I think all departments are facing this challenge, that there's a number of retirements happening throughout the civil service, that it's going to be a challenge in years to come with baby boomers retiring and wanting to do other things besides so-called work, but this year I'm advised that there's no positions relocated from Winnipeg to rural or—but there was one position

seconded from—sorry, from Winnipeg to rural. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: Does the department do any contracts? Are there any outside contracts that you commission or take on?

Mr. Lemieux: There are no employment contracts outside through this department.

Mr. Briese: Are there any new departmental initiatives that have been announced or undertaken in the last year?

Mr. Lemieux: I've been advised that these would probably fit into the category that the member's asking about. There's a—there was a sewer backup program that we had with regard to basement flooding and so on that was occurring because of high water tables in Winnipeg, as well as in rural Manitoba. And there was a Community Planning Assistance Program that the department has to assist municipalities with water and waste-water issues. And, also, well—Brandon Regeneration Strategy. I'm not sure if you can classify that as brand new, but it's a new program, I would call it, as well. And that's the extent of it.

Mr. Briese: And thank you, Mr. Minister. I will—I've got both those things on my list for later on, so we'll get into a bit more detail on them later.

Ministerial travel: This is a question I ask every year. How many times was the minister on travel outside the province in the past year, the purpose of those trips, and the dates? Who went? Who paid and what were the costs?

* (15:00)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, this is something that I believe all ministers, if they haven't commented on, should comment on, that we're the first government in Manitoba to post those on a website on our—showing our ministerial expenses, and I think that's a good thing. That's transparent; it's open. It shows the public where we've spent the money, if we've travelled, if we've bought meals or whatever the cost may have been incurred, flights and so on.

In my case, in—from July 11th to the 14th, I attended an annual provincial-territorial ministers' meeting, and that was in New Brunswick with the federal minister of infrastructure—or Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities. Labelle was in attendance, as well as other ministers for local government. In addition to myself, my deputy minister attended, as well as her assistant, and also

my special assistant attended, and head of policy and legislation for our department attended as well.

And in February I attended the provincial and territorial minister's meeting—of ministers and deputy ministers responsible for local government in Ottawa. In addition to myself, there was my special assistant, my deputy minister and Laurie Davidson, the ADM for provincial-municipal services, and also Karlene Debance who is the person responsible for the Building Canada Fund secretariat or the infrastructure secretariat, was also in attendance.

Maybe just on that note it's important to—the reason I mentioned Labelle twice is because the last movement the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made with regard to staffing, or with regard to his ministers, the Building Canada Fund, currently and future one, is now within Local Government, which will provide for some interesting times for staff within the department. It's a large program and we're very, very pleased to be able to have that. It's—even though there are challenges, it's very exciting and we've had one meeting with Minister Labelle and we plan on having a couple of others in the near future to discuss what has worked, what hasn't worked going forward with regard to the new Building Canada Fund that the federal government has announced that they are going to be moving on once this particular program is over in '14-15.

Mr. Briese: Do you—I'm not sure whether you answered this already or not—do you have any individuals hired on a contractual basis with the department this past year?

Mr. Lemieux: No, no.

Mr. Briese: And I ask this every year, too. Can the minister provide a cost on the amount of advertising that comes out of the minister's department?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, the department usually has a few sponsorships each year, such as the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, for example. I'm not sure if that falls within the description of what the member opposite, my critic, is asking for. But the department also has some minor communication expenditures related to printing of reports, booklets, brochures and mail inserts. In addition, there will normally be some advertising expenditures for career advertising as well. And, just to give you a couple of examples, well there's, let's see where can I put that. There's a document that we put out for AMM for example, on the—I stand to be corrected by my deputy, but it's related to the different

municipalities—yes, Municipal Officials book, sorry, I couldn't—I didn't have the title at the tip of my tongue. That's the kind of money that we would spend on advertising in a broad term, to use the term in a broad way.

Mr. Briese: I'm sure there's some ads that go into the papers around things like the two programs you announced, or the one—one of those programs anyhow, the backwater valves and those types of things.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, well, just on that. The reason I didn't mention it is we're responsible for running the program itself, but the municipalities are the ones who put out the information with regard to their programs, and the media, quite frankly, picked up on the program itself. They felt that this was a very, very worthwhile program. So it was in the media. That's really the advertising it received, quite frankly, but the local governments were responsible for really making the announcement and getting the message out to their citizens on the program itself.

Mr. Briese: So I gather, then, you're not responsible for any of the big ads that are saying, we're—this is the program we got out there, and they say Province of Manitoba on them and, you know, like that type of thing, or I don't know if there any in your department that necessarily you do those types of ads on. I know there's lots come from Agriculture and from Water Stewardship, and things like that, but—

Mr. Lemieux: No. I—now I know what the member is asking. No, we don't. I know exactly what he's referring to. Often, Agriculture will have some or Conservation. We have not. We have not done so.

Mr. Briese: Are there various things in the department that the department does that they charge fees on? I think there probably is, but I'm not absolutely sure, and if they are, and you may not be able to provide it today, but, if there are, I'd like a comparison on the rates of those fees from 2011 to 2012, the two fiscal years.

Mr. Lemieux: The two that I have is the Manitoba Assessment Online as well as the subdivision fees that are charged, but I don't know if we have the amounts. I don't believe so, but I can endeavour to find out. But I know those are the two that come to mind that fees may be charged. But I can tell you, just on the other side of this coin, is that all the services, and while we were both thanking the civil service—servants for all the good work they do, I know our people in the regional offices, with regard

to, I believe, it's development plans, and so on, they really assist a lot of the municipalities and others, quite frankly, trying to put their plans together.

I mean, other provinces, as I understand it, maybe the member would know better than I, but I understand other provinces actually charge for that, whereas, our staff, they do it as part of their job, day in, day out. They assist municipalities and developers on working with them on their provincial development plans which is—it's a huge bonus. If you had to calculate the hours and the time and the monies that are really costing to do that, it's quite a contribution to municipalities and developers.

Mr. Briese: I'm very well aware of that. I know the time that they put in and I think, maybe, there's several reasons for it. One is the dedication of that staff in those planning offices, but it also gives the Planning branch a little chance for a little more input into our development plans as we're doing them. So there are two sides to that coin. But, definitely, I do appreciate what they do.

Now you mentioned the assessment and I know every municipality pays the Province a fee for the assessment services, and I think I saw somewhere where it appeared to me there is another increase coming on that because of some of the equipment that they need in their assessment offices or something along that line.

* (15:10)

Mr. Lemieux: The member may have heard something along the lines where we did—you know, we do upgrade our equipment just like any other department does and also with regard to staffing, so I believe it's around a 1 per cent increase, which is minimal, but that was taken into consideration any changes and upgrades that were made—that the upgrades the department needed.

Mr. Briese: I go back a long ways on that municipal assessment stuff, and I remember the time they came along and said that they were going to put in this MACS system, which I'm sure is absolutely obsolete by now. This was quite a few years ago, and they pretty near doubled our assessment, or our assessment fee, at the time, and it was only supposed to be for two years and then it was going to drop back because we were just going to pay for this bulge. Well, it never dropped back and it's continued to go up ever since, and that would have been way back in the '90s that that happened. So it's been ongoing so—but—so that's one of the fees that, I'm

sorry, I—what was the other fee you referred to? It had something to do with subdivision or something.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, we're the approving authority and we do charge for development of subdivision plans.

Mr. Briese: Okay, I think I got that. It's the subdivision plans when somebody applies for a subdivision? Okay, I understand now. I wasn't quite clear on that.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague here. He has a couple of questions, then I'll take it back after that.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): My questions are fairly point forward. I'm just wondering if the minister could provide us an update on the LUD for Stony Mountain that's been applied for. I've had a couple of calls from constituents on it, if we could get something to take back to them.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank you to the member of Lakeside for asking the question. You're right, the application went in, but what happened was the Municipal Board asked for information from the RM and—or from local government, wanting them to get more information, but they had to check with the federal people because of the penitentiary and issues related to the penitentiary, I guess, in staffing, and so on, so that was still outstanding. So the local government has not provided those answers yet. So I'm not sure where that's at, and we don't know where that's at, but that was supposed to be information provided to the Municipal Board who were looking at it and waiting for that information before any decision was going to be made. So that's where it is. It's not necessarily in limbo but still waiting for the information. As far as we know, the Municipal Board hasn't received it yet. Okay?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I thank the minister and the staff for the answers, and that's all I have.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I thank the member for Agassiz for allowing me a couple of questions.

