

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
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NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	NDP
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REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
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STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
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WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Gimli	—
<i>Vacant</i>	Southdale	—

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 22, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 45—The Elections Amendment Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 45, The Elections Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, Bill 45 amends The Elections Act following recommendations from Elections Manitoba to move towards the creation of a permanent voters list. The bill will allow Elections Manitoba enumerators to do an enhanced enumeration, and the 2016 general election is part of that work.

I appreciate the support of the Opposition House Leader and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) with the introduction of this act.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports. Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Corporal Nathan Cirillo

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): One year ago today, Corporal Nathan Frank Cirillo was shot and killed at the young age of 25. Any death of a military member is tragic, but the horror of this event was intensified by the fact that Corporal Cirillo was not deployed overseas. Rather, he stood on duty, unarmed, at Ottawa's National War Memorial.

Corporal Cirillo was a reservist with plans to join the regular force. He grew up in Hamilton, Ontario, and joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders infantry unit as soon as he could.

Corporal Cirillo was a father, son and a brother. Looking back, we once more offer our condolences to his family for their loss, honour his memory and thank all those brave people who don a uniform to protect Canadian lives.

I stand today to thank our Canadian military personnel in the regular forces and the reserves across Manitoba, including those stationed at Minto Armouries on St. Matthews Avenue. We cannot underestimate the value of their contributions to our security.

The reservist infantry soldiers based at Minto Armouries, like others across our country, mirror the valour and dignity displayed by Corporal Cirillo, serving and protecting us, but also serving as community leaders, coaches and volunteers. They're our family, our friends and our neighbours.

The courage required to join the military is something that few have, and yet it is imperative for the safety of our country. When our military personnel go to work, they know they may be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, which is exactly what Corporal Cirillo did.

The motto of Corporal Cirillo's unit is *Ne Obliviscaris, Sans Peur: Do not Forget, Without Fear*. Corporal Cirillo fulfilled that motto. We will not forget him.

Corporal Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the sad anniversary of the death of two soldiers on Canadian soil. Corporal Nathan Cirillo was killed while standing guard at our National War Memorial in Ottawa. Warrant officer Patrice Vincent was killed in a hit-and-run in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. Both were targets of extremists, and many observers say that with their deaths Canada has lost its innocence.

Mr. Speaker, in my previous career, I have been in Ottawa many times and I've walked down the hallway to the Library of Parliament. That was the hallway where sergeant-at-arms Kevin Vickers bravely ended the assault on Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I was in Ottawa last spring at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

conference, and again walked down that hallway and saw the damage that was done by the assaults. I was somewhat surprised that legislators from other Commonwealth countries not only knew of the assault, but were also concerned about the well-being of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, on a cold April night this year, I spent some time at the National War Memorial, and it seemed to be a far different place than past visits. There were many other people there, and I watched as they approached the memorial to give their respects. I am sure their thoughts were similar to mine: great sadness at lives cut short, honouring those who have given their lives to ensure our freedom that we sometimes take for granted.

Mr. Speaker, this morning at the war memorial there was a commemoration ceremony honouring Corporal Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent.

Mr. Speaker, I ask leave for a moment of silence for the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to honour those two members of our Canadian military.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to observe a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Investing in École La Vérendrye

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Joining us in the gallery today are Claudette Warnke, principal of École La Vérendrye, and parents of La Vérendrye students Stacy Huard, Denise Clarke and Salena Buchan.

Having recently sent my own child off to school for the first time, I know that all parents want their kids to get the best possible start in life. I am confident and thankful that our teachers, staff and parents work hard to help our kids thrive.

Our government is supporting their hard work by investing \$5 million in a new gymnasium and new classrooms for students at École La Vérendrye. By the next school year, these kids will have more room to play and learn.

I was honoured to take part in the sod-turning ceremony at École La Vérendrye. With some fantastic singing from the kids, this ceremony highlighted our investment and the partnership with the City of Winnipeg and Winnipeg School Division.

And we thanked the parents, alumni and others who have worked hard to raise money and plan for the best use of these new facilities.

The parent council started with a modest goal of raising a few thousand dollars; they raised more than \$200,000. This funding will make the new gym a place that the whole neighbourhood can enjoy.

Our government has made a choice to build instead of cut. Since forming government, we have more than tripled our capital investments into public schools. We've invested over \$1.4 billion to build and maintain schools throughout Manitoba, including 35 new and replacement schools and 82 major additions like the new gym and classrooms for École La Vérendrye. And we chose to hire more teachers, the most important investment in any classroom.

Looking at the faces of those singing kids at La Vérendrye, and watching my own children learn and grow, I know we made the right choice.

Thank you.

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Costs

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I stand today before this Assembly to speak about Hydro.

Prior to 1999, Manitoba Hydro had been the crown jewel of Manitoba. Manitobans enjoyed some of the lowest rates in North America. That has changed, Mr. Speaker. We are no longer the powerhouse of low energy rates.

This government has interfered in the management of Manitoba Hydro. Manitoba Hydro made the decision to take Bipole III down the east side of Lake Winnipeg at a cost of \$1 billion. Our NDP government then decided that it would change that line to the west side, some 400 kilometres further, at a much higher cost estimated to be \$4.6 billion. We all know that cost estimates of past projects have been way over budget estimates.

This project is going right through some of the best farmland in this province. This is the first time the people of Manitoba, the real owners of Manitoba Hydro, had to expropriate property for any project.

* (13:40)

Line loss is a large factor in addition to the extra \$3.6 billion in cost. To make matters worse, every member opposite went door to door and told all Manitobans the cost of Bipole III would not cost them a cent; the cost of Bipole III would be included

in the price of hydro sold to our American neighbours. We find out this was not the case at all. The real owners of Manitoba Hydro, the people of Manitoba, would pick up the total cost of Bipole III.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House, what we've been asking for is very clear. We want the NDP to respect the real owners of Manitoba Hydro, the people of Manitoba Hydro, and listen to Hydro's experts in taking technical hydro.

David Collins Memorial Cairn

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): History is always being revised, and sometimes even stories we are told as children can suddenly become a part of history. Historians say things like, if stones could talk. Well, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, they do.

Emilia McNichol told her granddaughter Kelleen Blouin a story about some stones. In that story her old grandfather, a Metis trapper named David Collins, showed a prospector named Tom Creighton some stones.

Those stones were the mineral deposit that gave birth to the town of Flin Flon and one of the greatest mines in Canadian history. In today's coin it yielded up metals worth \$14 billion, giving generation upon generation of people a wonderful place to live, work and play.

Tom Creighton staked the claim on those stones and enjoyed the wealth that followed. The town of Creighton, a stone's throw from Flin Flon, was named after him. David Collins received some \$6 worth of flour, lard and tea for showing Tom Creighton those stones.

On September 27th of this year, I stood amongst the people, including many of David Collins' descendants who fought to get Mr. Collins the recognition he deserves. Thanks to efforts of a committee dedicated to bringing an historical truth to light, a cairn to David Collins' legacy now stands in the neighbourhoods of the North Park.

Kelleen Blouin spoke at the unveiling, citing another story her grandfather told her. Collins used to joke that he was still waiting for my sugar to put in my tea that Creighton promised me. And so to recognize the sweetness of the historical truth, she poured a bit of sugar on the cairn.

Thanks to the perseverance of Collins' descendants and the tireless advocacy of Gerry Clark and his committee, a beautiful stone now stands commemorating the historical truth: Flin Flon's

history started with the help of a Metis trapper named David Collins. It continues because Flin Flon cares about the history and their heritage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: And just prior to oral questions, I have some guests to introduce.

Seated in our public gallery we have with us this afternoon from Neil Campbell School, we have 48 grade 4 students under the direction of Mr. Alvin Dyck, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway).

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

And it is our practice to introduce our new pages. I'd like to introduce our new page who is with us here this afternoon and joining us for this session, Shivani Hunter, who is a student at St. Mary's Academy.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here to the Legislative Assembly and wish you well in your Legislative Assembly work. Thank you very much for your service to the members of the Assembly.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Deficit Cost to Manitobans

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): A little over a year ago a respected international bond rating firm, Moody's international, issued a warning to the government in respect of their management practices. The warning was clear and it was explicit, and it made comments in respect of the fiscal mismanagement that had occurred. It referenced overspending and wasteful spending practices, and it gave a heads-up to anyone who chose to read the warning.

Unfortunately, the Premier apparently did not or his Cabinet members did not read the warning. They were warned and they went ahead and produced a budget, and the budget they produced disregarded every piece of advice they'd received not only from Moody's but from us, from other Manitobans around the province. And it raised the projections on the deficit by over 20 per cent year over year and it

raided the rainy day fund and it borrowed, it borrowed, it borrowed from our future and our children's future to spend today. The result was the first downgrade of our credit rating in 30 years.

I want to ask the Premier: What is the annual cost to Manitobans? What is the loss as a result of his refusal to listen?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question.

The—he may know that the actual interest rate for the Bank of Canada went down. Our budget projects that the debt servicing costs are lower this year than last year.

Under the member opposite when he was in government they paid over 13 cents on every dollar for debt relief. Under us we are down to, this year, to 5.6 cents on the dollar, over 58 per cent lower costs for servicing the debt.

We're building schools. We're building roads. We're building personal-care homes. We're creating 50—nearly 60,000 jobs over the next five years. We created close to 10,000 jobs this year, Mr. Speaker. We're building the infrastructure that Manitobans have told us is a priority. We're doing it at low borrowing costs. We're doing it in a way that creates good jobs and future economic prosperity, very different from the members opposite.

When he was in office he raised the gas tax, cut the budget for highways, laid off people, including teachers, social workers, child-welfare workers and civil servants, had a higher rate of unemployment and lower economic growth.

Mr. Pallister: Well, they're fine talking points from someone who doesn't respect the intelligence of Manitobans.

Now, Manitobans know that the interest rates for borrowing right now are about a fifth of what they were in the time period the Premier refers to and that the debt service charges are the same now as they were when the interest rates were five times as high, and the debt has multiplied enormously.

So the provincial debt has to be serviced. The interest has to be paid on it and it has to be paid by those of us who live in this province in the future, including our children and our grandchildren. And the cost of servicing that debt must be borne by someone.

But when the debt is out of control, as Moody's has said, as Standard & Poor's has said, as various authorities have said, but—and that warning is ignored by this government, it's dangerous. It's reckless.

And what is happening here is that the real cost of not listening is tens of millions of dollars every year that goes to happy moneylenders, Mr. Speaker, but does not go to health care, can't go to education and will be paid back someday by our kids.

So I'm going to ask the Premier again: Does he not understand—101 finance—does he not understand that when he doubles our debt he creates a dangerous situation for our children?

Mr. Selinger: The arrogance coming out of the member opposite and his disrespect for Manitobans is legendary, Mr. Speaker. It's well known.

Former governor of the Bank of Canada said the following about infrastructure, deficits and—at this time. He said: At these very low interest rates, and given the need for infrastructure to allow for further economic development in Canada, it really does make sense at this point in time for governments to borrow in order to finance that infrastructure.

David Dodge, I'll take his opinion on what Manitoba needs to do over the opinion of the Leader of the Opposition any day of the week.

Mr. Pallister: Well, here's the opinion of the member for Minto (Mr. Swan): The Premier has lost sight of the priorities of Manitobans. His first priority is his re-election.

And this year's deficit budget is a re-election budget. It's a chance for the Premier to use the excuse of borrowing more to ribbon cut, to do conspicuous construction, but to do ribbon cutting to buy votes. And that is exactly what his plan is. It is not a plan for the long-term success of our province. It's quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. It's a plan for the weakening of our province.

Now, the Premier himself has said that infrastructure is important, and we agree. However, it took him a full year to come up with that excuse after he raised the PST, didn't it, Mr. Speaker? A full year to come up with a PR program to sell his agenda. And he underspent in the infrastructure budget for five consecutive years before that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the Premier, since he obviously has no financial plan except one: Will

he admit that his plan for the future of Manitoba is deficits in perpetuity?

Mr. Selinger: The member obviously hasn't read the opinions of the bond rating agencies. They say the following: The province's political and management culture is prudent and supported by a capable and experienced administration. They go on to say: Manitoba is bucking the trend of other Prairie provinces and will be the second best performing economy in the country.

* (13:50)

This is the time, according to the former bank of governor, to invest in infrastructure, to ensure young people have good jobs, to make sure we're building for the future when interest rates are low. Our plan is to grow the province, to grow our prosperity, to make sure everybody has that opportunity. That's what we're doing.

What is the vision and the plan of the Leader of the Opposition? Cuts to services, unemployment rates that go up, less opportunities for young people, borrowing in the future when the cost goes up, Mr. Speaker. His plan takes us backwards; our plan takes us forward.

Credit Rating Announcement Finance Minister's Response

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, the opinion of bond rating agencies is: a loss of fiscal discipline leading to debt and deficit. That's the opinion of the bond rating agencies.

Mr. Speaker, in July, when Moody's Investors Service downgraded the credit rating for Manitoba, the Winnipeg Free Press editorial read: Finance Minister nowhere to be found as credit rating falls.

The article states that the Finance Minister took a pass and made his communicators do his talking for him. And the article goes on to say the Finance Minister was missing in action when Moody's registered the non-confidence vote on his fiscal strategy.

Mr. Speaker, when a bond rating agency downgrades the province's credit rating and the Finance Minister goes missing, it is a serious issue of confidence and competence.

Manitobans deserve to know, Mr. Finance Minister: Where were you?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I was on the job, building our economy,

working with labour, working with business, working with our educational partners, working with non-profit groups, working to reach our goal of having the lowest unemployment rating in Canada. We are No. 2. Our goal is to be No. 1.

The—again, as I said, the only ones who aren't happy about the success of this province is the Leader of the Opposition and the gloom-and-doom members across the way.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister says he was on the job, but the Winnipeg Sun also reported the minister's absence, saying he was unavailable for comment.

Mr. Speaker, when an international bond rating agency downgrades the province's credit rating, it is a call to action for a Finance Minister. It is priority No. 1. It requires strong assurances to jittery lenders. Yet this NDP Finance Minister was unavailable, as the headline reads.

I ask again: What was the Finance Minister doing that was more important than responding to the province's first credit downgrade in 30 years?

Mr. Dewar: As I said, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans reject the gloom-and-doom tactics and philosophy of the members opposite. You know, we have a new partner in Ottawa who's eager to work with us to grow the economy.

I'll remind the member that the Bank of Canada—the governor of the Bank of Canada just yesterday downgraded Canada's economic performance.

But we, Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba, I've tabled—or I haven't—many reports from banks and other agencies which are predicting that Manitoba will lead the nation in economic growth. That is good news for the province. That is the path we're on, and that is the path we'll continue on.

Mr. Friesen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the dean of the Asper School of Business was on the job. He was available for comment, and what he said is that the government was losing credibility to meet financial targets. He said that a downgrade would likely add millions of dollars in financing costs, even if interest rates climbed by a fraction of a percentage point.

Basically, he said Manitobans are now paying more and getting less. He was also disappointed that the Finance Minister didn't respond with a strong plan of action.

Does the Minister of Finance understand that his absence and his inaction make the prospect more likely of additional rating downgrades? What convinced the Finance Minister that his time was better spent somewhere else rather than dealing with a fiscal crisis of his own party's making?

Mr. Dewar: I wasn't in Costa Rica like the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, when Manitoba was flooding.

I want to remind the member, Mr. Speaker, just a couple of stats: full-time employment in Manitoba, No. 1; total employment in Canada is in Manitoba, we're No. 1; private employment, we're No. 1 in Manitoba. As I said earlier, we have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada.

The bond rating agencies, they look at the bottom line. That's their job.

As I said in my previous answer, I was in Toronto; I was in New York. I met with investors, Mr. Speaker. They have full confidence in this province. They know that Manitoba is a good place to invest.

Mr. Speaker, again, the only ones who are down on Manitoba is the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues opposite.

Small-Business Income Tax Limit NDP Election Promise

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): As we continue to celebrate Small Business Week in Manitoba, it's unfortunate to have to point out yet another broken promise by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, during the 2011 election, not only did this Premier (Mr. Selinger) break his promise to Manitobans when he said he wouldn't raise taxes, but he made a promise to increase the small-business income limit to \$500,000. Yet he has failed to make this happen.

Mr. Speaker, why has he broken his promise yet again to small businesses in Manitoba?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): It is Small Business Week, and I've been able to travel the province and get the opportunity to talk to many small businesses, Mr. Speaker, and without question, what this government recognizes, and we know, that small businesses create more than 75 per cent of all new jobs in our province.

We also know that small businesses recognize that young people are proud of who they are and they

want to be able to give back, and the best way young people give back is by getting that critical first job, Mr. Speaker. It's small businesses that give them that first job, and we also know that small businesses all throughout the province help build the identity of neighbourhoods all throughout the province.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that we have over 80,000 small businesses, and we'll continue to stand with them.

Mrs. Stefanson: The Premier's refusal to live up to his word in the last election has resulted in Manitoba falling to second last place in Canada with respect to the business income limit, Mr. Speaker. That's almost dead last in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, why has this Premier broken his promise to small-business owners in Manitoba, forcing us into second last place in our country?

Mr. Chief: Mr. Speaker, our government continues to stand with small businesses. We're the only province in the entire country that has completely eliminated small-business tax, been able to increase the income threshold and so that includes more businesses.

We're out—I was down in Morden, Manitoba, and we stood with the good folks, hundreds of small businesses, working with Entrepreneurship Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And how are we doing that? We're helping them start businesses, registration, permits and licences, regulation, taxation, financial programs.

Over and over again, we're showing how we're standing with our small businesses. That's why people like Mike Moore from the Manitoba Home Builders' Association can confidently say there's no better place to start a small business than right here in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister is visiting small businesses in Manitoba. I hope he starts listening to those small-business owners, because being almost dead last in our country is nothing to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier made a commitment in the 2011 election not to raise taxes, and he broke that promise. He made a commitment to raise the small-business income tax limit to \$500,000, yet he broke that promise too.

With the litany of broken promises from this NDP government, how do they expect anyone to trust them again?

Mr. Chief: Mr. Speaker, I proudly say that I was travelling around all over Manitoba, including Morden, Manitoba, where they proudly say a government standing with those small businesses.

In fact, I was down in St. Boniface today at Pasquale's restaurant with Joe, and we were talking about—we were able to announce how we're working together to save Joe and Pasquale's restaurant some money, and that's going to happen all throughout Manitoba by this—the new Power Smart program.

Any time the member of Tuxedo wants to take the time and join me, I'll offer her to come down to Connie's Corner Cafe. She can hear first-hand how small businesses and how this government's standing with them. Not only would she get great information of how this government continues to stand with small businesses, Mr. Speaker, at the same time, she can have the best fried baloney in Winnipeg.

Mining Industry Tax Rates

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Baloney today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, mining is the largest industrial sector in northern Manitoba. Mining represents approximately 3 and a half per cent of our gross domestic product. The industry currently employs over 4,000 people, mainly in northern Manitoba.

* (14:00)

The industry is facing challenges not only from low commodity prices but also from a provincial government that has chosen to tax the industry at the highest rate in Canada, another example of Manitobans paying more and getting less.

Mr. Speaker, why has the NDP chosen this approach at the peril of future development?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has indicated, if you talk to people in the industry, if you talk to people that actually work in mining, if you talk to people that invest in mining, it's diametrically different than what we just heard from members opposite, the doom and gloom.

In fact, let's—Callinex Mines' president said: Of course, Manitoba, it's safe, it's stable. Manitoba has an excellent infrastructure, an experienced workforce. The provincial government is very supportive of mining through its Mineral Exploration

Assistance Program and issues rebates of up to 40 per cent.

You know what? He said, Mr. Speaker, we're one of the best places in the world to do mining, and that's been reflected by the fact that our expenditures for exploration this year are up from last year and down in seven other jurisdictions, even though tough—times are tough in the investment industry and in the mining industry.

Investment in Exploration

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, exploration is the lifeblood of the mining sector. Clearly, we need a vibrant exploration sector to find the resources so that we can open mines in the future. Prospectors and developers compete with other jurisdictions to attract investment dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, how is Manitoba doing compared to other jurisdictions here in Canada? Recent Natural Resources Canada statistics show that only 1.6 per cent of the total exploration dollars are being invested here in Manitoba. This represents over 50 per cent decline in the last seven years.

Why has the NDP allowed this to happen?

Mr. Chomiak: I—what the member conveniently overlooks, Mr. Speaker, is can he name another province in the country where two mines have been opened in the last year? He can't, because there's only one location in Canada where two new mines have opened: here in Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, if you want to make comparisons, much as I hate to use the Fraser Institute, I notice that this year members did not mention the Fraser Institute in their doom-and-gloom questions. And you know why? Because this year the Fraser Institute said we were the second best in the country in terms of mining and investment attractiveness.

Very convenient, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite say one thing; we do things.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the minister also going to take credit for the nine operations that were closed under their watch?

Mr. Speaker, investment dollars go where they are wanted, and clearly the NDP government are not sending the right message. People in the industry know that Manitoba has the worst tax regime in Canada, a dysfunctional permitting system, a lack of

clarity around land use, no framework for consultation, and the list goes on. As a result, statistics show investment in exploration is going elsewhere.

Why has the NDP government turned its back on the industry here in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: I really thank the member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, first off, for the first time in history, we have the minister's Mining Advisory Council, where we have 10 chiefs, all of the heads of all of the mining and exploration companies and the Manitoba Mining Association sitting at a table with government to work on both practices and the future.

And you know what the most important statistic is? At Vale, that members opposite wanted to give up on, 20 per cent of the workforce is First Nations, 20 per cent. So of those thousands and thousands of jobs that we create in northern Manitoba, for the first time, 20 per cent are in mining at Vale, 30 per cent are in hydro. All jobs, all futures that members opposite want to cancel and do not believe in.

Untendered Contracts Approval Process

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, long before an untendered contract needs to be publicly disclosed, an issue which you've taken under advisement and I won't speak to, it needs to go through a proper approval process.

Manitoba laws require that untendered contracts of certain values get approval by certain officials, ministers and Treasury Board. But over and over, for years and for years, different ministers and different Treasury Boards ignored those rules and didn't get the proper approval for millions of dollars of untendered contracts in Manitoba.

I want to know why minister after minister and Treasury Board after Treasury Board was allowed to break the rules and not one minister on that side ever said anything about it.

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Well, we know that Manitobans expect the government to be open and transparent, Mr. Speaker. That—also to remind the member that almost 80 per cent of all expenditures that the government makes go through a competitive process.

And of the ones that don't—that's only 60 per cent—they are expenditures, for example, when only one provider is qualified, like, for

example, Microsoft, or when we have to service our—Bombardier has to service our water bombers, excuse me.

The other example, of course, is in emergency situations, Mr. Speaker. You know, we can't simply say to the flood waters, can you simply wait, can you—we wait while we go and, like the member opposite wants us to do, and take 40 days to go to tender?

The member opposite, that's a ridiculous question.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, it was the Auditor General that indicated that this government, ministers and Treasury Board didn't follow the rules.

When I asked the Minister of Finance at Public Accounts earlier this month how it is that a minister after minister, Treasury Board after Treasury Board, could break the rules, Mr. Speaker, he said to me, "one would assume and we would expect that our staff is doing the job that they are assigned to do."

Mr. Speaker, instead of throwing the public civil service, our dedicated, hard-working and professional civil servants, under the bus, why won't this Minister of Finance acknowledge he's responsible? He and his government and his Premier (Mr. Selinger) should take responsibility and not blame it on the civil service.

Mr. Dewar: As I said, almost 80 per cent of all contracts go through a tendering process. And, again, a vast majority of those that don't are for situations, as I said, where there's only one provider, Microsoft, proprietary service to the government.

We've now changed the process. Before, only tendered—untendered contracts over 1,000 were reported. Now, Mr. Speaker, all contracts over \$10,000 are now reported. Before on the—they were only on the Legislature—excuse me, in the library reading room of this building. Now all that information is available publicly online.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, this is a government that's good at changing the rules after they get caught, Mr. Speaker, after they break the rules.

And here we see it again. Example after an example, minister after minister, Treasury Board after Treasury Board, year after year, this government broke the rules on untendered contracts and the approval of them. The Auditor General caught them.

Now they say that they're going to change the rules, but millions of dollars of untendered contracts were already issued, and that cost Manitobans; that cost Manitoba families.

And the best answer that the Minister of Finance could give us earlier this month was it was the fault of the civil service. Those professional civil servants aren't to blame.

Why doesn't he take responsibility? Why doesn't the Premier (Mr. Selinger) take responsibility? Why doesn't every member and former member of that Cabinet take responsibility in trying to say they're not at fault? They are at fault.

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of contracts go through a tendering process. Again, those that don't, a vast majority of those are because of proprietary contracts and to provide services that they provide to the government, like Microsoft, like Bombardier.

Again, as I'll mention, when you're fighting a forest fire, Mr. Speaker, you don't just say, can you stop while we go 40 days through a tendering process?

We have—now we have one of the most transparent processes in Canada. Before, as I said, you'd have to go online to the Legislative reading room here to get that information. Now all contracts over \$10,000 are disclosed in a public way.

Dedicated Stroke Unit Government Position

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, for the third time this NDP government refused to pass a resolution this morning that would create a dedicated stroke unit. This unit would help to decrease disability and death from stroke by 30 per cent. It would save lives.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain her government's stubborn refusal to improve the lives of stroke patients and their families with a dedicated stroke unit.

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

And it was an opportunity today to again meet with the folks from the health—the Heart and Stroke Foundation, because we do have an ongoing relationship with them. And I can assure Manitobans that we are doing the work that ensures that Manitobans do get great care.

* (14:10)

In fact, one of the most important times is that door-to-needle time when someone has a stroke, that access to clot-busting pharmaceuticals such as tPA. HSC has the best time; we have a 15-minute needle-to-door time. The national standard is 60. The average time is 74 minutes. We're coming in at some of the best times.

We're also providing supports to our EMS workers. We are—it's their—the work that they do, it's the most crucial time, that golden hour, the 52 new ambulances.

Other things we're doing, we're—

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

Mrs. Driedger: The minister did not answer the question, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation were here this morning to support the resolution that this government would not pass.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is the only province in all of Canada without a dedicated stroke unit. We are dead last. Manitobans are paying more and they're getting less.

There are about 1,700 strokes per year in Manitoba, and 613 of those patients die. The numbers are getting worse, and it's going to be a growing tsunami with our aging population.

So I have to ask the Minister of Health: Do Manitobans not deserve the same level of stroke care as everybody else in Canada? Why are they punished by the geography of this province and this NDP government?

Ms. Blady: Again, thank the member for the question. And I, again, thank the members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation for the work that they do. They have been our partners in so many projects. It's with them that we put AEDs throughout the province, in many cases providing them for free.

We have worked with the Heart and Stroke Foundation on numerous projects, including that one, and it's about building a relationship. I've met with them earlier this month, and we have talked about next steps. So when the member opposite says that we won't work with the Heart and Stroke Foundation or that we're not, I can tell you that we have, we are and we will continue to work with the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

And, in fact, I can tell the member opposite that after we left the Chamber and this morning's debate I met with the members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation and we talked next steps.

Mrs. Driedger: I met with them too, and they weren't very impressed with the *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker, not only can lives be saved and disabilities prevented, but money can also be saved with a dedicated stroke unit. According to a recent economic analysis, Manitoba could save almost \$20 million a year. So not only could we save lives, we could save some money.

So this Minister of Health has a second chance right now to do the right thing for Manitoba patients.

Will she commit today to the establishment of a dedicated stroke unit for Manitoba for the right reasons?

Ms. Blady: Thank the member for the question.

And what I will commit to is to continue to work with the Heart and Stroke Foundation to build on the conversations that we had earlier this month, and what we will talk about is all the different things that have been done and how we can improve the system. We have talked to them about best practices, about what is needed, about the direction that we want to go, the direction that they want to go. So I will continue to build relationships with the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The one thing I can also assure them, and conversations that we had, they are well aware that the one way you don't get a dedicated stroke unit is by cutting over half a billion dollars out of the budget.

Ride-Sharing Services Regulation of Industry

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, as Mayor Boris Johnson of London, England, and other civic leaders have found, it is less a question of banning ride-sharing businesses like Uber but more a question of how such businesses are regulated. We should be looking at regulations and how they're drafted for our province so that we provide equitable opportunities for Manitoba-based ride-sharing businesses and for our existing taxi businesses.

What are the Premier's plans for regulation of ride-sharing businesses in our province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question.

We will be issuing a request for proposals to work on improving services in the taxicab industry. The objectives of the review will be to ensure reliability, affordability, convenience and safety. These are vital factors.

I notice the member opposite and his leader have never mentioned the word safety once. It's important that people get in a taxi that's properly licensed with a driver that's properly licensed and ensure that when people are going somewhere that they're safe when they do that and have proper insurance in place. These are the regulations we have in Manitoba.

The review will canvass all of those issues and ensure that the public is safe and has access to affordable, convenient, reliable and safe taxi service.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, others have recognized the need and the advantage to being proactive and not just reacting. Instead of chaos and confusion over ride-sharing businesses, which can lead to unsafe conditions, there needs to be regulations which respect and provide opportunities for our traditional taxi businesses and regulations which provide opportunities for ride-sharing businesses.

Manitoba Liberals will introduce such fair regulations following discussions with all stakeholders and leading to equitable transportation options for Manitobans and fair and equitable treatment for those in the industry.

Will the Premier be allowing ride-sharing services to exist in Manitoba, or will he attempt to ban them?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Liberal Party has already announced that she's going to fully welcome Uber into Manitoba. She has not addressed the issue of safety, nor has the issue of insurance been addressed, nor has the issue of proper licensing for both the vehicles and the drivers been addressed, Mr. Speaker. Those are important issues.

We want a safe, convenient, affordable system that's reliable. That's why we have regulation of the industry. The review will canvass all of those issues, make sure everybody's heard and consulted, Mr. Speaker. We'll come back with an approach that allows the industry to meet all of those objectives.

And I will say this to the member opposite. I know that when his colleague Mr. Lamoureux was in the Legislature, he was one of the biggest advocates

for protecting the existing taxicab industry, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Leader of the Liberal Party has consulted with the members of the federal Liberal Party on where they stand on Uber being fully welcomed in Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable—order. The honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: —and there are many in Manitoba who are interested in learning more about the possibility of ride-sharing services operating in our province. Manitoba businesses want to know how they can provide such ride-sharing services. Manitoba citizens want options allowing them to make their own choices and to be able to use the taxi service we have today or to use their smartphones and apps to access more 'chansportation' options like ride-sharing services.

When will the Premier introduce legislation and regulations to ensure that our traditional 'traxi' drivers will be listened to and provided fair treatment while at the same time providing options for ride sharing? When will the legislation be introduced?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, that's not what the Leader of the Liberal Party said this morning.

The 'lither' of the Liberal Party said that they're going to introduce and fully welcome Uber into Winnipeg. The issue of safety was not even mentioned in the release or the conversation. That is vitally important. Priority No. 1 is to make sure everybody that uses a service called a taxi for which they pay is in a safe vehicle with a licensed driver and a properly insured vehicle.

The review that we're launching will canvass all of those issues: reliability, affordability, safety and convenience. All of those issues will be canvassed, and then we will come back with recommendations of that, and everybody can have input into that, including the member opposite, including the Leader of the Liberal Party.

But what we won't do, Mr. Speaker, is say we're going to do it first and then figure out what the issues are second.

Cervical Cancer Improved Screening

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, in 2010, after a 12-year battle with cancer, I lost my mother. And I have to say that the hospital staff was

top-notch, and her doctor's actually a world—was a world-renowned doctor on cancer care.

I'm very proud of our government's record on investing in new, innovative health-care services and improving the health care for Manitoba. That's why I was excited to hear about the minister's health announcement today that invests in efficiencies and pays off in cancer 'provettion'—prevention and early diagnosis and treatment.

* (14:20)

The Leader of the Opposition doesn't have a plan for improving health care. In fact, his plan is to slash a half a billion dollars from the budget and jeopardize those very lives and very services that Manitobans need the most.

Can the Minister of Health please inform the House of what our NDP government is doing to improve cancer care for women and young Manitobans?

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

I don't know if Manitobans are aware that this week is Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, and today I was able to go and see the cytology lab. We have new liquid-based cytology that was launched this past year.

And as a cervical cancer survivor, I can tell you what this research really means in terms of the pain and suffering that it's going to save women as they sit and wait anxiously for results, because we get better results. I was part of that 6 per cent that had to get retested. We've got that down to 1 per cent now with this lab. There are hundreds, there are thousands of women who are going to be saved the grief of being retested only to find out they don't have cancer or are going to be saved the process of being retested because now we can get them accurate results faster and get them into the In Sixty program and get them care.

And we're also working in investing in prevention, because yesterday I was able to announce that we are expanding the HPV vaccination for boys at grade 6.

So we're investing in care. We're investing in preventing cancer, and we know that that—

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

Farmland School Tax Women's Eligibility

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture broke his promise to farm families by changing the rules and placing a cap on the farmland education tax rebate, and as a result of this rule changes, in addition to placing a cap on the actual rebate that farm families can get, these rules have disallowed many farm women landowners to be eligible from the program, and as a result they are not eligible for this rebate program.

So the question is: Why would the Minister of Agriculture selectively exclude farm women from a rebate program?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): It's truly my privilege to stand up and maybe relay the question and answer it later, but let me say this. Let's take the time to recognize the importance of agriculture in the province of Manitoba and show a round of applause for the hard-working farmers, the farm families in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the school land tax rebate, women who own farmland can certainly apply for the rebate. Spouses and corporations, farm families must also share in the rebate cap. Of 35,000 applications in the province of Manitoba, 1,000 are only impacted by the cap of \$5,000. That is a due diligence.

But let's not forget the scoreboard. When—

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

Rebate Cap

Mr. Pedersen: So with that answer that he was not willing to give at the start, he's now said that 1,000 farm families are being taxed unnecessarily by this government.

And it's in their greed and absolute—Manitobans are tired of the same NDP broken promises. They promised to extend this program. Instead, they introduced a cap. They've excluded farm women landowners.

There is no appeal process, because there are farm families out there who have faced illness, who have faced death, and they have missed that deadline, and this Minister of Agriculture has said no appeals, no chance of getting their rebate.

Why is this Minister of Agriculture so determined to take tax money from rural Manitoba farmland owners?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess the 1,000 applicants were meeting the criteria or not meeting the criteria, but you know what? When they were in power, there was 30,000 applications that were not even considered by the members opposite, so I question them, where was their sincerity to help out farm families when they existed?

I stand here on this side of the House very proud of the NDP government that we work for the betterment of farm families in supporting local family efforts and opportunities of developing the rural economic development in the future—not only today but into the future—because we are committed to work with farm families, not what the Conservatives are choosing to do: cut out \$550 million and the school taxes and the opportunity of keeping schools—country schools in existence when they choose to cut out education in the future.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has elapsed.

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for petitions.

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting

pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by R. Jones, M. Kuik, D. Joycey and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

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

Proposed Lac du Bonnet Marina— Request for Research into Benefits and Costs

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Lac du Bonnet is a recreational area with great natural beauty.

(2) The Winnipeg River is one of the greatest distinguishing cultural and recreational resources in that area.

(3) Manitoba marinas increase recreational access and increase the desirability of properties in their host communities.

(4) The people of Lac du Bonnet overwhelmingly support a public harbourfront marina in Lac du Bonnet.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider collaborating with other levels of government to research the economic benefits and construction costs of a marina in Lac du Bonnet.