I'm going to key in on the Manitoba Water Services Board and the page in the Estimates book in that regard, and you—in the book, you had estimated there's going to be \$10.8 million of expenditures under sewer and water projects this year. Is there any way that we could get a list of which projects were going to be undertaken this year and, as well, have

you given consideration to which projects will be undertaken next year?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, my staff is just looking for some information, but we don't have a list currently. I don't have a list with me. But Dick Menon, who was responsible for the Water Services Board, has retired, and we have a new person, a new—*[interjection]* Yes, I think it was 37–36, 37 years—and served the province well, and, of course, was recognized and known by a lot of municipalities and local governments all over the province, and worked very, very well.

In fact, a lot of the work, quite frankly, dealing in rural Manitoba, PFRA was also involved in a lot of the work and a lot of those issues were—*[interjection]* But I'm not going to go there, and I'm not going to talk about PFRA, but Water Stewardship—and the member's correct, I'm going to have to get these constituencies correct. I've got my own down as Dawson Trail, but it's Spruce Woods now, I think, and my critic is from Agassiz. I keep thinking of, course, Ste. Rose and other—the old titles we used to have of constituencies we represented.

But I don't have a list of the projects that Water Services were looking at doing, but I'm sure that—and I'm not even sure if a list, a hard list, does exist, but I will endeavour to find that, and if it is, I would be pleased to provide it to you.

Mr. Cullen: I would certainly appreciate if the minister undertake that for this year, and if there's some indication of which projects the board is considering next year. It's—and the reason I ask the question is we're certain to get some conversations and some heat from local municipalities, and they like to have, you know, a plan in place, and they have to, obviously, know where your department's going to go in terms of the capital expenditures.

I guess the other question is: Does the minister have a sense of what kind a demand is out there for sewer and water projects across the province?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, the Water Services Board, a lot of the projects will go through them, and the Water Services Board approves the projects. So, when I'm saying there's no list of projects—or here today—yes, there is, as my deputy minister has informed me. But the Water Services Board, you know, I'm not sure if they've approved all the projects or approved all the money, and maybe that still has to happen, but, you know, it's—this is a program very similar to the—not similar, but similar in the sense that the Building

Canada Fund was always oversubscribed, and the water challenges, the water issues, whether it's waste water or good, potable drinking water, the programs are always oversubscribed in the sense that there's a more of a demand than there is money.

And I think it's been like that for a long, long, long time. And it doesn't mean that's right. It doesn't mean that more money shouldn't go into it, but I think that's part of the challenge. And I'm not going to go into long comments about recession we've been into or, you know, that, you know, we find ourselves also in the kind of economic times we find ourselves in. But, having said that, we know that the programs are always oversubscribed. They always have been where there's always more water or waste water requests than there is money to deliver.

And on top of that, the—it seems that the contracts themselves and the amount of money that these projects are costing and the kind of bids that are coming in now, some of them are just outrageous. It's hugely expensive work to do, but, anyway, aside from the commentary, there are always—it's always oversubscribed. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen: Maybe just a word of advice to the minister, and he can certainly take this advice if he wants to. But I think it might be easier for you to sell the principle that, you know, there's a lot more need out there than we do have resources for. So, if you are able to say to municipalities, you know, there's, you know, \$50 million that we have earmarked over the next two to three years for projects in the province; you know, right now we're only allocating less than \$11 million—that would—I think that would give the municipalities, the local municipalities, a better sense of where you're at and, then, in addition to that, where they're at and how they can handle their budget and then how they can move their projects forward.

* (15:20)

You know, if they recognize that it's going to be two or three or four years down the road before they can get financing or assistance from the Province, then they—they'll do some things that might be creative to try to get those projects under way.

And it—I think the problem the municipalities having is the sense they don't where they are in the list, and that's creating a lot of concerns. So, you know, like if the minister could show them, you know, where the money is, where it's intended to go this year, where it's intended to go next year, and

then provide them the bigger picture, I think that might make your life a little easier as well.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I'm always pleased to take advice from members opposite and including my good friend from Spruce Woods anytime. I appreciate the comment, and my deputy minister informed me, which is something that I would want to put on the record, is that this is something that when we talk about Dick Menon or whoever is with water services, this is—makes up most of the majority of the work that they do.

They work hand in hand with a lot of municipalities trying to plan what projects they have, no different than the Building Canada Fund, which I've referred to again. When the Building Canada Fund came out, a lot of the municipalities were not ready. They had a huge wish list. They might have had 10 or 20 projects, but they had no quotes, no estimates, no planning, no design, no anything to a lot of the projects that they had. So, even though they had the wish lists ready to go, there was nothing in place to say how they were going to pay for it, you know, taking a look at, you know, whether their borrowing authority was, whether they had some room, quite frankly, to get into a project, if it was a larger or a major project.

So a lot of that is what the Water Services Board and the former Dick Menon, former, I say former employee. He's not gone and he's not going anywhere or hasn't gone anywhere, thank goodness, except I think he's working for a private engineering firm now.

But I just wanted to make sure I put on the record, though, that this is the work that the Water Services Board does. They work hand in hand with municipalities, trying to get them to focus in on their priorities, because, you know, people will come to you with a wish list of 10 items and they have to 'priorize' which one they want to address first and—second or third. And that's really a good part of the job that the Water Services Board does. But I thank the member for any advice that can help Manitobans anytime. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, you know, you mentioned PFRA. I know that goes back a little while ago, but clearly there was federal money involved in these particular projects. What is the federal government committed to sewer and water projects over the last two or three years? Is there money directly provided to the Province to assist in sewer and water projects for municipalities?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, PFRA, you know, when we talked about PFRA, we asked the federal government; the former minister of Agriculture and then the—then was the minister of Finance and then the minister of Agriculture that took over for the former minister of Agriculture then became, now is the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers)—they all asked the federal government: What are you going to do with Prairie Grain Roads? What are you going to do with PFRA? Where is this going?

What they did was and, you know, this is a judgment call they made. They bundled it and they all put into the new Building Canada Fund. So a lot of the waste-water, water projects that took place, where the federal government had any involvement was really through the Building Canada Fund, where they addressed a number of the waste-water or water challenges that were in rural Manitoba.

So that was the input that the federal government put into the province or invested into the province. And we thank the federal government for that, and all the provinces across Canada have really pushed the federal government to bring forward a new Building Canada Fund.

And I believe we were the first. I believe the Premier of Manitoba was the first when Minister Flaherty, the federal Finance Minister, mentioned that there would be a new Building Canada Fund and he would hope that the provinces would get on board. Well, our Premier was the first one to say, we're there and the media said, well, what about the money? And the Premier said, well, whatever it is we'll pay our one third. Whatever the feds put on the table, we'll be there for a third, as well as municipalities will be there for a third and the feds will be there for a third.

So I'm sorry for the long-winded answer, but the money that they directed or the investment they directed into Manitoba was through the Building Canada Fund into any water projects that might have been—that came into Manitoba. But there is no ongoing federal program for sewer and water. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen: One other angle I want to take here, and I hope I don't steal too much thunder from the minister—from the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) here, but the question comes up from my local governments is the bridge replacement fund. I know there was a fanfare made not too long ago about money being set aside for municipal bridge infrastructure, and is there a line in your budget that

municipalities can access for the bridge infrastructure, either repair or replacement?