This petition is signed by M. Hiysio, G. Short, B. Lesko and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route— Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by S. Miller, D. Carruthers, S. Neves and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes petitions. We will now move on to grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll call orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank the House for allowing for this morning's leave for no quorum. I appreciate the co-operation of all the House in all these matters and it fits in with our

movement towards efficient and more effectively dealing with people's business.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

* (14:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors.

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

Floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I was just hoping that—I have answers from the last time we met in Estimates and I was hoping that I could have leave to read those answers into the record before we proceed to questions.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Is that agreed to have leave? *[Agreed]*

Please proceed, Honourable Minister.

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to take the opportunity at the start, as I said, to read into the record some of the answers to some of the opposition's questions that were posed when we were last in the Committee of Supply this spring. And I will read the questions and then the brief—and then a brief response.

The first question that I have an answer to from members opposite was a question of: Did the Souris Personal Care Home re-open their held beds on May 2014 or May 2015? And I can assure members that the regional health authority confirmed that those beds were open as of May 2014.

Second question that I have for members opposite related to the question was for unannounced reviews: How is the facility, in this case a personal care home, not aware of unannounced reviews? I can assure members that in terms of the answer that the

idea is that we brought in the PCH standards in 2005, put them into law, something that the Auditor General calls a significant achievement, and that with that, that means that each and every PCH is visited every two years to be inspected against standards that include infection control involving residents and family within care, restraint use and ensuring a safe and secure resident environment.

We also introduced unannounced inspections in 2004 and have since increased the frequency of these visits. Should a facility not meet a standard, they are required to develop an action plan within 60 days and implement it within another 60 days. At any point during this time, Manitoba Health may perform an unannounced visit to check up on that facility. And, by the very nature of unannounced reviews, they are unannounced to the PCH facility. It is a surprise review for the PCH; however, not for the region itself, though. The facility name, date and time of the unannounced review is known to the regional representative who must join the departmental personal care home standards consultants in doing the actual unannounced review. And it is in working with the regional health authorities that the unannounced nature of these reviews is stressed, with the expectation that the date, time and personal-care home for the unannounced review is kept in confidence at the regional program level and is not shared with the facility leadership.

We also had some questions that related—from opposition members—that related to the Prairie Mountain Health and, again, I will provide the answers to those particular questions. Questions that we got related to Prairie Mountain Health began with, what is the current situation with the leaking roof at the Minnedosa Personal Care Home and has the roof been completely repaired. To date, I can say that the roof has been patched as required. The site review with a consultant was completed on Tuesday, September 1st of this year, and the region expects that the roof repair will be completed by the end of this year.

A subsequent question from members opposite related to Prairie Mountain Health was, what occurred in relation to a resident at the Minnedosa Personal Care Home who was—and I, there's a quote here—without heat in their room through most of last winter. I can answer by saying that the comfort and safety of residents in all of our personal-care homes is a top priority, and I do thank the member for

raising the question. I understand that a baseboard heater malfunctioned in one resident room at the Minnedosa Personal Care Home, but that it was repaired within 24 hours, and the supervisor has indicated that it is standard practice to ensure that temporary heat is available in such an instance.

A subsequent question, believe from the same member, was the—was an inquiry as to the current state of—oh, pardon me, no, it must have been a different member—the current state of vacant positions and closed beds at the Virden personal-care home. In response to that question, I can say that I understand that the Westman personal-care home hired nine new health-care aides on June 8th, and they have been admitting throughout the summer. There currently are no beds which are closed or on hold, and as of earlier this month there were four vacant beds due to lack of applicable clients.

There was a subsequent question that asked a question regarding the Souris Personal Care Home, same question in terms of vacant position and closed beds, and as I'd indicated previously, the Souris Personal Care Home reopened their held beds in May 2014 and as of earlier this month they had some empty beds. But, again, no one on the waitlist for that particular personal care home.

There was an additional question regarding how many beds are currently closed in Prairie Mountain Health due to staffing shortages. I'm pleased to say that there are no beds closed in Prairie Mountain Health due to staffing challenges.

The member opposite made reference to comments about a statement that the majority of postings are for part-time nurses mentioned in relation to Virden, Melita and Minnedosa, and a question that asked had there been nurses seeking full time that could not get it. The Westman personal care home in Virden recently posted for and hired a 1.0 registered nurse position. The region reports that they have not been informed of nurses seeking full-time work that cannot get it and, in fact, often find the opposite: that many nurses don't want full-time work and, in fact, would prefer a lower equivalent full time and EFT that allows them the freedom to pick up additional shifts when they desire.

Where more nursing staff are required the region does work closely with the nurses to try to find them a position as close as possible to their desired number of hours, and it may be that some nurses are not finding the EFT they want in the exact community facility or unit that they would prefer.

There's a further question asking if I was aware of any nurse practitioner approaching Prairie Mountain Health for a job, but there were no openings, and according the member's question, this would have been some time prior to June 2015, the member was enquiring if there are vacant nurse-practitioner jobs at this time and how long have they been vacant. I can say that since last October, Prairie Mountain Health has had nurse-practitioner vacancies in Swan River, Ste. Rose and term positions in Erikson and Birtle. The Birtle position was filled in May. The position in Minnedosa was being filled as of early October with a nurse practitioner being offered the position at that time. As of June 1st, there was also a vacancy in Rosburn, which has been posted and remains vacant as of early October.

* (14:50)

The prairie mountain regional—Prairie Mountain Health region has also had a posting up for the mobile bus since July with a qualified applicant coming in from the United States. The region is working with Service Canada to bring this applicant to Manitoba. And if a potential employee accessed the website, they would have seen these postings.

The manager currently in the position has confirmed that she has never had an NP apply for a job where there were no positions available. Prairie Mountain Health reports also that the executive management team has always been very supportive of advancing primary care and advocating and supporting nurse practitioner recruitment in order to better address primary-care-services needs in their communities.

There was also a question from member opposite regarding the current status on doctors in the town of Melita. There is currently a part-time physician who provides acute, long-term care and ER services as well as primary-care services. Another physician provides primary-care services three days per week, and there is also a physician assistant providing primary-care services three days per week.

Prairie Mountain Health is also currently supporting a nurse practitioner from the area in completing her course of training through a return-of-service agreement.

There were also questions regarding the funding to the regional health authorities for the 3.6 hours of care and how 3.6 hours of care is calculated in relationship to personal-care-home residents. And, as

mentioned earlier, the safety of personal-care-home residents remains a top priority for this government and will continue to be so. The hours-per-resident-day requirement that the member refers to is calculated based on paid hours for the staffing categories per number of personal-care-home residents.

There was a subsequent question asking facilities doing—are facilities doing standards only for the review or are they doing them all the time? The expectation of the department is that all facilities should be able to meet all of the standards every day so that if an unannounced review is conducted, the measures assessed will be met.

There was an additional question regarding if the department is reporting standard review results. The standard review reports are provided to the region and to the individual facility. In the past, high-level summarized results were also released through FIPPA requests, and as of last month, we chose to make this information more readily available for members of the public by posting standard review results going back to 2014.

And there was one final question that asked how many panelled individuals in Prairie Mountain Health are waiting in hospital for a PCH bed. And as of July 31st, 2015, there were 42 people on a personal-care-home wait-list through the Prairie Mountain Health region.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): I thank the minister for that.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): On June the 8th of this year at these Estimates, I asked the minister about the collaborative emergency pilot project for the Vita hospital. The response I got back from the minister was, I know that the feedback that I've gotten from folks in the community is definitely an eagerness to put this together, so, for me, it's a case of how it is that we make it happen and how it is that we make it happen in a way that will best suit the needs of the Vita community. The minister also promised to facilitate a meeting between the RHA, herself and stakeholders.

Well, it's now going on five months since I asked this question and the minister made the promise to have a meeting. I'm just wondering how that's going because is this standard procedure for the minister to take five months to set up even a small

meeting or even get back to me with what she may be doing. I've heard nothing from the minister.

The ER at the Vita hospital has been closed for over three years with three Health ministers. Every one of those ministers made a promise to either have it open shortly or to set up a pilot project for the collaborative emergency pilot project, but yet three years and nothing has happened.

I mean, does the minister at all care about the people in southeastern Manitoba, or is that just what her standard is, to make people wait that long to have things happen?

Madam Minister, if you're looking there's—summit was on June the 8th, and I believe the minister's answer might have been on June the 9th where she might have even said get 'er done, like she was very enthused about getting this going immediately. And five months as far as I'm concerned and as far as the people of southeastern Manitoba are concerned, is way too much time for something as important as their health care.

Ms. Blady: I appreciate the diligence with which the member has followed through on looking through Hansards and keeping track of these things, and I can assure him that him that we have, again, conveyed to the community and himself that, again, we would like to test the collaborative emergency care model in Vita. The discussions are still under way on how to best staff and formalize this model of care in Vita, appreciating that it would be the first such site in Manitoba.

And we have been clear with the Southern Health region and the department that any proposal for a collaborative emergency care centre in Vita must not take financial resources from physician remuneration funding—meaning that, again, we are going to work on this model so long as it means that a physician recruitment in this area is, you know, doesn't mean that it's going to be impacted or that it could possibly cease. We want to ensure that we are still working on physician recruitment.

So there is work going on and there is, again, discussion happening, and it is one of those things that in terms of the work that is being done within the area we know that the region continues to work on physician recruitment, and we have not removed the funding for the emergency room coverage in Vita. The money for staffing is still on the table. And, again, I can assure folks in that area that the Vita health centre is still offering clinical and

hospital support, and that when staffing levels do shift, the region must ensure patient safety and adjust the services accordingly. And, again, what we will do is I will make sure that, again, in light of the comments made, that we will have a meeting set up. I will task my staff to do that right here and now to ensure that a meeting happens and that the member will be advised of the date of the meeting.

Mr. Smook: Do you have any copies of correspondence that you sent out, say, to whoever it is you say you sent it, to the local community, whether it be the RM or whatever? If you have sent correspondence, I would like, since that June 8th date, would you provide me with copies of it, please. And the meeting is the most important thing, because it's not only the ER because the ER has been closed for such a long time. You were very much in favour of getting this collaborative pilot project done and you made comments that made it lead to believe that you were working on it and would get it done immediately. But you haven't even been able to set up a meeting, and could you set some guidelines and timelines as to when this meeting will happen?

Ms. Blady: I thank the member for his, again, passion for his community on this. And, yes, I do have an interest in resolving this because I do think that what we are providing to that community with the—presently the 2.5 EFT physician positions serving the community and providing that primary care Monday to Friday and the medical supervision for the in-patients at the Vita district health centre is crucial, but that, again, we can always do more. I know that there have been ongoing conversations, that there are always ongoing conversations between the department and the region as to correspondence that relates to this. I know much has come out of meetings. So I can say that what we will do is we will endeavour to get a meeting actually before the end of this month, if possible, but we, you know, again, within the immediate future.

* (15:00)

Mr. Smook: I'd just like to make the comment that I've heard all these comments before, and I just want to make sure that something is done this time because we're talking about the—an emergency room and an ambulance service, because where it is in southeastern Manitoba, the distances to travel are great. And, when somebody has a heart attack that's 30 minutes outside of Vita and they got to get him to Steinbach, that's half an hour for the ambulance to get there and then an hour to get back to where it

should be. That is too long. And the minister has made promises that she is not keeping. And I want to put this on record that she knows about this because if something happens to somebody in that community, I will personally hold her responsible for it.

Ms. Blady: Again, I appreciate the members concern for his community and that, again, when we have things like the, again, the clinical hours and depending on the level of care required, we know that non-emergent walk-in patients to facilities under nurse managed care are triaged, we know that we have the 2.5 doctors there, we've got a variety of things in place, but I know that, again, you want more for this community and we will continue to work with the community

I'm also proud of the work that we have been doing in terms of supporting those emergency facilities, our emergency providers, that 52 additional ambulances and the quality of those ambulances will also help support folks. But, again, what's most important is getting that care close to home. So I appreciate the question.

Mr. Smook: How many more advance-care paramedics do you have in the southern RHA or any place in rural Manitoba and what is the answer to getting more of them?

Ms. Blady: Just checking with my deputy. We don't have the exact numbers at hand, but when I—one thing I can say is that we do have a new program at Red River community college that is a class of 16 advanced-care paramedics and it is with the goal of doing exactly that, getting more advanced-care paramedics into the rural areas.

And so that is a program that I'm quite happy to see and I really want to thank my colleague the Minister for Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum) for helping work on that project because it's something that, again, in working with the paramedics in our province, we have some phenomenal folks there, and the ability to get more advanced-care paramedics, it is really about how we can best use those resources. I know they are eager to be out on the ground and doing that work and I am eager to have them there.

Mr. Smook: The last numbers I got from the minister was, there was one extended, advanced-care paramedic in southern RHA and four in Interlake eastern. With one paramedic it's pretty hard to start a program. So I'd like to know what the minister is—there more on the way to southern RHA?

Ms. Blady: Because it has been several months since we have met last, I will endeavour to get the most accurate information on the most recent numbers from both regional health authorities.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): The minister still hasn't gotten back to me on one of the questions I had asked her in Estimates and she had actually committed to putting it in writing and sending it forth in writing, but I would ask her again which of the Winnipeg ERs have fast-track streams and how are those actually structured?

Ms. Blady: Yes, I'd like to thank the member for the question, and I do apologize for the fact that we haven't got that answer to you in writing. It was my understanding that it would have been there within this time, so I have tasked my staff to see if we can get it for today and, if not, for tomorrow. And, again, my apologies.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister just verbally give some indication of what these fast tracks look like and whether all of the Winnipeg ERs actually have fast tracks? I know it was recommended in the 2004 ER task force, and the minister has indicated that it had been implemented when she responded on June 2nd.

So I would ask her if she could just give a brief verbal description of how these fast-track streams are actually functioning, and if they are in every Winnipeg ER.

Ms. Blady: As the member noted, that in 2004 the Emergency Care Task Force did make 44 recommendations and that as a government we did commit to putting in the necessary funding, resources, and expertise in place to meet them all. And, as a result, you know, in having launched the emergency task care—Emergency Care Task Force to work with patients, front-line staff and hospitals, again, to develop a plan to improve emergency care in Winnipeg—and I can say that all the recommendations have been acted upon and all but one are fully implemented. And one of the long-term recommendations regarding the health information system project is the one that is still going on. That was having to do with phased in improvements to electronic hospital information that are allowing patient records to be shared within hospitals and long-term care facilities.

*(15:10)

In relation to the fast-tracking idea, one has to remember that the length of time that has happened

and events that have happened subsequent to this—we will endeavour to find those things that still fit within that definition, but what has happened is there has been much evolution. So, while the Emergency Care Task Force, in terms of the implemented recommendations included re-developing the emergency rooms, the emergency rooms at Health Sciences Centre, Seven Oaks, Concordia, Misericordia urgent care, St. Boniface and Victoria have been re-developed, and the same is going to be happening at the Grace Hospital emergency room.

But, again, these things have happened—the evolution of these things has happened over time, as well as subsequent events have occurred. So we know that, and I will be checking with the WRHA to see what things still fit into the definition of the fast-tracking process, what other new things have come in.

Again, for example, you know, the introduction of the reassessment nurses to the ERs to ensure that waiting patients are regularly reassessed and to communicate with patients and families was something that was very significant and that the WRHA was, in fact, the first jurisdiction to implement this role in Canada. And so all ERs do now, in fact, have reassessment nurses in place today. We have follow-up with patients who leave without being seen, via Health Links. And, again, we've also increased the geriatric program assessment team that conduct home assessments of discharged patients to help decrease the need for ER visits.

So it's about establishing these kinds of protocols. There's a variety of things that have been done that, again, since those original '04 recommendations and what would be defined as a fast track in the ER. I can get her a more specific thing as to—more specific information as to what things fit within that definition and what things have evolved differently, grown further and may no longer be defined as fast-tracked but may actually have supplemental supports and information.

Mrs. Driedger: Will the minister endeavour to approach the WRHA and have them also provide input into that document?

Ms. Blady: Yes, I will. In fact, that was the—going to be the source that I was going to go to to ensure that their definitions, what is being used, how each emergency room is set up, would be part of that. So, no, I will gladly work with the WRHA to get you that information.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how many acute-care beds are in the system? I note that it used to always be in the annual reports, and then at some point, under the NDP, it disappeared from the annual reports. So can the minister indicate how many acute-care beds there are in Manitoba?

Ms. Blady: Having one of those wonderful 21st-century moments wherein, having moved everything to electronic format, that we have got an answer, but it is meant much time with iPads rather than flipping through hard copies. And I think this is where my 20th-century roots show, in that I think I would feel much more comfortable flipping through a hard copy of an annual report myself.

But I can assure the member opposite that there are 3,949 acute-care beds. And that, again, having moved to electronic records—and also having changed the format of the annual report to focus on population health numbers, population health care, rather than a count of merely beds, knowing that health-care provision is not always provided within a bed, again, there's been a difference in format, including, as I said, its moving to an electronic form, which apparently makes things easier here in the Committee of Supply.

Mrs. Driedger: I would just make a comment to what the minister just said in terms of not carrying some of that information. It does take accountability away, though, because it disallows the public from knowing some of the key numbers in health care, you know, based on what the government chooses to actually provide. So, while I agree and support, you know, putting in the annual report more related to population health and then—and other aspects, it certainly doesn't cover off some of the questions that the public might have.

* (15:20)

One of the other questions I would have is the full-time, part-time ratio when it comes to nurses. I know that the NDP had made a commitment to increase more full-time nursing positions, and the last I had seen of that, they were struggling to keep that promise.

Can the minister indicate now where they are in reaching that promise, or have they totally given up on trying to reach that more—a higher percentage of full-time nurses in the system?

Ms. Blady: Again, we do have a growing number of nurses working within the system. And, in fact, it was actually quite nice yesterday morning to be able

to join this year's class of nurses coming through the nursing college at their pinning ceremony and knowing that there were, I believe, 129 new nurses that joined the profession yesterday.

So we did commit to hire 2,000 more nurses by 2015, including 1,000 to replace the anticipated retirements and the 1,000 new nurses to put more nurses on the front lines to care for patients and to increase the time that they can spend at the bedside. And what happened was we had—there was 1,731 retiring nurses that have been replaced, and 688 net new nurses have been added to registries for a total of 2,419 nurses added since 2011, again, not including yesterday's graduating class, obviously. The gains—and a few more that have come in from elsewhere.

The gains are attributed to expanding, again, more nursing opportunities and ongoing recruitment and retention initiatives to attract more nurses. The targeted recruitment funding has provided \$9 million to relocation cost assistance to 2,030 new nurses who have moved to Manitoba from out of province. And over 1,000 of these nurses have gone into the rural and northern Manitoba.

We do have part-time nurses. I believe the count as of December 14th we did have 6,571 part-time nurses and 4,993 full-time. Of course, again, those numbers, we know things have changed in that time. I am happy to say that, you know, at the end of 2014 we had more practising nurses in Manitoba than ever before with 17,806, which, again, is, you know, over 3,000—almost 3,000-plus, yes, higher than it was in 1999. I'm sorry; I'm trying to do the math here in my head. It was higher than the 14,092 when we came into office.

So we are continuing to work. I'm also very proud of the contract that we have worked out with the Manitoba Nurses Union because of what that does and how it does work on building a better system for nurses. And, again, it's one of those things where, you know, we had nurses voting over 90 per cent in favour of that new contract that—and a contract that demonstrates respect for them and the work that they do.

And so, again, it wasn't just about paying them more; it was about committing to, again, some of their concerns and about building a working relationship to fulfill those commitments. So, again, it was one of those things that I'm very proud of the working relationship we have. I'm very thankful for the work that our colleges do as well. And, again, in

terms of that contract, I think the part that I was the happiest in terms of their response was the fact that they said that, you know, again, back under a previous government in the '90s, that only one in five nurses in Manitoba would recommend their profession, and today four in five would recommend being a nurse in Manitoba. And I think that large graduating class that we saw yesterday of 129 students was testament to that.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what the ratio is or what the percentage is of part-time nurses to full-time nurses? I believe the promise that had been made by the NDP a number of years ago was something like moving towards 60 per cent full-time or in that vicinity.

Do you have that or does the province now have that percentage of nurses working full-time?

*(15:30)

Ms. Blady: Again, in looking at the increased numbers, and, again, discussions regarding the MNU contract, that is part of an ongoing project to get, again, more and more nurses working and working in environments that, and in positions that they want to have. In other words, making sure that there are full-time positions available for those that want them and part-time ones for those, again, that chose that.

It's part of a larger commitment to nursing optimization and it is the maximizing—the use of our professional nursing resources is really a key component in promoting and maintaining efficiency and effectiveness of the health services provincially.

And so in order to establish a process for health system improvements, it's been about a collaboration between employers and the department who are working, again, with the Manitoba Nurses Union and its members as part of a settlement that was ratified, again, back in April '14 through a memorandum of understanding entitled Collaborative Discussions to Optimize Patient Care. And it's over the term of the current collective agreements that this committee is focusing on efforts towards working collaboratively within the health system to achieve a variety of goals which does include the creation of a balance of full and part-time positions, improve quality of work-life balance through the implementation of the groups self-scheduling guidelines and the improved use of weekend staffing resources through broader implementation of the weekend worker.

So, again, in order to achieve these and other systems efficiencies and measures of success, there

is going to be some—there is data that has been reported and analyzed and, again, it's about raw EFT data that exists within our HR and scheduling and payroll software residing within each of the RHAs. And I've come to learn a little bit more of that recently that part of the data around that is also about distinguishing between the different types of nurses, and so whether things, for example, like payroll software and data is identifying whether someone is an LPN, an RN or an RPN. And so, again, work is being done to make the reporting definitions of full and part-time ones consistent among the regions as well as trying to find consistencies within these recordings.

So we are going to continue to work with the RHAs to, again, make sure that the definitions are consistent so then an accurate count can be given because it's from having that accurate count that, again, we can move forward. So it's about those provincial baseline measurements and metrics.

And, again, the idea of establishing what these are and the impact on shifting nursing EFTs towards, again, the more optimal level, and, again, concurrent with ongoing implementation of higher EFT positions, so we're doing those things to continue to build the nursing workforce.

And, again, it's part of larger capacity to just, again, not just get that count more accurate so that we can, again, based on that count, be able to move towards those goals of shifting from, you know, making sure that we have a higher percentage of full time over part-time positions if that is what nurses want, but it's also the idea of, again, consolidating and streamlining that data across the regions. We need to work with all of the different groups involved, whether it's the unions, the nursing groups, it's the management at the RHAs, even in terms of the ITC equipment that's involved to make sure that we're counting things the right way.

And when we start being able to do that I can say that that will actually help facilitate not just about creating more positions in that balanced way, but it's also going to be easier to share this information so that the kinds of questions that the member asks will actually be better available just online so that it will save asking—having to have those questions because what would happen—what is happening is on September 28th we announced that we were enhancing transparency by making more key health statistical information online, make it available online. It was part of the international

Right to Know Week and basically it's a case of, you know, we do believe that Manitobans deserve to have easy access to information about how the health-care system is performing and we are committed to sharing as much detail as possible.

And what it means is by making it available online it's accessible to everyone. And it's going to include emergency medical services response times for rural Manitoba, such as information on how long an ambulance may take to arrive after a 911 call is placed from the within a particular community; and other information that will be posted online as it becomes available through this kind of consolidation process; and ensuring that we are using similar definitions in terms of how we are counting these positions, will be everything from an archive of wait-time information for procedures such as hip and knee surgeries, and diagnostic tests such as MRI and CT scans; population counts including births and deaths; updates on how many people have been connected with a family doctor or a nurse practitioner through the Family Doctor Finder service; the number of visits that are made to our QuickCare clinics across the province; as well as the prevalence of chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes. It will also include the number of hospitalizations for injuries.

And, again, to the member's interest here, it will also indicate the numbers of physicians, nurses, and nurse practitioners that there are in the province. So the number of pediatric dental surgeries will also be included, the number of clients in home care, and the number of influenza immunizations, as well as data on pharmaceutical use.

So, again, we will get the details in this particular case soon, but I can assure the member that we are getting the information compiled so that there will be a time in the near future where the very question that she is asking will be available not just to her, but to other members of the public in an online format.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't think I got an answer, there, Mr. Chair, to my question, and considering we're talking about right to know, I find that kind of ironic.

I'm understanding from that answer, though, that the government has backed away from their promise to increase full-time positions by the date on which they gave it. Having said that, I would ask the minister, what is the nursing shortage today? How many nurses are we short in Manitoba as of today?

Ms. Blady: I know I did put a lot of information out there, but what I was trying to make clear to the member was the fact that, again, we do have numbers as of December 14. I was trying to get—to explain to her that we are also, as a part of this right to know, clarifying the numbers that we do have because as the numbers are currently counted there are discrepancies within different definitions between the RHAs. So, actually, in an endeavour to get her the best answers, and the clearest and most defined answers, it's about ensuring that we have consistency—that's what I was talking about—in data collection and in data management between the RHAs.

So it was about saying that while we do have a very raw-number list of full-time nurses being just shy of 5,000 and part-time being over 6,500 as of December 14th, we know that that—obviously, time has passed, but, also, again, in terms of the counts and what are full- and part-time definitions, those kinds of things, again, there is an ongoing commitment.

I mean, clearly, our commitment is evident in that if we look at the numbers, again, and especially those numbers as they are reported by the College of Registered Nurses, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses, and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, when we take a look at their numbers we can—it's clear that there is a commitment on our part to growing the complement of nurses, because every year from 1992 to 1999 their numbers indicated each year a drop in the nursing complement. Each year it went down and, interestingly enough, as of 2000 and every year afterwards there has been an increase.

And so, again, it's one of those things where, I believe, you know, the best year and, again, I'm trying to do the math here, but when the member opposite—when the best year her government has is a loss and our worst year was, again, of 11 nurses and that was factoring in a mass of retirements that occurred, again, I will put our worst year up against their best year any day. And that goes with working collaboratively with the nurses' union.

* (15:40)

So, yes, we do have over seventeen, close to 1,800 active practising nurses. Again, we do have a number—but, again, take a look at those numbers. If we have seventeen—over, well, again, close to 1,800 active practising nurses, we know that in terms of nursing positions and other things available that

number that we have is about 11,500. So there are other nurses in the province. This is about getting a clear set of numbers and those clear set of numbers once the data is analyzed will not just be available to the member opposite but will be available to all Manitobans. So we are clearly working with Manitoba nurses and all of the colleges within the nursing union, and, again, I look forward to being able to provide her with the clear numbers, but I know that, again, there's a lot of data analysis that will be involved because it is about working towards getting the numbers counted right, counted consistently across the province.

Mrs. Driedger: I wonder if I could get a clear set of numbers of what the nursing shortage is today. I think the last numbers we saw, it was over 1,800 nurses that Manitoba was short and that would have been an April number, I believe. I wonder if the minister could indicate an updated clear set of numbers.

Ms. Blady: We'll endeavour to get the, again, the exact numbers to the member on that, and, again, as I was saying, we're going through and we are looking at how these positions are counted.

One thing I can say is that since 2000 a total of 3,229 nurse positions and that includes RNs, RPNs and LPNs as well as nurse practitioners have been created across the province. And the number of filled nurse positions has increased by over 2,432 over the same period, which is an increase of 27 per cent. So, again, part of the increase in vacancies goes to the fact that we're actually increasing the number of positions available for nurses in the province, always looking to make sure that we have staffing options available throughout the province, and always looking forward to finding more nurses to fill those positions to better look after the communities that each of them choose to serve, whether they're communities that they're born and raised in or whether they choose to relocate to another part of the province.

It's about creating those opportunities, and that's why we have been increasing the nursing training seats, why we have been working with internationally educated nurses and doing a variety of different things to grow the nursing population. And so much of that goes not just to the relationship that, again, that we have with the union but also with a variety of colleges in terms of how is it that we best grow our complement of nurses here.

And I think, again, the growth in 3,229 nursing positions is a clear indicator of, again, our desire to have a strong nursing workforce, and always looking to have more nurses working here. I would much rather be in a situation of wanting to grow our nursing complement, growing our nursing complement and always needing maybe just one more, than having lineups of thousands of nurses looking for a job because they've all been handed pink slips, as has been done to many nurses in the past.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, just so that the minister isn't vague on how it works, her government handed out about 350 pink slips to nurses at—you know, from Morden-Winkler as Boundary Trails was formed and about 150 VON pink slips when they were changed. So, this government, even through the years, and I've been tracking some of that, have handed out hundreds and hundreds of pink slips too, so—that—just how the system works. So she may try to get political traction on it but I think she really needs to do a bit of homework here.

If we look at spending in health care, and it's certainly been raised as a concern across Canada in terms of sustainability of the funding levels that we have in Canada, I understand that the Department of Health here might have decided that they had some concerns around this issue too and have started to look at it a little bit more closely. Can the minister give us an update as to the initiatives that are under—being undertaken in the department to address these concerns about sustainability of health-care funding?

Ms. Blady: I always look forward to the opportunity to talk about what it is that's being done to ensure health-care sustainability.

The past couple of days have been excellent examples of that because today I was able to meet with the folks from DSM and they provided a wonderful example of exactly that kind of return on investment and creating a more sustainable system.

Having moved one year ago to liquid-based cytology, we now have a system for the early and more accurate and more timely diagnosis of cervical cancer. And what that means is that we have the opportunity there to reduce the number of unneeded retests down to 1 per cent of the 132,000 tests that are done every year. That's been, again, reduced.

* (15:50)

It's also been a case of—what was interesting was the DSM in taking direction from this government on

how to, you know, to seek out those places where they could do things better—took it upon themselves to find ways that they could better serve, not just those that they were working with in terms of who they could provide diagnosis back to, us the patients, but they were able to, through savings, actually be able to acquire the system that they do have now.

And we have a wonderful system that now, literally, on a space no larger than this table in front of me, is able to assess and provide slides of 48 patients at a time. It refines the process in terms of the accuracy, of the sample taken. And so there is one great example of how they were able to not only improve the accuracy, the wait time, which again gets women to care faster or maybe tells them that they don't need care, that they're healthy; they are good. So they get to find out that they're healthy that much faster or they get to get onto the In Sixty patient journey faster.

That—the savings there also are found in the fact that, again, there's fewer women having to return for retests. There are, again, the costs associated with the retest, the cost associated with visiting a family doctor. Think about how many family doctor visits would be cancelled or unnecessary now, rendered unnecessary with the accuracy of this testing, therefore allowing an extra space now for a family practitioner to see a patient because they're no longer seeing a patient about an anomalous test result and testing them a second time. It's those kinds of things that involve sustainability.

It's about providing—you can provide better care and you can provide more comprehensive care. The cancer patient journey is another example of that, one of the things that we've learned over the past five years, and it's been so exciting, talking to the folks that put together and ran the model of the cancer patient journey for us and the learnings that we have from that, learnings that I look forward to applying to other places in the health-care system where, in providing better, more streamlined care, by providing navigators, they were actually able to find efficiency, to find ways of streamlining the system that made it much more cost effective, but also provided a higher quality of care. And so it's been in everything from those aspects of, again, the, whether it's the testing that's been provided for folks, how that fits into the continuity of care within the in cancer patient, the In Sixty cancer patient journey.

And one of the other things that was also remarkable was when we think about the amount of

money that is saved and that creates sustainability in the system through vaccinations. So now the fact that we are going to be vaccinating boys—that was actually another example of cost effectiveness, the what is best practice for vaccines for the HPV, the human papillomavirus, we've been able to change from a three-dose to a two-dose system. In seeing that we were going to be saving money on only having to provide two doses now for girls in grade 6, we took up the opportunity to then go ahead and purchase vaccines for the boys because effectively what's happening is the amount of money that we would have spent on three doses for the girls now covers the two doses needed for the girls, one dose for the boys, and only a little bit more needed to be spent. So there was an example of science technology evidence-based and best-practice-based decision making where efficiencies were found.

And, again, what's most important about those vaccines is what they're going to save us in terms of, well, everything from I would say most importantly over any kind of dollar value, is peace of mind and a healthier population base. We do have to take a sort of a larger perspective on population, health population because now we are going to have generations of kids from a particular age group on, certain cohorts, and we've seen this happen in other jurisdictions where not only is the incidents of cancer dropped and almost negated, but it's also other related infections associated with HPV have been eliminated—there's a huge cost savings there. So it's about in making those investments up front, that's where health sustainability comes in.

That's why we're encouraging folks this year and every year to get the flu vaccine. The fact that we've got a quadrivalent vaccine this year, the fact that it is now available in a nasal spray for kids aged—for the younger kids, the—I believe it's the two-to-17 range. That means that the more folks that get that vaccine and the easier it is for parents to maybe take that needle-shy toddler or elementary school student to the pharmacy, the GP, to a flu clinic to get their flu vaccine now not—no longer through a needle, but through nasal spray, means that we are going to have more folks that are protected, and not only do they protect themselves, but we all know that through herd immunity, that getting a vaccine is not necessarily just about protecting yourself; it's about protecting those around you that may be immunocompromised, and as a cancer survivor I can tell you how important it is for having everyone around you to be vaccinated when you're immuno-

compromised. There are others that face that challenge as well.

So a flu vaccine, getting a flu vaccine not just saves you the grief of having a flu, but it saves you the grief that might go with being away from work, the economic loss that you might face, the loss that we face to the entire system, but from a health sustainability system means that we can hopefully have fewer folks visiting emergency rooms, QuickCare clinics and their doctor's office. That's about sustainability.

So, yes, we've got a variety of things going on related to health-care sustainability, and those are just a few tangible aspects. It's about making up-front investments and, again, those investments matter, not just from a dollar perspective, but I think what matters most is the quality of care that they provide to people and the quality of life. I have actually had, and it's an odd thing to say, but I actually got a message from a friend who thanked me for the fact that as a result of this she knows that her children will now—her sons and her daughters—will not face things like genital wart cervical cancer, penile cancer, that I've protected her kids from that. As a result, there's cost savings there, but, more importantly, there's a quality of life savings.

So, again, these are the kinds of things that we're all working on and that we are working together with the DSM. We are also working with the doctors through the Choosing Wisely program. The Choosing Wisely Manitoba is a phenomenal program that—and direction, and I really want to thank the DSM for what they have done. I was able to meet with them recently and discuss with them the work that they've done with physician engagement, because it's about making sure that our doctors do make the right call for diagnostic testing, that we are using our diagnostic resources most effectively. So I can say that health sustainability is about making wise investments.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, one of the wise investments, and it was certainly pointed out at various times today, would be the investment of a dedicated stroke unit. I mean, the minister was just talking about some of that in one hand and ignoring the dedicated stroke unit on the other hand. So she's a bit out of touch here and putting forward a lot of rhetoric without, perhaps, understanding all the things that can be done.

Now, I understand that there have been a couple of committees set up by the Department of Health

and I understand that the deputy might have something to do with that and these committees have been struck because there is a concern about the sustainability of health-care funding.

Can the minister indicate what the mandate of those committees are and whether there's one or two or three committees, and what is the mandate of these committees in terms of saving money or looking for cuts, or what is it that is the expectation of these committees that have recently been struck by the Department of Health?

Ms. Blady: Yes, again, wise investments are important and the committees that the member opposite references have been established and in—for a variety of reasons, and it's really been about not any kind of crisis concern over this health-care sustainability, but, in fact, about collaborative engagement and people knowing that if they get together, if they communicate and they build relationships they can do things better. So it's about being committed. So that is why, for example, having used the example before, mentioned the idea of the mandates that we have with both the doctors and the nurses.

* (16:00)

It was about committing to work together to find additional ways of making the system sustainable but making the system sustainable because it's the best way of doing things and because they were looking for best practices and knowing that best practices were ways of, again, for example, through Choosing Wisely, ensuring that appropriate tests are being done as determined by the medical professionals and the professionals involved in analyzing those things.