Mr. Lemieux: The bridge program, well, I don't think anyone would argue that it's not a good program. It is a good program and it's needed. It may be very similar in nature to the challenges the Water Services Board has with regard to being oversubscribed in the kind of challenges that are out there. Having said that, the flood—I think it was the one-in-350-year, 400-year flood that happened in Wesman. It was terrible and it affected a lot of municipal roads but also provincial bridges and roads as well as municipal roads and bridges. And, initially, we put a million dollars into the bridge program, but—and now it's 2 million.

But what we did was we sent a letter out in May of this year to the municipalities talking about the municipal build-bridge program, sorry, and how it would cover up to one half of the cost of major renewal. But we talked about the kind of criteria the municipality should be looking at, like the physical state of the bridge. Is it closed? What kind of weight restrictions are on it? The traffic volumes, and so on. And municipalities have received this letter. And we just mentioned that the Province is going to assist the AMM in evaluating and prioritizing applications against the criteria of the program, and that projects are approved for the physical works that must be designed by and construction supervised by a quality professional engineer.

So this program is—it's at \$2 million, but we know the kind of—I know the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and the Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation has received questions in question period related to bridges and the challenges on those bridges. Eighty-plus bridges have been damaged and, I believe, over a hundred roads, possibly more.

I would ask him for his advice, but this flood is—was terrible, not only to people but to damage to the physical infrastructure of the province, and the \$2-million bridge program that's within our Building Manitoba Fund is not—you know, we understand and know it's not going to address all municipal challenges that they have with regard to their bridges. But it's—again, it's an investment to try to help them, and the two million is for this year only, and it's a million-dollar program annually. Thank you.

*(15:30)

Mr. Cullen: I do thank the minister for those responses, and I look forward to receiving that information as we discussed. Thank you very much.

Mr. Briese: Just because my colleague was asking it, Mr. Minister, I'll go back to the water services for a moment. Water services—it's my understanding, it's funded completely separately from Building Manitoba.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, I've been advised that the capital funding is part of the Building Manitoba Fund—like, the capital money comes from the Building Manitoba Fund.

Mr. Briese: So, when we go toward, if I can find it again, the water services section of the expenditures book, and I can't find it right at the moment, but I had it a moment ago. It's near the back.

An Honourable Member: 62, 63.

Mr. Briese: Okay. Yes. So when we go to that, and we—where does it show where the capital comes out of the Building Manitoba, then?

Mr. Lemieux: I would refer my critic, the MLA for Agassiz, to page 70 and 71 of the supplementary information booklet, and it's the Manitoba Water Services Board—that subappropriation, and right at the very bottom on the right hand side on page 71, it shows that \$2,221,000 and—[*interjection*]-yes. So where it says “less recoverable” from the Manitoba Building Fund, that \$10,813,000 comes from the Manitoba Building Fund. It's recovered from there.

Mr. Briese: Okay, I see that, and I understand that we had another page in here. Well, maybe that's what I was referring to. They—so the—and that's separate—that's strictly for capital projects, that 10 million—yes, \$10, 813,000, strictly capital. Okay. And that's exactly the same as it was last year. [*interjection*] And as we know—and that would include, then, things such as road, water pipelines, and all sewer and water projects in urban centres outside of the city of Winnipeg. [*interjection*] I'm not sure, the city of Brandon, how it's dealt with, but I expect it's part of this too.

An Honourable Member: Yes, it is.

Mr. Briese: Yes. That's—yes—ten—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Local Government, to answer some of those questions.

Mr. Lemieux: I'm sorry, we're having a wonderful conversation here, and—over a cup of coffee or tea, and sorry about that.

It's not that this information—it still has to go in *Hansard*—we're just—I was just trying to help my critic, but he asked a couple of questions with regard to where does this money go. Is it outside of Winnipeg? The answer was yes, it's outside of Winnipeg, but Brandon is also included. So, just for the people that are keeping track on *Hansard*, that was what was being asked, and that's the answer. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: When PFRA was involved—and we could argue and we've had this discussion other years, so I'm not really going to really go there—but when PFRA was involved, where did the—where would the 1.5 million or more that came out of that rural water line fund, where would it have got dropped in here? Would it have got dropped in with another line that was—that said recoverable from PFRA, or something like that, because it would have went into water services? I presume that's how it was done.

Mr. Lemieux: Again, it would have showed through the Water Services Board, but it also would have showed a recoverable somehow. I'm sorry, I wasn't the minister then.

But the program, it was a real loss for Manitoba because Saskatchewan, Alberta were also part of PFRA, and, quite frankly, I think we used up—Manitoba used up about 60 per cent of the money allotted, so it was a very good program for us. It was a huge loss for us, not so much for Saskatchewan or Alberta; they didn't use it as much as we did. But it would have been—it would have showed very similar, I understand, as a recovery from the federal government's program. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: I can probably come closer on those figures than the minister can. It was a million and a half here; it was a million and a half in Saskatchewan, and about three million in Alberta, or about two and a half million. And Alberta was the one that didn't use up all their funds from year to year. Saskatchewan pretty well did, and then we get the kickback of any excess out of Alberta. And it really did help here.

But a number of years ago we were lobbying the federal government, because the Province had said they would come on side, and we were lobbying the federal government to move that figure up to the

roughly \$10-million range, and then we would start to, when you talked about tripartite funding, we would start to actually address the issue of rural water line funding, and it—it's—my own municipality has one of the lines that was put in probably, oh, 12 years ago or so, and it's amazing what it does for your municipality. It's a—it's more than just providing potable water to the people in those areas, and in that particular area, my municipality, it was not potable water. They hauled water. But it also has a major economic impact on a municipality, and I know, at the present time, there's probably in the neighbourhood of 50 municipalities or more looking for rural water line expansion.

And I know the minister will probably state that the times are tough, we're coming out of a recession and all those good things, but it's something that needs to be looked at and in budgets going forward, and that's definitely a number that's got to come up.

A lot of the problem, too, has been developed from, and probably with very good reason, but a lot of the regulation and legislation that goes into place makes these systems even more expensive, especially the sewage systems in the urbans, and so you've got always escalating cost and not escalating investment, so.

I really didn't have a question there; I was just making a comment. But I'll go back, if I may, into the booklet, and on page 5 it—and I've got a few questions here directly related to the review information. On page 5, the operating expenses, the second kind of block on the page, there seems to be a fairly major increase there, and I'm wondering what that is, from last year to this year.

* (15:40)

Mr. Lemieux: That amount is—I'm informed that that amount is dealing with grants, grants that are provided. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: What are the nature of the grants then?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, it's municipal grants. Grants that are provided to municipalities.

Mr. Briese: So is that the money that used to be municipal—provincial—municipal tax sharing and other things, that—all those things that go together to make growing Manitoba or Building Manitoba?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, to be able to do it in a way that may be reflect—where the member is going with this, is that the one large number just shows that there's a big increase, but in grants. But, if he wanted to

determine what that is, you'd have to go through—see each, I guess, subappropriation. You know, it—almost individually, to see which ones went up, by how much, and you'd have to go right through the package. We'd have to go through the package and go through it, because it's broken up throughout the rest of the package. But there is an increase, but we'd have—that's—would be the only way we could be able to do it.

Oh, if not here today, then, you know, we could—I could talk to you about it and maybe show you that. Thank you.

I'll try one more question on this.

For instance, on infrastructure programs, it shows a 20.6 per cent increase. And, when you're talking about your equivalent to 1 per cent of sales tax, you're talking smaller increases than that. So where are these extra increases coming from?

An Honourable Member: What page are you looking at?

Mr. Briese: I'm on page 5, where it says infrastructure programs in the first column about five down from the top.

Mr. Lemieux: Okay, on page 5? Yes, sorry, thank you.

On page 5, where it shows No. 4, financial assistance to municipalities, it shows the \$313,425, a 20.6 per cent increase, right? And so that—that's the Building Manitoba Fund, and operating, as well—they're both.