We have also encouraged and seen phenomenal results in terms of lean initiatives which is government wide and health system wide and, again, have had the opportunity to talk to folks, whether it's been at-out in Selkirk about the results that they've seen out there. There are wonderful learnings there from the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. We've also had a variety of programs that have won health initiative awards for the work that they've done because it's been about how is it that we empower folks on the front lines to make the best choices possible. How is it that we transform the system, and how is it that we keep working together? And health-care sustainability goes from everything from, again, working with nurses and front-line folks about how they might organize everything from a storage cupboard to be able to best access resources, therefore making

their workday earlier and what that does for the system. And it allows them time to actually be front-line providers more. It gives them more hours in their day to do that.

We also have things that are higher level things like the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) Health Care Innovation Working Group and the work that is being done there in terms of pharmaceuticals. Again, what we've had happen with that group has been a national approach to procuring drugs. There's a phenomenal savings of money that occurs there when we are able to purchase together, especially as a province with a smaller population base. I mean, when you think about the fact that our population base isn't even a quarter of what it—of the population demographic of the GTA, that, again, for us to be able to work with our other provincial colleagues and to be able to, through the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, again, now we've got Quebec involved with that. The idea of us being able to bulk purchase, it's always about how we can do things better for Manitobans. So it's really about getting the most bang for our buck, and I can say that we're doing that, and the kinds of things that I talked about earlier are great examples of that.

I can also say, as well, that when we have these kinds of groups and when we do work with folks—the member likes to think that I'm dismissive of a particular endeavour that she talked about today, but I've already spoken to the members of the, again, of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and we did talk about, you know, there's a—there's clearly a difference between what an opposition can promise and what a government can deliver, and they know that what we can deliver to them, we're willing to work with them on.

And so that there is a relationship there that we have with them, that we will continue to have with them, that we have had with them for a long time. She doesn't have to like that relationship. She doesn't have to agree with it. But I will continue to work with the folks from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. I will continue to take their advice, and we will see which direction that moves in because we do have a lot of shared goals with them. And I just want to make sure, like with these other investments that I mentioned earlier, that we are doing them right, we're doing them in the best way for Manitobans and that we are doing them in a way that not only ensures that we get the best services for Manitobans, but that we are doing it in a cost-effective way. And so I am

working with them to see how it is that we move forward to next steps.

I can also add that we do have the information on the fast track that I can add, just was able to receive this from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. And the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority emergency program advises that the streaming of patients occurs at Concordia, Grace, the Health Sciences Centre adult, Seven Oaks Hospital, Victoria and Misericordia hospitals, and in general, patients are assessed based on their Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale, their CTAS, and the MTA criteria. The high-acuity patients are assigned to the main emergency department, and the lower acuity patients are assigned to the minor treatment area. The Health Sciences adults minor treatment area operates 24-7, while the other emergency departments' minor treatment areas operate during peak emergency visit hours—emergency department visit hours.

When fast-track or minor-treatment-area dedicated services are available, we find that the length of stay is positively impacted for this patient group as well as impacting the larger patient population within the emergency department. And, of course, we know that this impact is dependent on numerous factors including patient volumes, admitted patients and site activity related to patient acuity at any given period.

So, as I said, I would get that answer to the member today or tomorrow, and I would like to thank those folks at the RHA that were able to ensure that they got that answer to us today for her previous question.

Mrs. Driedger: The committees that have been struck to look at sustainability in the system, can the minister tell us how many times they've met?

Ms. Blady: In relationship to the member's question that she's asking about the exact meeting dates related to health-systems sustainability, I can assure her that when we think about—I'm not sure which particular group she's looking at because I do know that, for example, the DSM and physicians meet on a regular basis. I know that we are involved with, again, for example, the Health Care Innovation Working Group was established, you know, again, by the premiers in 2012, and there's, you know, regular meetings that occur on their part, and that has everything to do with the pan-Canadian pricing alliance.

So we have ongoing meetings that occur, again, within the premiers'-I guess, at the health-care innovation group. We have meetings that are occurring on an ongoing basis in terms of those—the work that is done with Doctors Manitoba, the doctors that—work that is done with the Manitoba Nurses Union. Again, I know that my deputy meets, and I meet, with the RHA chairs and CEOs on a regular basis. And so there—it's not about their—there's only one or two tables at which this is discussed. This is something that is an ongoing series of discussions around a variety of tables and around every table on an ongoing basis. Committees are struck for a variety of reasons, and we try to get certain players at the table on a variety of issues. But to suggest that there is only one or two groups for whom there are meetings that occur and for whom that a small list of meetings could possibly be put together doesn't capture the sense of just how much this is being discussed around a variety of tables.

So maybe if she would like to clarify, is there a particular table that she's looking at? Because I can tell her that, literally, on a daily basis, somebody, somewhere is having a meeting where they're factoring into the equation how is it that they can make better choices, whether it's, again, through Choosing Wisely, whether it's through lean initiatives, whether it's through the regular meetings that occur relating to the pan-Canadian pharmaceutical initiatives, those kinds of things.

So I know that there are—there's constantly meetings going, so if she can maybe clarify as to—there's a particular table that she would like more information on, because I know we have a variety of tables where health-care sustainability is crucial. In fact, yesterday, the regional health authorities had an education and subcommittee meeting where I know that that was part of the conversation that they were looking at: How is that in—that they can, again, better provide health-care services, both in terms of quality but also, again, in terms of ensuring that that quality health-care delivery is provided in a sustainable—a long-term sustainable way.

*(16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: Are any of these committees looking at length of stay in the WRHA acute-care hospitals? And can the minister tell us if the length of stay in those hospitals is still the highest in Canada? I know a few years ago, it was climbing, and I understand that our length of stay was considered one of the highest in Canada, which

certainly points to inefficiencies, also points to increase possibility of infection and creates some serious challenges in the health-care system.

So two things: Can the minister tell us what the WRHA length of stay is in this past fiscal year—the average length of stay, and if any of these committees are addressing how to handle that issue?

Ms. Blady: Again to earlier comments, in regards to the question put forward by the member opposite, there seems to be broad reference to these committees and committees as to which—you know, is the committee looking at this or what—can it—does a committee have an answer, I guess I would just like some clarification as to which committees she might think have these answers, because, again, there are a variety of committees that meet throughout the entire health system.

So, to be able to provide an answer, I need greater clarity in her questions as, again, there are a variety of people that meet around a variety of tables as it relates to providing the best care for Manitobans and where conversations around health-care sustainability are part of their—again, their goals, their larger direction, and in—again, the idea of sustainability in the health-care system is one that is important, because, again, providing good quality care is what we're shooting for. It's what we all want, but you need to be able to do it over the long term.

So, again, if she could clarify which particular committee or table she thinks has that information.

In regards to length of stay, you know, I guess while the RHAs will have work and records regarding length of stay, I always look at it through the filter of the patient. And so I want to make sure that when a patient is in a hospital bed, that it's about what length of time is it that they best need to be there for the purpose of their best care and their best recovery.

And, again, what are our best practices in general for particular recovery times, what are the—you know, what is considered a reasonable window, but at the same time, knowing that each patient is different? And so, while one person might, you know, be good to go within the, you know, the standard or the benchmark time, that somebody else might require longer because they have more complex medical needs.

So, you know—and I think to my own times in hospital. I think to my time at the Grace back when it had a maternity ward, and when my first child was

born there, I know that my time in that emergency ward, because I was a young 25-year-old that was quite healthy—emergency ward meaning maternity ward—when I was there, my turnaround time was quite low. I was, again, out in benchmark time, and that was, you know, one of those things that, again, it had to do with my particular situation. I knew other women down the hall that did—had much more complex health needs, and so the length of time that they spent in hospital was different, because they had more complex deliveries, they had more complex personal health-care needs.

So it is really about that. Again, I think of my time as someone recovering from cancer. Again, it was the same thing. I know that, when I was on an oncology ward, my recovery time was different than every other patient in that ward because we all had a different diagnosis, we all had a different treatment, and we all had individual complexities within our particular case. And so I do find it a little concerning when length of stay is associated with cost-savings, because, to me, I would rather have someone, you know, spend that extra time that they need getting the primary care—getting the care that they need in a hospital, being looked after during their recovery time than sending them home too early and having them present later, you know, through emergency, and having to be back a second time.

So, again, when I—we speak of health care efficiencies, I get a little concerned when a length of stay is conflated within that. I would much rather work with our professionals through Doctors Manitoba. And, again, the commitments from them to work—to enhance the sustainably—sustainability of the health-care system; again, through the partnership there; again, the same thing with the nurses. It is about those things, regarding how is it that we do the work. And I want to make sure that if somebody is in a bed, it's because they're there for the length of time that they need to be there to recover.

And, again, in terms of sustainability, I know one of the—you know, just to go back to some very high level big things, you know, when we came into government in 1999, we inherited 13 health regions, and we've reduced that down to five and redirected the administrative savings into supporting front-line care. I think that's an excellent example of health-care sustainability. We've eliminated more than 100 board and executive positions and saved over \$50 million through these mergers, so there's money

that, again, was better redirected and better spent on patients.

And it is those regional health authorities, hospitals, and personal-care homes are again, are now required to report, annually, their expenses of their most senior executives to the public. And, again, there was a time when we had among the highest hospital administration costs in the country, but now we are among the lowest. The WRHA is actually below the legislated 2.99 per cent corporate spending cap; it's at 2.54 per cent. So, again, Manitoba ranks below the national average for administrative costs in all five years from '07-08 to 2011-12, in terms of CIHI report from 2013. So, again, we've identified over \$50 million in savings that we're reinvesting into front-line care, which includes things like productivity initiatives in the health region, health region mergers, and, again, as I've said before, the better pricing on generic drugs.

And what I find refreshing is when other folks see those things and they point at—they recognize it, and, when he was the president and the CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba, the now-MP Jim Carr said, you know, he said this in the Free Press back in April 2013: "We're seeing a continuing improvement on controlling cost escalation in the health department."

So, again, we are working on a variety of things across the system to, you know, ensure that health sustainability is there. And, again, it is one of those things where it is a sharp contrast to, again, the cut in the number of medical school spaces. I don't think by cutting the number of doctors you have you improve sustainability of the system. I don't think that when you cancel all of the new health-care related construction while creating 13 regional health authorities that there were any savings there that were put into front-line care. I don't think that does anything for the sustainability of the system. That is what we inherited, but I'm proud to say that, again, through the things that I've mentioned, that we actually found savings from those choices in the past. We found a way of picking up that mess and moving forward.

And so, again, we're always willing to work with folks. We're always working to do things better. We will never pretend to be perfect. We will always say that we're working hard and that we do things from the right place. We come from the right place. And we run things through the filter of what it is that we want for our loved ones and for our families.

And I know that what I want from a length-of-stay perspective for my family members is to stay in hospital, receiving the care of highly trained medical professionals for as long as they need to recover from whatever it is that might have placed them in hospital.

*(16:20)

Mrs. Driedger: It's the same as every province wants, that's why, certainly, when people look at length of stay they look at average, because some people have to stay in hospital longer and some stay in hospital not so long. But I guess this is why FIPPA was created, was to get direct answers through freedom of information, so I will continue the process through FIPPA.

But it is an issue that is raised by, you know, the World Health Organization or health-quality councils that do have some concern about length of stay and the increased opportunity there is for patients to become infected. With hospital infection rates the way they are now with superbugs, that the longer you are in hospital the greater exposure you have to various infections. So that is certainly a part of looking at, you know, length of stay.

But also all provinces certainly look at giving the best care, but also in the shortest period of time. Manitoba has been way above the average of other provinces and Manitoba has been criticized for their, you know, their inability to change those numbers. And perhaps there are some valid reasons why our length of stay might be higher and she obviously doesn't know what it is. So I will go the FIPPA route and get the answer from the WRHA through FIPPA.

The minister just mentioned something about the flu shot and flu spray, and I wonder if the minister could indicate whether Manitoba will be providing the flu spray for children and when that might happen if we are going to be doing it.

Ms. Blady: Yes, I will begin, actually, with the member's last question that, in fact, last week on Friday we announced that we would be providing it and there is a news release available through the government website indicating that the flu with—the quadrivalent—so it's the same vaccine that is being provided to adults, but it is being provided to children in the nasal-mist form.

Again, in terms of other information regarding performance and, you know, the member opposite mentioned length of stay and what those criteria would be and why is it that we have higher numbers.

When I think of the social determinants of health, I think of its—it may very well be grounded in the demographics we have.

When we think about the social determinants of health and the implications that has for long-term health and well-being and what that means for hospital stays, those with more complex medical needs will tend to spend longer time in hospital for identical procedures.

So we can look at the fact that we do have, you know, a large percentage of our population or a significant part of our Manitoba population that are resident on First Nation reserves where they have substandard housing conditions and are—often live under boil-water orders. So when they're under a system when there has been in the past—and I do hope it changes now that we have had changes this week, we will see how they, the new government, lives up to its fiduciary responsibilities and lives up to the honour of the Crown in looking after its First Peoples—because when you have a significant chunk of your population that is operating at a disadvantage it means that they have higher health needs. They—there will be a higher utilization of hospitals and that when there is stay in hospital their time in hospital might actually be longer than someone not facing the similar social 'determinant'—similar challenges under the social determinants of health. And so, again, you could have two people facing identical surgical treatments, for example, and one might require a longer time in hospital. So I think there's a lot that can be learned.

I always appreciate the work that comes out of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy because oftentimes they illuminate exactly that kind of thing.

So, again, I think it's a case of looking at what is unique about our population, what is it that's different from other provinces and wanting to make sure that we do what's best for Manitobans.

And, again, in terms of those—the idea of finding savings within the system, I mentioned before that the Lean Six Sigma projects and Lean trainees are a vital part of that. I talked about how that is—I gave some examples of some places where we've seen efficiencies there and found employees that we've empowered people to find ways of not just making the system better, but, again, savings reinvested. And what we've been able to find is that we have found those, again, those savings reinvested in the following areas—everything from staff time available, patient wait days saved, bed days reduced, increased

patient through-put, supply savings, space savings, financial resources redeployable, reduced operational costs, staff safety occurrences reduced, staff labour dollars reallocated and processing days reduced.

So, yes, the bed days are implicated in there, and we hope that that means that people are getting, again, still the best care, but you can see that it's not the only thing. And, again, it always has to be looked at in the context of what is best for the patients.

And, again, what's been interesting is that we've had a five-year training and mentoring strategy that began in the 2010-2011 year, and it was again aimed at looking at these things and the quality improvement training within the RHAs and, again, with health-system-stakeholder agencies. And what's interesting is that when we took a look at the total savings, for Manitoba Health within the Lean Six Sigma strategies projects that was, as of August 1st of this year, there was a savings of over \$21 million, and these savings were predominantly on non-extractable savings, again resulting in improved patient through-put, redirection of resources, other value-added, which, again, these kinds of things made a real difference. We were able to reinvest.

There were over 225 improvement projects that have been completed, and, again, it was everything in savings in terms of supplies, space savings, staff labour dollars that were able to be reallocated, operational costs reduced. That alone was over \$5 million.

So, again, we've got these folks that are within the system. We've got 157 green belts and 46 black belts, as they are called within the Lean Sigma Six program, and again we've been able to do so many different things among those 225 improvement projects. We have had things like staff time that was available to reinvest was over 147,000—actually close to 148,000 hours. We had patient wait-days reduced by 2,232,903 days—well, sorry—it's looking like a long-distance phone number; it's such a big number—2,232,903 days. We've had increased number of patients that could be put through the system. We've had staff safety occurrences that have been reduced.

So, again, we've got a variety of things. That's how we're looking to save within the system, and that's how folks within our team have been trained and are deploying so that, again, we can see that there are efficiencies within the system that are being found. And, again, I'm very proud of the work that has been done by the department and those things

that we've been able to reinvest in because, again, that's what's made it possible for us to keep giving care to folks in the best possible way and to ensure that we can keep doing so in the future.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is correct that our length of stay certainly could be related to social determinants of health. For a minute there I'd forgotten that we have the highest child poverty rate in Canada and the highest use of food bank use in Canada, so she's probably right that their lack of ability to address some of those challenges might be leading to some of this.

I want to ask her: Was Gerry Delorme fired because he disagreed with the NDP position of helicopter EMS?

Ms. Blady: Well, that's a very interesting question and supposition from the member opposite. I can say that I—you know, Gerry Delorme had a very interesting offer put forward to him, a very exciting offer, an offer in British Columbia where he went through a competitive process and he left this department on very good terms. And, in fact, I have to say that the last time that he and I had the opportunity to meet we actually talked quite warmly about—he and I, we have a shared interest for the use of maps as far as how we—the geopositioning and geodeployment of health resources.

* (16:30)

So, no, I can assure the member opposite that he left of his own volition. He left to an opportunity that was presented to him in British Columbia, and he is very much missed and very much respected by myself and others on the team. He was a very strong person that I really enjoyed working with, and I am—while I am very sorry to see him go, I also know that when someone is presented with an opportunity to go forward and to grow their career in a new direction, that I always encourage them to take that path for that personal and professional growth.

Mrs. Driedger: Interesting comments from the minister based on a recent CIHI report about doctor retention. The report from CIHI indicated that Manitoba had the worst doctor retention rate of any other province, yet the minister is saying exactly the opposite and even quotes CIHI saying that we're doing better than any other province west of the Maritimes in our rural doctor retention according to CIHI.

CIHI is saying the opposite, the minister is saying this. Like who are we supposed to believe?

I'm choosing to believe CIHI because they are very credible. I'm surprised the minister would misinterpret the numbers like that. Can she please explain why she's saying the opposite of what CIHI was saying?

Ms. Blady: Again, I appreciate the member's interest in our doctor retention rates. Again, the numbers in terms of the numbers that we use, in terms of counting doctors, we take from our local doctors ourselves. So we—I, again, while I trust CIHI on a number of things and I really do appreciate the work that they do, that I look at the numbers that are presented to us by our College of Physicians and Surgeons and the other colleges within the province. They're the ones that register our doctors, they're the ones that provide, you know, provide them with licensure, they're the ones that know how many doctors are on the ground and practising.

And so, again, it's one of those things that I will take their numbers any day regardless of what other respectable entities provide those numbers, and, again, we put our trust in the college of the physicians, and we're going to recruit and retrain more.

And, again, what I have to say is that while I do trust the work of CIHI, that this particular report is typically not in sync with the other doctor counts, and it is the fact that it is a survey and it was dependent on the response rate of physicians, whereas the numbers that we have from the College of Physicians and Surgeons is based on the actual count of licensed physicians. So it's not about voluntary response to something.

And, again, based on those numbers, we've had growth every year. We have had, you know, now I have to admit maybe 2005 where we only gained 10 was not our best year, but at the same time as I've said previously, I think, you know, a gain of 10 while it might not be as good as 2014 with a gain of 83, or 2012 or 2015 with a gain of 66, and, again, this factors in all migrations, movements, if a physician passes on, all of those things, these are about the net gains.

Again, those years are, you know, quite strong. I think that, you know, years where you're gaining 60 doctors is definitely better than those years when the college tell us that they lost 75 in 1996 and they flatlined in 1994.

So, again, I will—I appreciate the work that CIHI does but in this particular case I appreciate much

more the solid, on-the-ground numbers that we do get from the College of Physicians and Surgeons and I really do appreciate the work that they do.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister's comments are very strange, because according to CBC, the data used to create that CIHI report was taken from billing information and physician statistics sent to the health institute by provincial health ministries.

So what she is saying doesn't jive with what the CBC reported in terms of where CIHI got that information. So can she just explain that discrepancy?

* (16:40)

Ms. Blady: I'm just sitting here. I apologize for the delay. I was getting my hands on a copy of the CIHI report and—itself, I—the academic in me likes to go to the primary sources, not what a media outlet says about a primary source.

And right within their own data sources and collection area, they talk about their use of the Scott's Medical Database and the other data sources, and they qualify themselves that the counts of physicians from these various sources may not agree due to the inclusion and exclusion of criteria applied by each source and the timing of their data collection.

So they provide their own proviso as to why there may be anomalies or why there may be inaccuracies. So I appreciate the fact that they do that, and so that is why we rely on the direct data and why we trust the data that is provided by the college as opposed to—in fact, again, it says, you know, according to CIHI's—it's what's called the SMDB, which is based on a survey of physicians across Canada.

Manitoba's count of physicians was counted one way and it's a contradiction to their—it reports a decrease which is in fact a contradiction to their own MPDB report for 2014 which is based on the count of physicians that were actually paid for clinical services.

So, in fact, there's a contradiction between their two reports. So rather than rely on either of these reports where there's inherent internal contradictions, that is why when we count the number of physicians in the province of Manitoba, we go by the numbers that provide—that are provided by our licensing body, the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

So I stand by our numbers because I note the methodological issues that CIHI themselves note as providing any contradiction in the numbers

actually is something that CIHI themselves have acknowledged. So we go with the raw numbers from our own folks where they do the licensure of doctors. I trust our College of Physicians and Surgeons to tell me how many doctors there are.

Again, I appreciate the work of CIHI, but I'm going to listen to our college on the numbers.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): A question for the minister about the Brandon Regional Health Centre, or whatever you wish to call it these days. Name changes daily, it seems.

I understand we're—we've been this—the government has announced renovations to the bed tower, initial costs estimated to be about \$12 million and charged, of course, the local foundation and the City of Brandon and the surrounding municipalities to come up with 10 per cent of the cost. And the foundation, as I understand, that has been successful in doing so, and the municipalities are working with their councils on it. But now I understand the cost has gone up to \$17 million.

So the question for the minister is: Is it 10 per cent of the \$12-million cost that they'd agreed to, or is it 10 per cent of the \$17-million cost, and why is it up to \$17 million already?

*(16:50)

Ms. Blady: I want to say to the honourable member we're having some issues connecting with the right folks to get you the precise answer, so I will try to get you that answer, but I do want to thank the community for what it is that they have contributed, what they have been able to raise. The foundation does phenomenal work there, and I know that folks in Brandon will be happy with what is coming into the Brandon Regional Health Centre, again, in terms of that redevelopment and renovation.

There has been a lot of change that has occurred there that—there has been, you know, developments made there. It was really nice to go there and see the new diagnostic imaging suite that's there and what that means in terms of digital mammography for women. Again, and it's going to be building on the \$58-million redevelopment that was completed in 2004 and, again, this new project is going to increase, you know, by 156,000 square feet of new space and another—renovating another 36,000.

So the idea of the new surgical service, the emergency department, labour, delivery and recovery and post-partum rooms, the neo-natal intensive care, pharmacy and central instrument processing. Again,

the new ambulatory care department is where—as well as cardiac diagnostics, day medicine, respiratory therapy, and adult day rehabilitation on the main floor. Again, the additional hemodialysis stations, computerized and other information technologies to improve case co-ordination and case management. All of these kinds of things, as well as new IT for scheduling day surgeries and procedures, pre-operative preparations and discharge, all of these kinds of things, as well as the tower itself. It's really going to, you know, the creation of 12 new medical in-patient single rooms, washrooms, all of these things are going to be much looked forward to by the folks in Brandon.

And so, as I said, for the member I will get that information for him at soonest opportunity regarding the funding model, but I do appreciate the fact and we do—I do want to say that our 10 per cent rate is significantly lower in terms of community contribution. That policy is one where, again, in terms of the cost sharing is something that I think is viable and having the reduced level of 10 per cent is something that has made a big difference for many communities.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we'll wait for the minister to find the numbers, and I'm sure she'll get them for us.

So I do have another area of interest here, the Brandon and Area Acquired Brain Injury Survivor and Family Support Group is made up of volunteers and they've been working towards the establishment of community-based brain injury services for Manitobans with brain injuries and their families. And since it is volunteers they are strained for their resources and wondering what the plans are for the Province in this regard. Are there resources that they can access or are they on their own?

Ms. Blady: Well, I'd like to thank the member for her—for that information. I wasn't aware that there was a support group like that in the Brandon community and I appreciate that there is a group like that and that—and the valuable work that they do. I can assure the member and the members of this group that the RHA and the department are always interested in finding ways that we can work together and partner with community-based organizations like this.

So I would encourage them to reach out to us, to the RHA and as well as other—I know there are also always other supportive members within the community for these kinds of groups, so I know that we have some wonderful corporate citizens that also

support groups in this kind of work. So I would encourage them to contact us and contact the regional health authority as well as contact those other broader sections of society that share, you know, the value of the work that they do and appreciate the value of the work that they do, because those living with brain injury, post-brain-injury situations, it is a rather life altering experience and the supports that they require unique to each individual.

So I appreciate the work that's there and would encourage this group to reach out to us and others to see what might be done to help support them and the good work that they do.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the minister for that answer.

This group has worked with mental-health department as far back as 2003 and has had limited success with any resources from the government. So their question of the minister, now that she has extended the invitation, is how is it best to engage her attention to this and how should they approach her in her department?

Ms. Blady: Again, I would encourage them to get in touch through my deputy minister because, again, we've been working with mental health because we do have a department that has two ministers. The one go-to between both of us is the deputy minister. So if they would like to make contact with the deputy minister's office we would gladly engage with them there.

Again, appreciate the good work that they are doing and hope that there are ways that we can build partnerships with them and support them whether it's through, you know, through resources or if—through helping them access additional resources elsewhere. It's whatever we can do to try to help them. So please have them get in touch with the deputy minister, Karen Herd, and she can inform both Minister Crothers and myself of how either of us or our respective parts of the department could be useful to them.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): All right, the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Jobs and the Economy.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Yes, I do. It's my pleasure to speak to you today on behalf of the Department of Jobs and the Economy. The department combines responsibility for a broad range of economic development portfolios, and has its mission to support the development of a skilled and sustainable workforce and foster trade, innovation, investment and entrepreneurship in partnership with stakeholders to maximize opportunities for prosperity for all Manitobans.

With that in mind, Manitoba's economy continues to show steady growth. Manitoba Finance's survey of economic forecasts estimates Manitoba's real GDP growth will be 2.1 per cent in 2015. Manitoba now ranks second strongest amongst provinces in 2015, following BC. Together with Ontario, these three provinces are the only provinces with growth at or above 2 per cent in 2015. Manitoba's well above the national average of 1.3 per cent. According to the survey, Manitoba's real GDP of 2016 will go by 2.3 per cent, third best amongst provinces and above the national average of 2.1 per cent.

Employment is forecast to grow by 1.7 per cent in 2015, the best growth in Canada, and by 1.1 per cent in 2016. Manitoba's unemployment rate forecast at 5.6 per cent in 2015 and 5.4 per cent in 2016, the second best in Canada for both 2015 and 2016.

As of July 1, 2015, Manitoba's population estimated at 1.2–1,293,378 is an increase of 13,136 persons, and a 12-month increase of 1.3 per cent–1.03 per cent. While Manitoba's population continues to grow, the medium age of Manitoba-Manitobans is stable. Manitoba's medium age remained at 37.7 years and is the third youngest amongst provinces, and below the national level of 40.5 years.

Manitoba's growing economy and relatively low unemployment rate has resulted in skilled labour shortages in many sectors and regions of our province. Employers need workers with specific knowledge and skills. Concurrently, we have significant number of Manitobans who are not engaged in

the labour force who have some barriers to employment, but have the potential and—to need sustainable employment and good jobs. Our vision is to improve quality of life for all Manitobans by developing opportunities for people to find and keep good jobs, improving the lives of their children.

We also—we are also building Manitoba's economy, helping employers to connect to skilled and unskilled workers that have the need in order to be more competitive. Through collaboration with businesses, industry, labour, community and education partners, we're moving forward and making 'progress' on the goal to add 75,000 workers to our labour force by 2020.

The Manitoba Works! program has changed the lives of over 300 individuals since 2013 and they empowered to change sessions for parents with young children, mostly single parents that result in almost 240 employment and income assistance EIA case closures.

Rent Assist is the most significant change to Manitoba's income support system in decades. It will help us to tackle poverty in a meaningful way. It is a benefit for all low-income individuals and will help people avoid enrolling on social assistance. It also provides to help EIA recipients and stability for them as they transition from assistance to work. I am proud that we have prioritized Rent Assist and that we are increasing these benefits to target level above schedule, helping families to get supports they need now so they can have better housing and healthy outcomes for their kids. Starting in December, a four-person family with two children age four to six will see their total monthly income increase \$2,246, a 74.4 per cent increase since '99–1999.

Assisting EIA participants to independence is a shared responsibility with Family Services. Though the caseload has seen increases since 2007 and '08, there are 25 per cent fewer cases receiving income assistant benefits than there were '93-94. The caseload of single parents is at its lowest level since 1992.

Manitoba's labour market has attracted an additional 17,000 new workers since March 2014. There are currently over 670,000 individuals who are employed, actively looking for work in Manitoba. This includes a record high of almost 11,000 active apprentices in over 55 designated trades.

Manitoba's Jobs and Skills Development Centres served over 17,300 Manitobans last year, including

over 10,000 at the new 111 Lombard location. Over 3,000 individuals accessed apprenticeship services at this location.

We're adding more apprenticeship seats at colleges this year to meet employer demand and certified workers. In addition, to aid the opening opportunities for enhanced training and certification for select occupations that are not recognized trades, we introduced a new Certified Occupations Act. When passed, this act will provide consistency and recognition of industry-based training in a greater number of occupations and permit individuals to receive provincial recognition for work-based training and accredited skill training.

To continue building the workforce of tomorrow, we are developing First Jobs Strategy. We are partnering with Children and Youth Opportunities as well as Education and Advanced Learning to help youth explore work, get ready for work, get that first job and make the jump into a rewarding career. Jobs and the Economy provide a central intake to all program streams.

In addition, we are continuing to develop the successful high school apprenticeship program. As of March 2015, there are 1,168 active high school apprentices who are gaining paid, on-the-job practical experience toward their apprenticeship and high school credits. The gateway program, including the Building for Tomorrow youth camps and pre-apprenticeship co-op programs is continuing to attract underrepresented youth to rewarding apprenticeship opportunities.

Through our sector council network, close to 14,000 individuals will be trained in companies and communities all across the province. In addition, Manitoba was the first province to successfully implement the Canada Job Grant in July 2014. To date, Manitoba has awarded 170 grants to train over 3,700 individuals to meet business needs.

Manitoba continues to grow its international exports both to United States, the world's largest market and Manitoba's largest trading partner and countries around the world. In 2014, Manitoba total domestic merchandise exports grew by \$915 million or 7 per cent. Manitoba's exports to non-traditional US markets grew by over \$207 million, while exports to US grew by over \$708 million.

In 2014, Manitoba's exports to China exceeded \$1 billion for the second year in a row, only second

time Manitoba has exported over \$1 billion to a market other than the US.

In the past fiscal year Manitoba Trade and Investment led or participated in business missions to Asia, Europe and North and South America to assist Manitoba companies in the pursuit of business opportunities in these foreign—in these four markets. In addition to the missions and consulting services, Manitoba Trade and Investment offers on-the-ground assistance to Manitoba exporters in the form of foreign trade representatives in five foreign markets: Brazil, China, Europe, India and Mexico. Manitoba works closely with partners to deliver the services required by Manitoba's exporters. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada has a trade commissioner co-located with Manitoba Trade and Investment, providing MTI with linkages to Canada's offices around the world.

As well, Manitoba Trade and Investment works with industry associations, and other trade organizations in Manitoba are partnering with the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters under trade-related activities, supporting and promoting Centrallia activities organized by the World Trade Centre Winnipeg.

Manitoba continues to expand markets for exports by joining with the federal government, other provinces and territories to negotiate new trade agreements. Significant advancements have been achieved recently with the conclusion of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership in October 2015, a comprehensive, economic and trade agreement with the European Union in August of 2014, and on January 1, 2015, a free-trade agreement with South Korea entered into force. Manitoba continues to engage the federal government in international trade negotiations with other trading partners including India and Japan.

After 2014's summer meeting, Canada's premiers agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of the Agreement on Internal Trade by March of 2016, using the existing AIT as a starting point and looking to ensure more consistency with modern international trade agreements. With internal trade in Canada valued at \$366 billion a year, up by approximately 60 per cent in the last 10 years, ensuring that free flow of people, goods, services and investments across the country supports building stronger economies and strengthens Canada's economic union.

The recent significant advancements in international trade make it even more important that

Manitoba be effectively positioned to capitalize on opportunities both domestically and internationally. Manitoba is committed to working toward an ambitious balance and equitable internal trade agreement that levels the playing field for trade across Canada.

Through economic development initiatives, the department is pleased to continue support strategic initiatives such as the Composites Innovation Centre, the Vehicle Technology Centre, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. These initiatives and others, like the Industrial Technology Centre, continue to strengthen Manitoba's technological capabilities, innovation, competitiveness in numerous sectors. As well as EDI supports initiatives that promote industry, specific training, job creation and job retention throughout the province. In addition, the Province will provide an ongoing support through CentrePort Canada to advance Manitoba's trade capacity and promote an environment that attracts investment.

In its third year of operation, Entrepreneurship Manitoba continues to grow, expand its services to small business community. Moving forward, it will improve service efficiencies and service integration, enhance online services and advance development of data analytical services.

We are continuing to implement initiatives under the Manitoba Innovation Strategy that was announced in 2014. The department launched TechFutures, a new program that provides financial training systems to young entrepreneurs to assist in launching or growing early stage technology start-ups. This competitive program awards up to 20 grants annually to applicants with business ideas that demonstrate the greatest potential for commercialization.

The department has also worked to finalize three-year funding agreements with four key innovation and commercialization partners: The Eureka Project, the Manitoba Technology Accelerator, Startup Winnipeg and Innovate Manitoba. These agreements represent a provincial investment of a million dollars per year, will ensure Manitoba entrepreneurs have access to important services, and support various stages of their journey to bring their innovative products to market.

In addition, too, the department has successfully transitioned its annual provincial research funding support of \$17 million to the Research Manitoba, and we look forward to working alongside this new

organization in building Manitoba's research excellence.

In concluding my remarks, I'd like to thank the deputy ministers and their staff for their support, hard work, good efforts to build and develop our department's initiatives and policies. Thank you.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I want to thank the minister for his opening comments, and welcome all of his staff here today and thank them for all of the hard work that they do.

As we celebrate Small Business Week here in our province, it's important to recognize the great contribution that small businesses make to our economy.

You know, Manitoba's economy is relatively diverse, and, as a result, historically, we haven't realized the dramatic increases or decreases to our—in our GDP that perhaps we see in other provinces that are struggling as a result of global economic downturn.

*(14:50)

And just when we look at, for example, the province of Alberta that is struggling as a result of the decline in oil prices and how much that economy is tied to a single sector within the economy where that is, it's challenging for people in those communities. And I think we're relatively—our relatively diverse economy here in Manitoba has fared well for us, and I think, you know, it's important to recognize the contribution of our small businesses to economic growth within our province and, indeed, to all businesses, to economic growth in our province. I think these businesses are the backbone of our economy, they are the reason that we have the kind of economic growth that we have in our province and that we haven't realized those downturns that other provinces and in other countries have realized as a result of global economic downturns.

And, having said that, I think it's important, also, to recognize that we have a government here in Manitoba that is not respectful of those businesses and the contribution that they make to our economy. And they're not respectful because it's in the way that they spend their money, their hard-earned tax dollars

that they contribute to this government. And it's unfortunate because the government has been spending beyond its means for a number of years, in fact, 16, since they've been in power in this province, and it's starting to have a negative impact on our small-business sector and in our business sector within Manitoba. I believe we could be so much stronger than where we are today had there been a government in power for the last 16 years that was more respectful of businesses and their contribution and—to our community.

And it's unfortunate that we have in place a government in our province that has resulted in a significant increase, almost a tripling, of our debt here in our province, Mr. Chair. We have extremely high deficits, and with a economy that is growing relatively well as compared to other provinces in Canada, we shouldn't have to be realizing the kinds of deficits and the increases in the debt in this province that we are.