Mr. Briese: And I'm still not clear on why it took that much of a jump. I'm not arguing with it; I'm just not clear on why it would go up that much when—like, there's got to be something else that went in here somewhere that caused that, and I don't think it was the one per cent increase or the equivalent to one per cent. I think something else had to bump this significantly to get it up. Whatever it is it's probably close to 60-some million dollars.

Mr. Lemieux: That number, under No. 4—that's on page No. 5, that No. 4, if you keep that number and if you take a look at page 59, where my department mentioned that if you want to break it down, you can break it down by going into the subappropriations and you can break down each category. If you look at page 59, and it talks about financial assistance to municipalities, and then it lays out the 313,425, a very similar number as to page No. 5, but then it breaks it down. It goes down to (a) Building

Manitoba Fund is 262,000 of the 313; yes, and then operating assistance—58,000-plus; and then grants to municipalities in lieu of taxes is 174. So that total amount is the same as that's on that No. 5, but this page—this page breaks it down into different—into a number of different categories to get that total number.

Mr. Briese: We'll go to page 59 then and I'm still trying to get my head around these. There's a major increase in operating assistance, for instance, from 27 up to 58. Where's this increase coming from? Like, I didn't see anywhere that in the budget where there was extra money allocated to Local Government, to the department, so where is this—where are these switches of figures coming from?

Mr. Lemieux: The way it has been explained to me, and, hopefully, I can pass this on correctly to the member opposite, is that the 20 per cent increase is primarily due to us restoring the operating assistance, in that that was accelerated through a year supplemental funding the previous year. So if you take a look at last year's you will see the numbers—because we're going over two different calendar years: what the municipalities use and what the province uses. And so we prepaid, if I can use that term—I'm not sure if that's a correct term, but we prepaid the City of Winnipeg, for example, prepaid them out of the 2000, if you will—2012—2011—sorry, and then you have to catch up. So, in our books, our accounting is fine, but what it does—so sometime, some year it may show a huge increase, even though the municipalities did get a 9 per cent increase. What you're referring to is the big jump, and you're trying to figure out where it came from, where it went. But that's all it is. It's that amount from 2011 going into 2012 and doing the catch up, because some have—may have been prepaid ahead, right, in advance.

* (15:50)

But the member is correct. It looks like it on paper, but that's all it is. But this is a practice that has been—this is a practice that the municipalities are aware of, you know, City of Winnipeg. It doesn't affect the municipal funding. They're just aware that that's a flow of cash and the amount of money that's flowed to Winnipeg and other municipalities.

Mr. Briese: Thanks, Minister. I'm starting to get it through my thick head now. The—and I expect, probably, most of that operating assistance is City of Winnipeg, because you have different deals with the other municipalities of the province, so I expect that's where most of it is.

The member from River Heights has a couple of questions.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Thank you to the member for Agassiz. Now, my first question has to do with, as Minister of Local Government, what was your role in dealing with local governments during the flood and—because they were obviously involved in a major way and you have a, you know, very important ministry with this respect.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question. The department staff worked with municipalities as they normally do, but Emergency Measures, really, during a flood occasion like this and the magnitude that it was at, it was Emergency Measures that was really dealing with municipalities. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), also the Minister for Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh) would—I wouldn't say they were equally ministers responsible for working with municipalities and citizens of Manitoba, but I would say the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation primarily, and through his department with the kind of infrastructure damage that took place, it was that minister that was really, if you want to use the term, a lead minister, aside from the Premier (Mr. Selinger) were the ones who dealt specifically with a lot of the challenges.

Now, our department, the Department of Local Government, continues to work with municipalities on a number of different issues related, still, to the flood, but I would say it's—as far departments go, on an overall basis, it was Infrastructure and Transportation and Water Stewardship that would be classified as lead departments, even though Local Government assisted and worked with municipalities on the challenges they had related to Emergency Measures, the—kind of the DFA programs and so on. They dealt a little bit with that.

Mr. Gerrard: The—many of the municipalities had expenditures which were then reimbursed because of what happened during the flood. Can you give me some insight into what was the total amount that's been reimbursed to municipalities so far and how much is still outstanding?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, that's something I don't—it's not within my capacity, certainly, to answer. I mean, that's something that Disaster Financial Assistance or Emergency Measures would have to address that. I mean, I don't have that; I don't have that.

Mr. Gerrard: Are you aware of whether there's any municipalities—rural municipalities in very difficult financial shape as a result of what's happened with the flood last year and follow up?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I think—well, I thank the member, first of all, from River Heights with the question, and the answer—the quick answer is yes. I think anyone that has talked to anyone, either anecdotally or formally, which I've met with, St. Laurent, for example, and I've met with other municipalities and talked to them about some of the challenges that they're having. And, you know, certain municipalities realized a significant loss in the assessment base due to flooding. Those kinds of challenges that that's something that Local Government, either staff or myself, have been talking to municipalities about, and that's been really—that is something that has come to my department as opposed to the DFA or the Emergency Measures side. But—so I think, you know, the answer is, of course, yes, but different ministers in different departments have different issues that—where they work through municipalities with.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, as I'm aware of the government's taking some measures to support municipalities, but the extent of that support has been limited with the respect if—certainly to the most severely affected municipalities in terms of what their real situation is. So I would ask whether the minister has a plan, were there to be any municipalities facing the imminent threat of them no longer being financially viable.

Mr. Lemieux: I know we—we know we have a role to play to help manage ongoing pressures related to the 2011 flooding, and this is cross-departmental as well. And we believe in rolling up our sleeves, quite frankly, to find a solution. I know many of the ministers have worked directly with municipalities and we have certainly tried. And most municipalities have either reserves to get them through this particular challenge that they have, and we were working very, very closely with regard to a number of municipalities—the most hard—hardest hit, I guess, is maybe the best way to phrase it or to word it—and on an individual basis, because they differ from municipality to municipality. And that's, of course, part of their challenges as well, and I know municipalities, you know, face financial hardships as flood-affected properties affected their revenue base for a lot of them. So we responded with a timely, you know, property tax relief program that we had. So those are the kinds of things that Local Government

has tried to work with and tried to talk to municipalities about.

I mean, here it is a year later. The water has receded and—but flood-related challenges remained as we've heard in this Chamber many, many times. And certain municipalities realized a significant loss in assessment base due to flooding, and this is something that staff—my staff—have been working with municipalities on an individual basis because it varies from municipality to municipality. So, I mean, we're not going to leave them by themselves. We've said that before. We've told them that before, and we'll support the municipalities most in need. And we've tried to do that.

Mr. Gerrard: What you're saying is that, if there were any municipalities in absolutely dire financial straits, they should come to see you quickly. Is that right?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, you know, municipalities—they vary in their challenges, and they're unique. And many have already have come to the department, either to my deputy minister or others, pleading their case as to the hardship they face with regard to assessment and how assessment has changed for them or has affected their tax base.

*(16:00)

But, again, I will repeat: what I've been advised by my department is that the municipalities have either enough monies in reserve or the financial wherewithal or are able to deal with this particular situation that they're faced, even though—as hard and difficult as this flood was, municipalities have been able to deal with it. And they—municipal governments are another level, a duly elected government, that have a responsibility to bring a budget forward, a responsibility to deal with their citizens, bring a budget forward and deal with what they have. And no one said it's easy. I certainly wouldn't, because they've been through such a hardship that, I think, all of us feel for them in, you know, the kind of situation they're in—not only their citizens, but as elected officials trying to deal with the challenges of their citizens coming to them, looking for a plan or looking for solutions. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: I just—I would interpret what the minister is saying that, as far as he's aware, that all the municipalities are in a position where they can manage, and—but that if there was a municipality

which felt that it absolutely couldn't manage, I presume he would be receptive to being approached.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, we've already done that, but I would like, you know—I mean, the definition of they can't manage. I mean, what does that mean? Right? I mean, municipalities are very good at managing and very good at doing a very good job of whatever circumstances come their way. They take these challenges seriously. So—but we've already done it. We've already helped municipalities and tried to assist them already. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the ongoing debates has been whether there are too many municipalities or there should be some amalgamation of municipalities. I just ask the minister what his view is on this and, you know, what his perspective is and what his approach is.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, how should one answer this question? I mean, that's a—I know the—I wouldn't say that the MLA and the Leader of the Liberal Party is devious about his question or trying to set a trap for the poor Minister of Local Government, but, you know, it's a very straightforward question and I will try to give him as straightforward answer as I can.