But it's the fact that we have a government right now that is not fiscally responsible and has implemented, in my opinion, has implemented policies that have had a negative impact on what our potential economic growth could have been had we had better fiscal management over the course of the last 16 years.

Mr. Chair, I just want to say that I recognize that in question period today when I was asking some questions of the minister as a result of a broken promise of this government, he mentioned in his response that he had been out visiting businesses across this great province of eyes—of ours, and I'm glad that he is, and it's an important thing to do because of their contribution to our community and to our economy. But I think it's more than just going out and visiting these businesses. It's high time that this government starts to listen to those business owners, in particular, the small- to mid-sized business owners in our province, as we know they are the backbone of our economy.

And when we have been out—I've had the opportunity to be out across this province visiting with various stakeholders in the business community, and I've heard loud and clear, and my colleagues have been across this province as well, and we've been hearing loud and clear from small- to mid-sized businesses across this province, that they're very concerned about the direction that this government has taken with respect to taxation. We know that before the last election, of course, the government

went door to door and promised not to raise taxes and, of course, the first thing they did when they came in is not only expanded the PST, but then the subsequent—the following year, they, in fact, increased the PST from 7 to 8 per cent, and that had a very negative impact on small- to mid-sized businesses in our province.

Another thing that I have heard time and time again is the excessive red tape of regulations and so on in this province, Mr. Chair. And I'm hoping that the minister, I'm sure, as he's out visiting the same businesses, that these are issues that are—that have been brought to his attention as well. And I hope that he will start to do something about this because it's very significant in terms of future economic growth. And, as the minister is considering what policies to implement over the course of the next several months prior to the election, that I hope he starts to take into consideration some of these very serious issues because we know that they haven't really done anything for the last 16 years.

So we know also that the small business income limit, you know, is another broken promise. Not just the PST hike but this was another broken promise. They promised in the 2011 election to raise it to \$500,000 and that has yet to happen.

And the other thing that we've heard is a lack of venture capital opportunities in our province, and I think that that is a very serious area that I think the minister would want to take a look at, as those businesses, those small businesses in our province, want to look to grow and expand into mid-size businesses in our province. What's happening without that kind of venture capital opportunity for them, they're looking at other provinces and other jurisdictions to go to where they do have those kinds of opportunities for them. So we are losing some of those businesses to other provinces.

So, Mr. Speaker those are—Mr. Chair, those are some of the issues of concern to small and mid-sized businesses in our—in Manitoba. We know that those small businesses are the backbone and—of our economy and represent a huge opportunity for us in our province for tremendous economic growth down the line if the policies in place are put in place—that are fiscally responsible, when it comes to the areas of taxation and red tape—and we start to implement some of the ideas that are coming forward from our small business communities.

So I look forward to our line of questioning in Estimates over the course of the next number of

days, and I hope we can have a good, frank dialogue about the future of this great province of ours because this is something that's near and dear to me. This is about keeping young people in Manitoba. This is about growing our economy, making sure that there are jobs for our young people here in our province. It's why I got involved in politics; it's why I'm still here today because I believe there's just so much more that we can do as a province and as a government.

So, having with those few words, Mr. Chair, I'm ready to move on to some questioning.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for 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 10.1.(a) contained in resolution 10.1.

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.

Mr. Chief: So, Mr. Chair, I'll start with Jan to my left, Jan Forster, the assistant deputy minister of Workforce Development and Income Support division; Dave Fisher, the executive director of Employment and Income Assistance Programs; Craig Halwachs, assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services; Amy Thiessen, acting executive director of Finance; Wayne Copet, executive director of Industry Services; Colleen Kachulak, executive director, Strategic Policy and Divisional Services; Kevin McPike, manager of Policy, Legislation and Board Operations—Apprenticeship; Doug McCartney, senior executive director of Science, Innovation and Business Development; Alan Barber, Policy, Planning and Co-ordination.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or on a global discussion?

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm wondering if it would be amenable to minister to proceed in a global fashion.

* (15:00)

Mr. Chief: Yes, that's fine.

Mr. Chairperson: So thank you for agreeing that the department will proceed in a global manner with all the resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Chairperson, I think I'm going to start off today where we ended off in question period today and ask about the business income, the small-business income limit. It is, as we know, a promise that was made, in fact, at a press conference out in Brandon, and on—I believe it was September 11th, actually, of 2011, and the Premier was out in Brandon on a small business there, and he made the announcement that he would raise the small-business income limit to \$500,000. And I know this is something that's very significant to people in—in—you know, owners of small businesses, and to the jobs that they create in our province, and I'm wondering if the minister could indicate why that has not taken place to date.

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for the question. I was honoured to be able to stand up today and talk about small businesses, considering that we are celebrating Small Business Week. And I did, as I said, I travelled the province and was not only able to visit and talk with lots of small businesses, but, like the member said, it's important, as you're doing that, to listen to their thoughts and ideas and, you know, the things that they talked about, and, you know, being the only province in the nation to eliminate small business tax, of course, were things that they talked about and how that's supporting their businesses.

The recent increase in the threshold to include more businesses, and we know that these small businesses—we know the incredible contribution that they continue to make. I was able to talk a little about that today around—we—you travel the province and not only talking to small businesses, but when you're travelling the province, you get to meet and talk with lots of families, in particular young people, and young people will tell you, and I continue to hear, that they're proud of who they are, proud of where they live, and they want to give back. And often it's the small businesses that give them that critical first job and it's the small businesses that when they recognize the best way they can give back to their home towns is by hiring and creating good jobs so people can make a good living for themselves and their families.

These are the things that I heard all throughout the province. In fact, I was in Brandon yesterday. There was 350 people. They were either directly running small businesses or supporting small businesses.

So the messages are often quite clear that they want a government who can continue to work with them, provide the supports and resources that they ask for. You know, this is the—things that we're hearing we're going to continue to do.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, but my question had to do with the business income, small-business income limit. And, again, I think it's very important when, you know, particularly on the eve of elections when, you know, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) out making promises about what he's going to do if elected. We know, of course, he made the announcement about the PST; he said it was nonsense, that they were not going to raise the PST. And, of course, we know that that, in fact, took place after the election.

And this is yet another promise that was made on the eve of the election as well where the Premier promised to raise the small-business income limit to \$500,000. This has not happened yet. In fact, this is the second lowest threshold in the country, almost dead last in our country. And this is a very important thing for small businesses. The more we can take them off the tax roll, so to speak, the better off they are, the more money they have in their pockets to be able to spend, and that helps boost our economy. So this is a very important issue for small businesses in our province. And I'm wondering if the—or the minister could indicate, is this—is it his plan to fulfill this election promise from four years ago?

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for the question, and, you know, I do want to say for the record, again, that Manitoba is the only province in the nation that completely eliminates small-business tax. In Budget 2015, we did increase the income limit to \$450,000, and that means thousands more businesses will pay no small-business taxes. We recognize, and I was able to share again today in question period that our small businesses, you know, not only create jobs and often give young people that critical first job but they help build the identity of our neighbourhoods. And I think the member would agree, when she has family and friends and people visiting, she probably has a small business that she takes pride in and takes people there. Those are the businesses that make everyone feel like they belong in those neighbourhoods.

A great example was today with the new Power Smart program with Manitoba Hydro. We were down at Pasquale's restaurant Being able to stand alongside of Joe, the owner, help him save some

money by upgrading, be cleaner, greener and more efficient, upgrading lights and investing so he can improve the faucets and taps and spray valves and those kinds of things, and, you know, we know that that's going to save him thousands of dollar. And we know when small businesses save thousands of dollars, they invest it back in their businesses. How do they do that? Well, they hire more people. They extend the hours of those people. They invest it in training, so people can continue to build on their skills and talents in those businesses. And that's how you build healthier, stronger communities because we know businesses invested back into their neighbourhoods and in their hometowns. And, you know, we heard loud and clear that Manitoba, being the only province in the nation in completely eliminating small-business tax. It makes a significant difference, and these are the kinds of things, and why we'll continue to stand next to small businesses.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess the minister is not really answering the question. The question is with respect to the small-business income limit, and the question for the minister is, again, is it the plan of his department, are they now looking at ways to fulfill this election promise, or is this simply going to go as another election promise that was made back in 2011 that is not going to be fulfilled by this government?

Mr. Chief: I'll repeat the same answer. We are the only province in the nation that continues to completely eliminate small business—the—in 2015, in our budget, we increased the income limit to \$450,000. That's where it's at, meaning thousands of more businesses will be able to be part of that, and they will no longer pay small-business taxes. That's—I've been able to say for the record a number of times how that impacts.

* (15:10)

We know that small businesses make up and help create over 75 per cent of all new jobs in our province, and we'll continue to stand with them and we'll continue to look for ways to make sure that our businesses stay competitive. We know that our small businesses are thriving and we want to continue to make sure they do that.

And one of the things that we know, and it's been said, not by us but private sector forecasters, BMO, TD Bank, Royal Bank are all saying the same thing, that Manitoba continues to have one of the fastest growing economies in the nation. Simply put, when small businesses do well, Manitoba does well, and that's what we're seeing right now. We'll

continue to work with small businesses and find ways to make sure that they continue to build the fastest growing economy, one of the fastest growing economies, in the nation.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess I'll just take that as that—as this will be yet another broken promise by this NDP government when it comes to small businesses and fulfilling those promises that were made just prior to the last election. I think it's really unfortunate for small businesses in our province who work hard and to help our economy grow and to help create those jobs, as the minister even said, for young people and to keep young people here in our province. But the unfortunate thing is that they're not going to fulfill that promise, and the only people that will suffer are those young people who are looking for jobs in the small-business sector that perhaps won't be able to find those jobs because government feels that they know better how to spend the money than the businesses do. So we'll leave it at that with respect to that, but, clearly, it's just another broken promise by this NDP government.

The minister did indicate the importance of putting more money back into the pockets of businesses so that they can hire more people, and I'm just wondering why is it then that the policies of his government have been counter to exactly that. We've seen the increase in the PST that's had a very negative impact on many of the small businesses in Manitoba, taking money out of their pockets, as well as, you know, these election promises that aren't fulfilled.

So I'm wondering if the minister could indicate why is it that on one hand he said—says this is an important aspect of what needs to happen, but, on the other hand, his policies of his government do not reflect what he is saying.

Mr. Chief: The member—for the question, and, you know, how we put money back into the pockets of small businesses. Again, we've eliminated small—completely the small-business tax. We've increased the threshold for that. We know that when we work directly with and listen to businesses throughout the province, they work closely with Entrepreneurship Manitoba. A big part of what we do is—a great example today is Pasquale's working with Manitoba Hydro, making sure that we can help businesses be cleaner, greener and more efficient. We stand with them. We want to make sure that they know about the financial programs and services. We want to make sure that they recognize that there is a lot of

information and supports in place, including business information counselling and mentorship programs.

These are the things that we hear how important it is for small businesses or either established entrepreneurs or aspiring ones. We recognize how important it is to establish a network, that one of the great things about our small business and our entrepreneurs is that it's not always an easy path, in fact, it can be quite difficult, but when our businesses overcome adversity, they always have a willingness to help others. And we see that again today at Pasquale's being able to save some money, and they reinvest that.

But, you know, one of the things that we are seeing now is all you have to do, as a great example of this, is to go down to Innovation Alley. At one time, in fact, when members opposite were in government in the 1990s, Adelaide Street, people would look at that as a street that there was a lot of struggle, a lot of challenge. Now when you look at Adelaide Street, it's one of the most exciting places in our city to be at. In fact, when the new mayor, Mayor Bowman, got elected, one of his first things he did is that he had to rename the street Innovation Alley. And now what are we seeing? We're seeing, under the leadership of people like Dave Angus, Michael Legary, Chris Johnson, we are seeing a thriving area where there is an incredible amount of support, and the message is loud and clear to established and aspiring entrepreneurs; that if you have a new product, you have a new idea, you have a new approach, come on down to Innovation Alley. We, as a government, gladly stood with all of these leaders in our community to make sure that the supports were in place.

Recently, just as early as today, you can look in the Winnipeg Free Press and there's a great story about how they continue to expand the support that they're providing. In fact, now when you look at innovation technology and the kinds we're seeing, people are looking to us throughout the country, in fact, being nationally and internationally recognized for those investments. And, when you have a young, fast-growing demographic, it's a very exciting place to be.

You know, another aspect of how important that is is when you look at—of where a college is. You know, we have, you know, in our post-secondary institutions, where are they located? They are located in the inner city. They are located down in the Exchange District. We have a record number of

young people going to school now. There it sends a strong message that no matter who you are or where you come from, post-secondary education is for you, and when you're doing that and you're a young person and you're alongside businesses every day, it's an incredible, incredible opportunity.

So what happens is that we're looking at a downtown that's a—that's thriving. You got more businesses starting, more entrepreneurs wanting to start business. You have an excitement, to the point where we have a record number of people now wanting to be close to that action. So, what do they do? Well, now they're living in our downtown. They're living in these areas at one time that people saw an area that was about difficulty, and that comes from the ability of our entrepreneurs, seeing potential, understanding that anything is possible, and a government that stands with them and listens to them and invests in ways that's going to be able to maximize that potential. I think that you—one of the things I think we're all proud of now is that when you go down into our downtown, not is it an incredibly exciting place, but you take something like the MTS Centre, it's known as the loudest barn in the National Hockey League. Well, that success comes from that entrepreneurial spirit, and we'll continue to work with our aspiring entrepreneurs and we'll continue to work with our established ones.

But the reason that you maintain that momentum at the end of the day is because our entrepreneurs are able to keep more money in their pocket. We stand beside them and we listen to their thoughts and ideas. There is no question that's why that we have that kind of momentum, not only in our downtown, but through hometowns all throughout Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I want to thank the minister for that, and I agree with him, that you need to put more money in the pockets of businesses and Manitobans because they know better how to spend their money than government does, and I agree with the minister on that.

The problem is that the policies of this government are counter to that kind of a—that's not what's happening under this government. That's not what the policies of this government are. So he needs to—if, you know, perhaps that's the way he believes and that's what he thinks within his caucus or in Cabinet, but it's important that he take that message back to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) because for the last 16 years we've had a government that has not put more money back in the pockets of Manitobans and

small businesses in our province. It's done, in fact, the opposite. And so I think he needs to take that message, and I hope his colleagues are listening because that message needs to go back to his caucus and to the Cabinet table.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move on. I know during question period today, I just wanted to clarify something that the minister referenced, and he spoke about the number of employee businesses in Manitoba. And I don't have the opportunity to peruse Hansard yet but, you know, perhaps I will later, but I thought he used the number of around 80,000 businesses in Manitoba. And I'm wondering if he could indicate what is the breakdown of small, medium and large businesses in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

Mr. Chief: I'd like to add a few more things to the record about how we continue to support small business, and then, of course, I will get to the question.

We're increasing the income limit from \$425,000 to \$450,000. That's expected to benefit up to 5,600 businesses—corporations. An estimated 2,000 corporations will pay no provincial income tax due to the small-business income limit increase. A small business with \$500,000 taxable income in Manitoba pays the lowest provincial income tax in Canada in 2015. In 1999, the Manitoba corporate income tax was the highest.

Manitoba is the first and only province to permanently eliminate the small business tax. In 2010, about 80 per cent of the taxable corporations benefit Manitoba's zero per cent small business tax rate. About 14,000 corporations pay no Manitoba corporate income tax because of the zero per cent rate, increasing it to 16,000 in 2016.

The number that I did use today was 80,000. I can give some general information, but I will commit to the member that I'll get more specific information as time goes on. But we do—and I do agree that—with the member that we know that small businesses are the backbone of Manitoba's economy, and I have said over and over again, simply put, when Manitoba's small businesses do well, Manitoba does well. And we know that there are 80 per cent—over 80 per cent small businesses—small-, medium-sized businesses in our province. That would—that number, there'd be roughly 90 per cent, if not a bit more than 90 per cent of those would be small, medium businesses.

And one of the things that we have heard from these businesses that are making a difference—and, of course, as the member would know, that we continue to work with some of the poorest people in our province. Some of those vulnerable people that have had—that have—deal with an incredible amount of barriers, and one of the things that I had said about our business community and our small, medium size, and our large businesses, deeply care, that they want to be able to help families. They want to be able to help people who are struggling. Now, that doesn't mean they have the expertise to understand some of the challenges that some of our most vulnerable people face, so we work closely with the business community and we continue to invest in our non-profit community-based organizations.

We have a program called Manitoba Works!, and I would share with the member that there are some incredible stories of success and achievement and resilience. And it becomes—it comes because of the incredible generosity of—and support and hard work of our businesses, but also the incredible work of our non-profit organizations. We have non-profits that help remove those barriers. We have businesses that are willing to stand with government, to stand with those non-profits to train these people. Often, it is—often where we see incredible success is with single mothers that, you know, are working hard to get their grade 12; they're working hard to get that extra training. They want to make a better living and a better life for themselves and their children, and we're seeing incredible stories of success.

And I remember talking to Candace [*phonetic*], a young indigenous woman in the neighbourhood that I represent, and she was in a training program and she was guaranteed a job if she got through the training with a business, and she talked about how incredible it felt. And she said, you know, I'm sure I heard it as a young woman over the years, but I just don't remember when, but the employer who's wanting to employ me and the people who are helping train me continue to tell me they need me, they need me to do well, they need me to come to this program and get the training I need. And you hear from incredible stories like people like Candace [*phonetic*] that they're getting the training that they need. There is a guaranteed job for them.

And that is how a government stands with our non-profit organizations. That's how government stands with our businesses to make sure that we can do that together to make sure that people like Candace [*phonetic*], that not only do they get to

develop their skills and their expertise, but they're guaranteed a job.

And, you know, we look at one of the enormous advantages that our province has, it is a strong message that we have a young indigenous population, we have a new-Canadian community, a refugee community that has incredible potential and making a huge contribution, and we continue to work closely with women to make sure that all women, all young women, get a tap on the shoulder and recognize that there is not a job that they cannot get.