I know the member from Agassiz would like to reduce the municipalities down to whatever number. The member for River Heights might want to reduce the number down. I'm not saying they would. I'm just saying, what is the magic number? And what kind of criteria would that mean that—what are municipalities—how do you base it on reducing the number of municipalities from 197 down to what number? And should they at all?

But, you know, the kind of challenges that are being faced, as a result—actually, that's a very good question. Because the challenges that have been faced by a number of these municipalities because of this natural disaster, is really—has put pressure on these municipalities. They're small in population, a number of them—relatively small, I should say—and yet, some of them don't have that financial wherewithal. They don't, maybe, have the kind of taxation or tax base that they would like, and so it has created some real challenges for them overall.

Whether or not that should happen, it may happen some year where the numbers are going to be reduced. I know that it has been raised before at AMM; people have raised it. I'm not sure if there's a resolution on the books going back when my critic from the constituency of Agassiz was in a leadership

role with AMM at the time, or even when the conversion happened. But this discussion has happened for a number of years as to how can a number of these municipalities be viable with such a small number of population base and a lack of taxation base or assessment base for them.

I know I'm not answering the question directly because I don't know if there is—there isn't an answer today as to what that should be. But I know that these discussions are going to have to take place. They will have to take place. They have, I think, for every year that I've been, certainly, minister, and every year I've been in government, for 12 years, this discussion has happened. People have asked, you know, should people get together in a more formal way?

Right now, there's a lot of service agreements that have taken place between many municipalities, sharing services. Most recently, Shoal Lake and the RM of Shoal Lake amalgamated and came together. Gimli—the town of Gimli and the RM of Gimli became one. They saw a lot of advantages. Instead of duplicating services or duplicating their costs, getting together, having service agreements, they made them work.

Some may say, you know, let's go further. Instead of just having a service agreement and working with each other, maybe there's four or five municipalities that should get together. And, in fact, we see a lot of partnerships all over the province now just on waste water. You hear in southern Manitoba and other areas of Manitoba where people—well, I shouldn't say not just waste water, but in the St. François Xavier local government area, they have a water co-op that—I believe there's five municipalities that've come together and worked together to have a water co-op and, I believe, the member from Portage la Prairie was at the announcement. It was a great announcement, a great initiative, by the way, on behalf of these municipalities. But it was federal-provincial-municipal monies. But from five—I believe it was five or six—*[interjection]*—five municipalities come—came together.

So these things—these are happening already all over the province, but there are some municipalities that want to come together in a more formal way. Instead of having, you know, five graders, five shops that has costs, operational costs related to them, maybe have one and bring the equipment together, bring their staffing together. Instead of having five CAOs, bring—have one, and so on. I mean, these

conversations are happening already. I haven't participated in them, but a lot of these service agreements, the municipalities, they see the reality of actually coming together, either contractually by having service agreements, or actually looking at, like Shoal Lake and the RM of Shoal Lake did, or Gimli and the RM of Gimli, and coming together and forming one municipality.

And it does, you know, it does beg the question as to, you know, is this going to happen more formally between more municipalities, or is it not? I don't know. I can't answer that question. But I know people are talking about it already out—certainly, outside of this building. And, again, it comes down to the best—trying to get the best bang for the buck for their citizens and how they can they provide the services they're currently getting without impacting more on their ratepayers.

So it's a very good question, and I didn't make—mean to make light of it. It's a serious question because everyone has that—the passion about their municipality or their RM, and what would that be like to be incorporated or become one of five in joining and maybe even changing the name of your municipality to the name of—and joining four others and having a totally new name of a municipality, and how would that work?

So there's a lot of challenges related to that. It's a serious question, and it deserved a serious answer. So I hope the member for River Heights will realize I tried to address it the best I could because there are no formal discussions or anything like that happening presently, but I know, informally, many, many municipalities are talking about this amongst each other, and even gone to take the steps of that working, and gone to formal working agreements with each other to try to address some of the challenges they've had. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister.

I'm going to turn it back for the MLA for Agassiz. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: I'm going to weigh in a little bit on just what the minister was talking about. There's some interesting anomalies out there, and population doesn't necessarily mean—or low population doesn't necessarily mean a municipality's poor. Their incomes are based on something else. But lack of people is a problem we're seeing in some areas. In fact, some of the municipalities that are the lower populated ones because of the oil boom that's going

on are probably the more wealthy municipalities that are out there right at the present moment.

So any time we look at amalgamations or at—we do have a lot of service agreements and, in our case, the municipality I live in, we counted them up one time in joint efforts with us and other municipalities. I think we had 19 different agreements with other municipalities, when you take into account planning board and library and rec facilities and everything and all the different agreements we had. So that—that's one good way to go.

* (16:10)

On the amalgamation end of it, I don't believe, personally, that there's a major saving to amalgamations. I think there's big gains to be—like a big financial saving—I think there's big gains to be made in terms of operations, in the recognition you get from other levels of government and that type of thing, where one small municipality right now—one small municipality might not get quite the attention that five or six municipalities working together would get the attention. And I know the Province looks for areas, and so do the federal government, look for areas where there is a co-operation between municipalities and a will to work together to get things done.

So I do believe, and I'll put it on the record, I do believe that we need to move further down the road and amalgamate some of the municipalities out there. I think we have too many of them. Lord knows we're in good shape compared to Saskatchewan. They have about 900 of them and we have 197, but they're a little bit more protective out there on the—there's no co-operation between the urbans and rurals, as far as I can see, out there, whereas here a number of years ago, when I was involved, we joined the urban and rural association together, and I think it was one of the best moves that we ever made when we formed AMM.

Unless the minister has a specific comment to that.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member from Agassiz for your forthright and honest and straight-up answer with regard to feeling that there has to be some amalgamations take place in the future.

You know—and I have to also thank you for the leadership you took at the time between the urbans and the rural. That, at one time, was quite divisive. I mean, I wasn't in politics then, but I certainly knew a lot of municipal politicians that were involved and it

was—there was a lot of finger pointing going on at the time, and you should be congratulated for your leadership role in bringing that all together, and I sincerely mean that, because I believe AMM is far better today because of it.

And, you know, going—moving forward with regard to amalgamations, and what is the right number, and how do you determine that, and your point about the population is correct—it's not just based on population of how many people live in your municipality, nor should it be. Because you're right, you might have a lot of people that own oil wells or might be on municipal land or you have the financial wherewithal—we have oil wells there—that your municipality could be far better off than one that has a larger population and still are having some difficulty in entering into all kinds of service agreements to try to address it. That is probably for another day.

But I know that amalgamations would not take—they would not take place with having full consultation and getting some input from all the stakeholders as to how this would work. And I know the member opposite, I'm sure, would be part and parcel of that, and would want to be part and parcel of that, and to see that come through. But why would it happen? Well, it would happen because of the things we've been talking about. How do you have a viable municipality, and how do you make it viable for your citizens?

And your point was well taken as well with regard to the federal government. The federal government, in the last go around in stimulus and dealing with Building Canada Fund, when people came together and said, we've got a project for five of us, or six of us, and looking regionally, it certainly got a lot of attention in Ottawa because that was a key for them; they wanted more regional projects. They wanted—if they could have encompassed eight municipalities in a waste-water project, that's what they were looking at. So your point about that's where they have—that's where you have some clout is by having a larger geographical area, for example, wanting something to move forward, it does hold a lot of weight.

So maybe I'll just end my comments by just thanking you for being honest and stating that your party and you personally feel that something would have to be done there. And, you know, again, that's not for today, but these are conversations that you and I know, these are happening out there already.

And some amalgamations have happened already, and more will happen, not because they're made mandatory, it's because people want to come together on their own and want to make it work. I thank you.

Mr. Briese: Just one more comment on that. Just as a point of interest, the first committee on the amalgamation of MAUM and UMM, the urban and the rural municipalities was George Fraser, as deputy mayor of the City of Winnipeg; Rick Borotsik, the City of Brandon mayor; myself; and Bill Roth from the RM of Dufferin.

Those were the first four plus the two executive directors—[interjection] Probably about '97, I think, probably at about 1997 that we started that process and we went through it in about 2000 was when we finally got through it.

Moving on then, I noticed in your opening remarks, you mentioned a half to-half-time job in Brandon going to a full-time job. And I notice in the Estimates book that you actually have a cut in the costs of the Brandon office and, of about, I think, \$20,000. And I—my first suggestion would be that you maybe hire a lot more—take a lot more half times and turn them full times if you can save that kind of money. But the second one is I'm just wondering where the reduction was in the Brandon office.

Mr. Lemieux: I'd just ask my critic if—I'm not sure what office. You mentioned the Brandon office; I'm not sure what office. If there a page that you're referring to or something I can look at?

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Briese: On page 21.

* (16:20)

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Acting Chairperson, I've been advised that an amount like that will show that if there's a gap in positions or a gap in staffing, that money will—it's not a lapse, it's a—yes, it's like a staff turnover allowance. I'm trying to think of the right terminology, but that's what it is. It just shows if there's any kind of a gap.

Mr. Briese: Well, and I do see they have a quite a few pages in here. They have a staff turnover amount and I was going to ask about that too. It seems to vary considerably from one to another and I was wondering, what actually is all included as staff turnovers. Is that retirements? Is that—or is that open positions that you're not funding, or what makes up staff turnover?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, it's—I've—it's been explained to me that that is the gap from the time a person leaves, whether it's by retirement or promotion to something else, or—it's the gap between that time until there's either new position hired or, you know, I mean, that's what it is. It's just a gap, the gap period.

Mr. Briese: Okay, thank you for that, Mr. Minister. On page 29, and I'm sure it's covered somewhere else, but on page 29, on the very last line Urban Development Initiatives. What all falls into Urban Development Initiatives?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, the UDI program, Urban Development Initiative is based on a percentage of video lottery terminals and that percentage is UDI—is directed to the City of Winnipeg and it's a myriad of different programs and different initiatives. And that money or grant is provided, in this particular case, to the City of Winnipeg, and it can be—it's two initiatives that they have, so—or the—two particular initiatives. So, again, it's based on a per cent or percentage of the VLTs, video lottery terminals.

Mr. Briese: So along that same line then, where does the VLT money to the other municipalities show up?

Mr. Lemieux: Excuse me. This is not the monies that the member opposite might be familiar with where a portion or—is—goes to the municipalities. This is—the UDI is a percentage off of VLTs that is then used for initiatives to the City of Winnipeg.

So there's another component of that for rural Manitoba. Rural Economic Development Initiatives the REDI program, which comes out of MAFRI. It's in the MAFRI Estimates, the MAFRI books. So that is a—they're similar. Similar idea where it's a percentage coming off of VLTs, but one goes to rural Manitoba and one goes to the City of Winnipeg. And UDI is to the City of Winni—

Mr. Briese: And I presume that the REDI programs are, if I remember correctly, there was—they're over and above—there's 10 per cent—well, there's 12 and a half per cent goes to municipalities out of VLT revenues and two and a half per cent of that, I think, is in a form of a grant and the other 10 per cent is on a per capita basis. And then REDI—the REDI funding, I believe, if I remember correctly, is about 25 per cent of the remainder, but I'm not absolutely clear on that, but I presume that REDI is administered through Department of Finance or somewhere else. I don't expect it comes through Local Government.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, 25 per cent goes to UD, 25 per cent to REDI and 10 per cent of the VLT net revenue goes directly to municipalities. That's that—the one you're referring to as 12, it's 10. So you've got 25 UD, 25 REDI, 25—or 10 directly to municipalities, but the REDI is administered by MAFRI.

Mr. Briese: And that 10 per cent is done on a per capita basis. Winnipeg gets a chunk of it and every municipality in the province, except maybe the City of Steinbach, gets it. I don't know whether they—I think there's one that doesn't.

An Honourable Member: Winkler.

Mr. Briese: Winkler. Okay. I think there was—I was pretty sure there was one that didn't.

So, then, back to page 29, and on the line I asked about, there's almost a \$2-million reduction in Urban Development Initiatives. That would simply indicate that there was a drop in VLT revenues, then, I presume.

Mr. Lemieux: The answer is yes.

Mr. Briese: Thank you. I'll move on then. That was one of the questions I had there.

Page 42, it's on grants to SRO projects in Winnipeg that contribute to safer communities. What's that involve? What are those projects?

Mr. Lemieux: This program, I would argue, has been very, very successful, and the SRO projects that contribute to enhance school and community safety and increase positive relationship between the police, the youth and the community as a whole. And these are really—you're talking about police officers in school, and so it's something that we're very, very—you know, this is something we're very supportive of and the school resource officer program supports the placement of Winnipeg City police services and constables in high schools with the officers also providing support to feeder schools as well.

So the SRO projects aim to minimize the risk of youth becoming involved in the justice system and to strengthen the partnership as I mentioned before between the police, the youth, the community as a whole, and the SRO's focus on crime prevention, safety, education and maintaining peace in targeted schools in adjacent neighbourhoods. So it's a program that it's very, very important and I know there are a number of different schools, of course, that probably would want officers in their schools for various reasons, but I believe it has been a real—very,

very successful program, and there have been evaluations done on the program and that's really the analysis as I understand it that they've been very successful.

Mr. Briese: I'm certainly not questioning the success of the program or the need for the program. My question was more on how did it happen to fall into Local Government. This is a school program or it's a safety program or a number of things. Why is it in Local Government?

* (16:30)

Mr. Lemieux: Yes. Well, because we are responsible for the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, and that was part of it. And it was—also grew out of Neighbourhoods Alive! and became even bigger than Neighbourhoods Alive! which was within intergovernmental affairs or now Local Government.

It seemed like a natural place where it should stay because the staff are so great. And they know the programs and, without being too tongue in cheek, they are very familiar with this particular program. And it was felt that that's where it should stay. And it has been very successful, and we're very pleased to have it, quite frankly, as a very, very successful program.

Mr. Briese: Madam Acting Chair, on page 46, it lists the different activities under Urban Development Initiatives. Does the department have any say in how those are funded, or is it turned over as a lump sum to Winnipeg and they decide what they're doing with that particular amount of money?

Mr. Lemieux: We have a direct funding agreement with every organization that we fund, and we—we're the ones who deal with them, with the organizations themselves.

Mr. Briese: I think I'll go into some other areas now. I know we've had some discussions before on things like, oh, consolidation of planning offices, and so on. And how many, first of all—just so it goes on the record, I guess—how many planners, senior planners have we got in the province? And I'm talking about basically the director of the—whatever planning office it is.

I know that one of the offices was closed in Deloraine, and there was some staff moved, and that was over a year ago. Have there been any others? Where are we at on those staffings, because I know the minister referred to it earlier about the help they do provide the municipalities. And my time on

planning board, quite a bit of it was with Terry Pierce, out of Brandon, and he was marvellous at the co-operation with our planning district and his dedication to making sure things moved along for us.

And you probably know we were one of the first in the province to implement the livestock policy in our development plan. And Terry was instrumental in that, but it was the wish of our own locals to have that done too, at the time. But I'm just wondering if there's any further reduction in—I know the—I don't think the Brandon office is staffed at the level that it was staffed at one time, and I'm just wondering what the numbers are.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question. We touched on this a little bit earlier but not as much depth as maybe he wanted. But an example would be—well, first of all, there've been no reductions. There have been retirements, and this is something that the civil service is facing all over, in every department. And, regrettably, I'm sure we'll face that too, even more so in the days or weeks or months to come.

I'll give an example of efficiencies and what we're trying to do is, you know, you—where you can use a position for a planner, for example, is the Beausejour-Steinbach office where you have one manager out of Steinbach responsible for the Beausejour office and the Steinbach office. But you use that money or salaries, you know, to ensure that you have another planner. And the Thompson manager is currently vacant.

So here you have—you've got, you know, between the Steinbach and Beausejour in the Eastman region, both offices are operated by the one manager, but the current manager is in Steinbach, but he's responsible also for Beausejour.

Mr. Briese: How many planners—I would call them senior planners—are in the Brandon office at the present time?

Mr. Lemieux: In the Brandon office, I've been advised that there's one manager and there's also a planner and one planner vacant. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Just moving on here a little bit, but still on the planning area, I—I've become concerned over the last period of time, and I think I've actually mentioned it to your deputy and maybe even to yourself, that the whole concept of planning districts was the concept of local people making decisions about the local area

under the auspices of The Planning Act and under the land-use policies. And when you go through that process and when you make—you develop a plan, you develop your bylaws, but whenever you do a zoning change, there's a process you have to go through. And in the rural municipalities especially, most of it's zoned agricultural, and so if you want to put in a rural residential or rural residential area somewhere, you have to go through a process, or if you want to put in a commercial operation of some sort.

When that's done—and I'm telling people that already know this, but I want it on the record—when that's done, it's circulated through a number of organizations and government departments for comment when there's a change being made on the zoning in the development plan.

It was always—and any of them that have concerns then comment back on—to the planning board on what their concerns are with that particular development. We're seeing a lot more of, especially a couple of departments of government, taking that a step further and going—if the planning board doesn't implement their concern into it, they're taking them to the Municipal Board, and the municipalities are losing quite a few of those appeals at the Municipal Board.

Nowhere in The Planning Act does it say that these other departments—as I said earlier, it's designed for local people making local decisions as long as they're within certain parameter—nowhere in The Planning Act does it say anything about other departments of government or other organizations having veto power, and it's almost like as if they feel they have veto power and they're using it. And I think there's far too many of these being turned down.

*(16:40)

We talked before about population in municipalities. Most municipalities are very cautious about where they put any residential or allow any subdivision. There's some places that they obviously shouldn't be. But I could give you a list of at least a half a dozen that have been turned down in the last few months. Like, it's almost like as if everything's getting turned down, and most of it is being turned down by the Department of Agriculture. It's the Department of Agriculture that's challenging it. And I think it's—I think someone's got to make this argument. Like, municipalities are people as well as property, and there's a blend of people on—and—on

the country side, and people have a right to live in certain places.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank goodness. And it's something that I'm certainly not going to apologize for, that this province was long overdue to have a provincial land-use policy that worked.

I—and where I live now, there was such a hodgepodge and, I would argue, across the province it looked like a patchwork quilt on where people could develop. People, you know, put up development—this is not to say that, you know, one should be antidevelopment or anti—well, antidevelopment, I guess, is where I'm going, is—that's not it.

The point is, you have to develop in a sustainable way, that you're not building huge neighbourhoods on a river with septic fields, you know, 50 feet from that river, and, indeed, having places where they've got a straight pipe from their septic tank right into the river. You know, this—those days are over. And the municipalities that I've met with—and I've said so to them without apologizing, that anything we can do to make sure that neighbourhoods and development are sustainable, we're better for it in years and decades and centuries to come, not only for ourselves, but our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

So it's not always easy. So, when you have a provincial land-use policy that says you're going to consult with Agriculture, Water Stewardship, highways, all these departments to ensure that there's no infringement or developments being put in a way that they're not going to be sustainable, that you have to allow these departments to have a say—and the veto is certainly not the right word; they don't—no department has veto power. It's consultative; people work together and they try to pass off information to each other, where they may feel traffic flows, for example. Whether we're dealing with highways people, they don't want too many driveways going on to—let's use No. 16, for an example, the Yellowhead. If you have a development outside of Neepawa, you don't want a lot of driveways going directly to No. 16 because you know what's going to happen. Sooner or later, there's going to be fatalities there.

So I know the member opposite is—and I don't mean to get on my high horse about this—but, I think, we all saw it, just too much development going on in places where it shouldn't have happened. And yet,

for municipalities, a lot of that development is bread and butter. They need people living in their municipalities. They need people moving out there. You have to have housing. If you're going to have a huge hog plant or a processing plant, people need places to live; they need places to develop; you need neighbourhoods.

In my area, a lot of people that are moving back—their families used to live in St. Adolphe and Lorette and Ste. Anne, and they want to move back. And there's just not enough housing in those towns to accommodate that. So how do you do it in a way that it's sustainable?

So, without being too longwinded, and I apologize for it—for that, for being longwinded—I don't apologize for having good, strong provincial land-use policies in place because we'll never regret it, never. We'll never regret it.

But I understand that you're concern, and we certainly noted that—that it seems like, over the last while, you have a certain department or departments that are raising questions, that are objecting to certain development.

But I'll tell you, we never want to turn into what happened in the Niagara Peninsula, where all that beautiful fruit and farming land was turned into asphalt. I couldn't believe my eyes the last time I was there. You know, 20 years, what a difference. It's just asphalt and apartment blocks. It's—well, I don't think we want to see that happen in Manitoba. Fantastic farmland, the best farmland in North America just turned to asphalt, streets, lights, and, you know, we've got—there's got to be a better way.

And it's not to restrict development. That's not it at all. It's just to do it in a sustainable way, be smart about it. And I know the member opposite feels the same way, but your point is well noted, though. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: Don't get me wrong here, but—and I agree. We need strong land-use policies. I just think there's an anomaly developing here and—but, you know—and I truly support the CentrePort operation. But you're talking about the Niagara Peninsula. We got 20,000 acres out there going under pavement.

I just wonder if the Department of Agriculture was opposed to that one, because I'm fairly passionate about this. I, we used, I think, very responsible land-use planning in our municipality. We went out into the areas that had poor land when we allowed subdivision. It wasn't the first rate. It was

land that fed 25 cows to a quarter section. It was land that was, for agricultural value, didn't have a lot, and in that way we were able to keep the population in our municipality fairly stable, while all the others around us were dropping. We were lucky we were next to a fairly large urban centre too.

But, you know, what bothers me is that the resistance to this is not coming from the local people. It's coming from a department of government, and that isn't what local development plans, in my view, were set out to do. It's—we would have—you have a hearing, and you have four or five departments of government show up. None of the local people are concerned. But, all of a sudden, all the departments of government are—got their concerns and they're—I think there has to be another look taken at how this process is done.

Mr. Lemieux: But let me just—well, let me address the issue about CentrePort. There's a huge discussion about that. Of course, we want it to be a multimodal rail, truck, air, dealing with logistics, dealing with movement of goods, and we want to be the inland port of North America, and there's huge potential for this. And I believe it will come, but there's 20,000 acres there.

By the time 20,000 acres are used, regrettably, none of us in this room will be around, because it's going to take that long. And it will take that long to develop. And my understanding is that a lot of that rural agricultural land, which is—falls within the RM of Rosser, I believe, that will remain agricultural land for a long time.

And the other issues with regard to the local people not objecting, that's darn hard for a neighbour or others to object to a development—*[interjection]* Well, you know, I mean the member from Agassiz is saying that the local people are not objecting to this, but if somehow those big, bad agricultural people in Winnipeg are saying no, it can't happen.

It's a difficult—this is not an easy thing. Provincial land-use policies and development of land—land is very—very precious, and the development of it is a serious issue. I mean, I take your point. I noted that you're saying that, you know, people are making—it appears—it appears that people are making decisions that are not directly affected or attached to it.

I would argue that Agriculture has a lot to say about agricultural land. Someone has to be and should be the steward of agricultural land in the

province or in the country. Not to say that the farmers don't care about their land, but I know the member from Agassiz has heard it more than once where someone is 75 years of age, they don't want to farm any longer. Their sons or daughters don't want to farm any longer. They would like to parcel off 200 acres of that land and have it developed and get \$80,000 an acre for that land as opposed to selling it as agricultural land where—I'm not sure what the market value is—I know the member for Portage (Mr. Wishart) or yourself would know, you know, what it would be if you just sold it as agricultural land.

So you know the point I'm making and where I'm going with this. And I don't begrudge people trying to be entrepreneurs and wanting to retire and, you know, parcelling off some of their land. But it becomes a difficult issue. It really does.

* (16:50)

I don't pretend to know a lot about agriculture, because I don't, not compared to yourself or the member who's with us today from Portage la Prairie. But I, you know, we try to be respectful of views of rural Manitobans, wanting to develop their land. I know they want to. But it's—where's the balance? You have to have some balance there, and I think the point you're making is that it appears recently that there's an imbalance, where a number of different proposals are not being accepted.

So, I mean, I note your point and, you know, that you're making about that. I don't have an answer for that today. I would just say that I would be respectful in the sense that the people in MAFRI are trying to do the best they can for the province and trying to ensure that we have a sustainable agricultural industry as well as in farmland and farms as well as having a balance with development. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: I thank the minister, and I—don't get me wrong here. I'm not suggesting that, but it gets to be an awful lonely countryside when there's no people in it. And, if we develop, and I'm not pointing fingers or anything, but if we eventually move to a development process or a land-use policy or whatever, that literally puts everybody in urban centres and leaves the countryside empty. I think we've lost ground in this province big time. And, in some cases I think that's almost where we're headed.

So—and, by the way, subdividing to make big money for the family isn't necessarily big money. By the time you do everything that happens—I know a guy that subdivided 16 lots or 17 lots of four acres a

piece, and his profit in the end was about two of those lots with all the development he had to put into it. So nobody gets particularly rich, but I enjoy to see some people out in the country too.

Just kind of related—I don't know whether you've got anybody from assessment actually here, and I know I did have this conversation a little bit with the deputy one day too, but we have a developer—once again, a developer—but it's in the town of Neepawa, and they've made a deal with the Town of Neepawa when they started that development, and they were going to do it in phases.

There's about four phases to it, and they made the deal that it would—it was on agricultural land, by the way—but they made the deal that it would stay at 400—based \$400 a lot until such time as the water and the sewer went in and then they go to a higher assessed value. But they made a deal so that they could afford to do the development.

And I think on at least two occasions, now, the assessment branch has appealed those assessments on those empty lots, and so then the developer has to go argue the case at a Municipal Board and with the full support of the town in this and, I expect, probably, the assessment branch says there's a higher value because they're—they are lots, but they're not serviced lots yet, and that was the deal they made at the time, and if they had to—if they had the assessment of serviced lots, they probably wouldn't have been able to get the development even off the ground. It's a really quite a large one.

So I'll wait for comments on that.

Mr. Lemieux: The department is in discussions right now with a group of municipalities about this issue and is reviewing its assessment process to ensure that councils, developers and assessors have a common understanding with regard to absorption rates and consequential discounts.

The discussions are also being pursued with respect to other means by which municipalities can offer incentives for local subdivision development. And I think that's part and parcel of what you're talking about. The department recognizes it. So we're in discussion right now with a group of municipalities that are being directly affected by this.

So the point that you raise is a good one because we know it's there, but the department is trying to work with municipalities right now on how we can address this.

Mr. Briese: Well, thank you for that. I'm pleased to see that they are taking a look at that.

There's another kind of a similar issue and it—this goes back years. And quite a number of years ago in the city of Winnipeg here, on the outskirts of the city of Winnipeg here, they decided that any of the farmland that was still being farmed as agricultural land would be assessed as farmland, even though it had a higher value if it sold for commercial or industrial or housing, so—but to put in a deal where, if it sold for those higher values, then they backed up the assessment for five years or collected an extra assessment for five years back. It was—the problem was the assessments were getting too high to be used as farmland if they went with the potential value.

We did the same thing, and I did it and I was on the committee with a number of the senior assessors from the Province on potato—irrigated potato land to the south of where I live. And we'd arrived at agreement at that time that they would specifically identify the quarters, because there's a water shortage. Nobody's getting new licences. So you can't just take this quarter and say, we're going to irrigate and grow potatoes, so—because you don't get new licences. So they were going to separate out the irrigated land because it's far higher assessed—higher value.

So I—we're seeing—because the potato growers will walk in and pay three to four thousand dollars an acre for land that's worth \$400 an acre, we're seeing that overflow of assessment onto the poor land that isn't capable of meeting those kind of assessments. So I hope that the department still takes into consideration—or I would ask that the department—if the department is still taking considerations like that into play.

Mr. Lemieux: To answer the member's question, the farmer—the individual has to apply for it, and there's a request for farm-use assessment.

And, if someone wants it assessed, for example, at farmland as opposed to development land, if that's a proper terminology, then the request for farm-use assessment has to be—an application has to be filled out, and the person has to put in the legal land description, registered owner, assessment, land, market value, farmland, buildings and so on. And it just says that the property described above must be used for farming purposes, that is, to produce agricultural products on a commercial basis.

And then it says further, a change in use tax payback as described in a certain section of The Municipal Assessment Act shall occur when all or part of the above description property is no longer used for commercial farming purposes.

So—and it just says that this form must be returned to the Assessment Services no later than December 31st for farm use to apply to the following year. So there's an application process that a person has to apply and, I guess, it's on a case-by-case basis on whether—you know, what the person wants that particular land assessed at—agricultural land, or do you want it at the development side?

But I've heard this and maybe you're—I think maybe you raised this with me earlier at a different time informally about this starting to happen now

where land is really starting to—the overflow of assessment is starting to happen. So—but thank you for raising it again.

Mr. Briese: I actually got caught in it myself in this last assessment. I apparently—I talked to one of the assessors about this, but Neepawa is quite a thriving community and, apparently, they did a higher assessment on land within three miles of town. They took a circle and—okay, I'll take that one till tomorrow. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: 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 24, 2012

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Petitions		Income Assistance Benefits	
Repeal of The Jewish Child and Family Service Incorporation Act		Goertzen; Swan	1643
Blady	1641	Bills	
Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach		Goertzen; Swan	1643
Goertzen	1641	Highway 75	
Bipole III Routing		Taillieu; Ashton	1644
Pedersen	1641	Lake of the Prairies	
		Maguire; Ashton	1645
		Shellmouth Dam	
		Maguire; Ashton	1646
Tabling of Reports		Flooding (Lake Manitoba)	
Aboriginal and Northern Affairs—Supplementary Information for Legislative Review— Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Wishart; Selinger	1646, 1647
Robinson	1642	Wishart; Ashton	1647
Sport—Supplementary Information for Legislative Review—Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Mandatory Legislative Reviews	
Robinson	1642	Stefanson; Struthers	1647
Housing and Community Development— Supplementary Information for Legislative Review—Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Mining Sector	
Irvin-Ross	1642	Cullen; Chomiak	1649
Culture, Heritage and Tourism—Supplementary Information for Legislative Review— Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Water Management Policy	
F. Marcelino	1642	Gerrard; Selinger	1650
Immigration and Multiculturalism— Supplementary Information for Legislative Review—Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Lake Winnipeg	
Struthers	1642	Gerrard; Selinger	1650
Innovation, Energy and Mines—Supplementary Information for Legislative Review— Departmental Expenditure Estimates, 2012-2013		Manitoba Hydro Place	
Chomiak	1642	Gaudreau; Chomiak	1651
		Lyme Disease	
		Graydon; Oswald	1651
Oral Questions		Members' Statements	
The Manitoba Evidence Act		Pride Winnipeg	
Goertzen; Swan	1642	Blady	1652
		John Usackis	
		Ewasko	1652
		Henri Dupuis	
		Braun	1653
		Missing Children's Month	
		Mitchelson	1654
		Transcona Political History	
		Maloway	1654

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Committee of Supply

(Concurrent Sections)

Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs	1655
Advanced Education and Literacy	1676
Education	1683
Local Government	1699

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