And our government continues to work with businesses to be able to do that. We continue to work with our training institutions. We continue to stand alongside of our non-profit organizations, all to make sure that the message is loud and clear that no matter who you are or where you come from in Manitoba, there is a great job for you.

I can confidently say that because of the people that we get to stand with, the incredible businesses, small, medium and large businesses, because of great people that are doing great work in our non-profit organizations. But most importantly, you can say something like that because of the incredible hard work, determination that people like Candace [*phonetic*] show every single day.

Mrs. Stefanson: I know that Industry Canada has, in the past, put out a comparison of provinces with respect to the number of businesses in that province. And I think the criteria they have used for small businesses is one to 99 employees, for medium businesses it's 100 to 499 employees, and large businesses are over 500 employees.

I was just wondering if—I know the minister mentioned that he would get back to me with a breakdown of the 80,000 businesses total, if he could maybe just use those criteria in order to let us know the breakdown of how many businesses we're dealing with in Manitoba.

*(15:30)

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for the question. As I said that—you know, I'll get a more specific answer for the member. We're working on it. Now, I'm hoping we can get it even before we're done here this afternoon. I do want to say that we do use the same measures as the Industry Canada as well. I do also want to say, though, for the record, that we also work very closely—bringing up Industry Canada, we work closely with our federal partners, that includes all of our federal partners. In fact, when we looked at the

Canada-Manitoba Job Grant, 63 per cent of that was used for small businesses. One of the things that we do take a lot of pride in, and I want to say that not just our government takes a lot of pride in it, but our small- and medium-sized businesses take a lot of pride in it, that we're able to—and it's the relationship that we have with our small businesses that we're able to get to be the first out the door when it came to the Canada Job Grant, and so the relationships that we have with our federal partners and that close relationship we have with small businesses is a huge advantage because, if we can get out first, we can work closely, we can make sure, and we can be the standard for the rest of the country. And that's what we've been able to do. And, once again, that's an incredible testament to our small businesses and the incredible work that they do every day.

Once again, I'll say for the record, that they recognize that the best way to make a contribution, and they certainly want to give back, is to hire local people. You hire local people, you help them make a good living for themselves and their families and then they recognize that they—those families give back to their hometowns and their home communities. So any time that you can be first out the gate, and you can be seen as a national standard, I think is absolutely incredible and important to say, for the record, that's a testament to the hard work of our established and our aspiring entrepreneurs.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister, Mr. Chair, if he could endeavour to get back to me with respect to those numbers when he can. That would be great.

I do just—I just wanted to clarify something from earlier. Can the minister indicate when the announcement was made, I believe it was in last year's budget, but the increase in the small business income limit from 425 to 450 thousand. Was that announced last budget?

Mr. Chief: I just want to let the member know that she could get that more specific information with Manitoba Finance.

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, yes, I just wanted to clarify when it was actually announced. I mean, I would think that it's something that your department would know just offhand because it's—it does affect small businesses in Manitoba. So I just, you know, what I'm trying to find out is when does that—when was that first announced, and when will small businesses in Manitoba start to realize that new limit?

Mr. Chief: Yes, I want to say to the member, again, the details of the announcement, we can check with our colleagues over at the Manitoba Finance, but that's a—they would have a—they would have those details. We have been—our department has been committed to work, as I've said many times, with small businesses, making sure that they get the resources that they need to continue to help young people get those critical first jobs, but the details for the member's question is with our colleagues in Manitoba Finance.

Mrs. Stefanson: I mean, just a little frustrating because this is within the purview of this minister with respect to small businesses in Manitoba, and I would hope that he would know the answer to a simple question, which is just really, I mean, forget about when it was announced then; it's okay, we can look that up, but, you know, when does it take effect? I mean, he should know that.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chief: So, just want to say this—so for the record, Budget 2015, we increased the income limit to \$450,000. That will take effect January 1 of 2016 and I will get the date that we announced it—when the Minister of Finance announced it.

Mrs. Stefanson: Those businesses, for clarification, so those businesses won't realize the effects of that increase until they file their return for 2016?

Mr. Chief: Once again, these specific questions, the details are with Manitoba Finance.

Mrs. Stefanson: I mean, I just would think that the Minister for Jobs and the Economy who's responsible—it's under his purview, small businesses in Manitoba; this is something that has a direct impact on them. So I just—I would hope that the minister would be able to get me the answer to that, but if he's not going to answer that or if he can't, then I'll have to move on with my line of questioning, I guess.

I guess, I would ask if perhaps the minister can indicate if his government were to fulfill their election promise from 2011 and increase that small business income limit to \$500,000, how many businesses would be taken off the tax rolls?

Mr. Chief: Once again, I sure thank the member for the question. That is the kind of information that Manitoba Finance would have. They should—they would have those kinds of details.

But what I will commit to the member is that we will connect with our colleagues and work to get her that information. Those are more readily available with the Department of Finance.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and again I would just indicate to the minister, I would think it's something that he would sort of want to know about because, again, small businesses and businesses in Manitoba do fall under his purview. And I would think it's just something that he would want to know and have at his fingertips to be able to answer if there—if, you know, if you're taking businesses off the tax roll in the province, I would think it's something that he would want to know himself. So I thank the minister for endeavouring to get me the answer to that question.

I do want to move on and just ask in—the minister again indicated earlier in question period today and in his opening comments how he has been visiting and meeting with various businesses across the province and I'd like to know if the issue of excessive regulations, also known as red tape, if that issue ever came up at any of the meetings that he had with various businesses across the province.

Mr. Chief: Yes, I'm glad the member asked again, and I do want to say, for the record, as I'm out talking to small businesses, you know, they do highlight and talk and show their support for the no—the elimination of—no small-business tax. They, you know, appreciate the increased threshold.

As I've said before, we recognize that a lot of these businesses are providing young people with that critical first job. When you, particularly, you talk to people like Michael Legary, who was out in Brandon yesterday sharing and talking about innovation technology and the incredible opportunity that not only exists in Manitoba but exists throughout the country and the world where we have a generation that you can have a global reach, a worldwide presence, and still be able to give back right here in your hometown.

So you want to be able to stand with our businesses and our people who are working incredibly hard to make that happen. These are the kinds of conversations we have. You know, people often are incredibly proud of the work they do out in Morden, at the business gateway. They—where hundreds of businesses came from the region, stood with us and they talked about how important it was to have a one-stop shop where you could come in and get information from one place. They work

closely with Entrepreneurship Manitoba. You can find out about all of the financial programs that exist, a place where you can get business information, where you can get counselling, where you can get very good mentorship.

Our entrepreneurs are always willing to help other entrepreneurs, and where—in particular, in Morden, which was incredibly exciting, is the investment of a boardroom that is high tech, that they don't even have to leave Morden or the region of Morden, and they have access to webinars and seminars and conferences all over the world right there because they have a top of the line for the businesses. In fact, I was talking to a recent immigrant who had just come in, and it was under a year, where he was able to not only start a business but I already think he told us at that announcement and probably stood with the mayor, that he had already built 12 homes in less than a year. So that's how fast it took to get his business going. These are the kinds of things that we're hearing. That's why I was also able to say to the minister—I mean, the member today, that people like Mike Moore from the Manitoba Home Builders' Association, said there's never been a better place to start a business than here in Manitoba.

You know, these are the kinds of things that I hear when I'm out talking to small businesses. These are the kinds of things that come up.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that response, but it didn't respond to the question at all.

In fact, has—did the issue of excessive red tape come up at all? Because I know in pretty much every meeting I've had with small businesses across this province, the issue of red tape has come up and that the need to reduce the regulatory burden on small and mid-sized businesses is pretty significant. It's the most, if not one of the most, certainly, important issues that comes up time and time again, and I would be surprised if this hasn't come up in a meeting with the minister.

And I'm just wondering if he—could he indicate whether or not the issue of excessive red tape or excessive regulatory burdens or red tape has come up as one of the most important issues that faces small businesses in Manitoba?

Mr. Chief: Yes, I was just sharing for the member that when I was travelling and I was talking to small businesses, they highlight the incredible

contribution that they're making in their hometowns and neighbourhoods. They talk about the different programs that are making a difference. These are the things that I hear when I'm out and about.

But, certainly, when we look at regulation, we work closely with our businesses, with our employers. In fact, we work very closely with the Manitoba Employers Council and we—there are things that we've been able to work together on.

I do want to say, for the record and for the member, that if there are thoughts and ideas that we know that, once again, can support our businesses, feel free to bring those forward. We do take them very serious. And that would include the Manitoba Employers Council; I'm sure they would like to hear your thoughts and ideas, as well, on what your ideas are about regulation.

When it does come up, make no mistake about it, our businesses, our employers, understand and they highlight this, that safety is always a concern, that we do things to protect the public. These are the things that they're sharing with me that they—that—you know, safer and healthier work environments for their employers is always going to be a high standard and they want that to continue to happen.

They want to make sure that the regulation is in place, we'll always make sure that it's always a 'leven'—a level playing field between businesses and that there is not some unfair advantage or unfair way to do that. So these are the things that we talk about.

Things that we have been able to work closely with, with standing alongside of our businesses, standing alongside our employers, is an online service for reducing red tape. A great example of that is BizPaL, and you should—the member should know that in Morden they were very excited to highlight and make 'bizpol'—BizPaL part of their—the business gateway. It—you know, these are the things that I hear about—provides comprehensive information from federal, provincial and participating municipal governments on regulatory requirements for starting and operating, expanding a business.

We know that it's not an—the easiest thing to do, but we also know that when employers tell us that the public safety and safety for their employees and making sure it's a level playing field has to maintain as a top standard, we work closely with them.

Entrepreneurship Manitoba was established to improve the service delivery and reduce red tape for businesses by providing a single window for clients

to access these programs and services that they require. We have information officers and business consultants in the Small Business Development branch of Entrepreneurship Manitoba to help reduce red tape by providing information and guidance and regulatory requirements businesses need to comply with within starting and operating and expanding businesses.

And, finally, with the business number, which is used in five program areas in Manitoba, helps government reduce red tape and realize service delivery efficiencies by enabling programs to identify and verify common business clients accurately and consistently.

And, once again, when we look at regulation, we're always open to ideas. Our businesses know this. We work closely with people like Dwayne Marling. We have—work closely with people like Ron Koslowsky and others that, you know, continue to work with us on this. If the member has ideas, I'm always open. All of us are always open to look at those things. Once again, we want to do those kinds of things that we know that will make that safety and protecting businesses from unfair competitive advantages stay at top line. These are the things that we hear.

In fact, one of the first announcements that I was able to do, and I did it proudly, was the Military Credential Recognition regulation. It reduces the paperwork so veterans can move quickly into jobs.

We know that people in the military—and by the way, this is what the military had asked for—we know that when they're in the service, they build an incredible amount of skill, that they get an incredible amount of expertise. We know that people in the military make an incredible amount of sacrifices for all of us. They will put themselves in harm's way. They will move away from their families for long periods of time. And we want to make sure that when they want to transition out of in the military, that they get their red seal of approval and they can get those jobs. This is not only great for employers and businesses, but this is great for military families. And we've had an incredible amount of success.

Once again, these are the kinds of ideas that we hear first-hand from people and we move on. When we know we can do that, we do that. And we'll continue to work closely with our employers and our businesses to look at ways to do this.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm glad to hear the minister indicate his openness to deal with the issue of red tape. And I would encourage him—in fact, there is a bill before the Legislature right now, a bill that I introduced some time ago, Bill 208, The Regulatory Accountability and Transparency Act. And this is one way to help reduce the regulatory burden for small businesses in Manitoba.

In fact, when I've been around to meet with many businesses in Manitoba, they welcome this kind of bill that's before the Legislature. So I guess I would ask the minister, is he now indicating his support for that bill, because that would be welcome news for small businesses in Manitoba.

Mr. Chief: I'll just say for the member, again, I thank her for her question and I will say for the record that we continue to work closely with people like Dwayne Marling and a group of people from businesses and employers from the Manitoba Employers Council. We've been able to move on online services, things like BizPaL that people take a lot of pride in and doing that. We have Entrepreneurship Manitoba that helps with the service delivery and getting the information and resources to people, those business, the needed information officers.

We—but, you know, I do want say for the member and for the record, that when you talk to small- or medium- or large-sized businesses, often the No. 1 priority that comes up for them is a skilled workforce. They want to make sure that, you know, as I've said before, our businesses work incredibly hard to hire. They know the best way to give back to their hometowns and their home communities is to hire local people. And when you hire local people, they make a good living for themselves and their families. And often they end up giving back.

Why have we had success with these small businesses? And why do we have one of the fastest growing economies in the country? Why do we have one of the best job growth rates in the country? Is because we stand beside businesses and train, and we train local people. This is what our businesses are asking for. This continues to be their No. 1 priority.

* (16:00)

In fact, not only small business, do they like this; you go down and you go up to Smoak construction in northern Manitoba. They proudly provide jobs for northerners, make sure they stand with northern people. Our government works to train them. You go

down to Zenith in Brandon, very proudly work with Zenith and, you know, people tell you that if you're from Brandon, Manitoba, and as soon as you see that logo, you realize that you're back home in your hometown. And we stand with businesses like Zenith to make sure that they can hire local people.

We hear how important affordability is. And you take something like even our big-sized businesses, like Valeant, up in Steinbach, and they shut up—they shut down some shops out in Ontario, and you ask them, why did you move here? And they said, well, affordability, much more affordable to do business here. They say that they recognize the incredible demographic of young people we have, that we have a young, dynamic indigenous community, that there is an incredible, dynamic, new Canadian community. They—and they say there's a government that will stand with businesses to train these people. These are the priorities that I hear.

I will say for the member that Shaw just recently announced 500 new jobs here in the backyard of the Leader of the Opposition, something that he should—and I'm sure he is incredibly proud of that 500 new jobs at Shaw is here on top of other jobs that they've created. So you say to them, why'd you move here? And they said, well, we can look all throughout the country, and here's what we know: that when we invest in someone in Winnipeg and someone in Manitoba—and they're not guessing; these guys are doing research; they're collecting data—they say that when you invest in a person here, it's a—they are incredibly loyal to the business. And they stay in the business. And people have opportunities to move up in the business. And we stand with the companies like this.

These are the top priorities, and other ways that the small businesses say is, you know, is things that we heard today from Joe at Pasquale's. You know, that—ways that we can create efficiencies and help them be greener and cleaner and more efficient. And we know that when they save a bit of money, they put that back into their business, and that goes back into their neighbourhoods, and that's how we build stronger and healthier communities. Without question, our government is seen as leaders when it comes to training young people, and we recognize that we have this incredible demographic of young people.

And I do want to say for the record that one of the things that I see businesses being incredibly proud of, and I think our government's proud of, and

I'm sure the member is proud of, that we are sending a strong message to young women that there is no job that they can't get. And, if they want to be our future welders, they'll be our future welders. If they want to be our future engineers and geoscientists—and we're seeing more women moving into being engineers and geoscientists—that's something that we should all be proud of. And when I travel the province, this is what businesses tell me. This is what they tell me their No. 1 priority is hiring local people and having a government that will stand with them to train those local people.

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe I was talking about red tape, but we've gotten onto another line of questioning here, and I know my colleague the member for River Heights, has some questions for the minister today, but just before I hand the floor over to him, I do want to say that I agree with the minister. In fact, a shortage of skilled labour is a very important issue and one of the other issues that does come up when we meet with people, with various stakeholders in the business community. It's a significant issue. Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to get to those—that line of questioning today, but I'm sure I will another day, and that's another issue that I look forward to hearing from the minister on.

But I do not want to leave the area of red tape. It is a very significant issue for Manitoba businesses, and I hope that the minister takes it very seriously because it is an important issue for businesses in Manitoba, and it would make such a huge difference for those small businesses to free up some of their time to be able to do what they're in business for, what their passion is, and that's the businesses that they run.

So I'm going to leave it at that. I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague the member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to ask a few questions of the minister, and the first question is about the job situation.

I note that, you know, before the PST was raised in June of 2013 that we had 641,600 people employed in Manitoba, and I note that as of September 2015 we had 640,900 people employed in Manitoba. That's two years and three months, and we've gone down instead of going up.

So how does the minister explain that the number of people employed in Manitoba in the latest month, in September, is less than the number of

people who are employed in June of 2013 before the PST was raised?

Mr. Chief: I'd like to be proud to put some words on the record for the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), a great question and talk about the job situation—I think that's his words—in Manitoba.

The fact is we led in job growth over the last year, and I do want to say for the member that we're projected to lead again, with one of the fastest job growths anywhere in the country. That's the job situation, 20,000 jobs; three out of four of them are private, four out of five come at being full-time jobs. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation. One of the reasons for that and, you know, I don't want the member just to take my word for it, Rosemary Sparks from the executive director of BuildForce Canada says there's never been a better time to get involved in the trades in Manitoba, and we're, you know—as we know we're making major investments in infrastructure.

And how do I respond to that? Once again, we're standing with businesses and training, over 10,000, in fact, close to 11,000 active apprentices right now. I was able to say today for the member in question period, probably still, Mike Moore: There's never been a better time to start your own business here. Businesses create jobs. He's president of the Home Builders' Association.

Over and over and over again independent private sector forecasters are predicting that not only our economy continue to the one of the best but so are our job growth. In fact, BMO Capital Markets' senior economist Robert Kavcic said this in a note to investors: "First we must praise the often overlooked, but now rising star on the regional labour force map—Manitoba. . . . Employment growth now leads the country at 3.1 per cent year-over-year (by a wide margin)."

He went on to talk about the labour market in our province. Employment growth continues to lead in the country. In March a very strong 3.1 per cent year-over-year clip, the best pace the province has seen in 13 years, in 5.4 per cent, and a jobless rate at now being the second lowest in the country, a tick above Saskatchewan.

*(16:10)

And so we know that the plan that we have in place when businesses say that they know the best way to give back is to hire someone locally, give them a good job and—so they can make a good living

for themselves and their families. And then those people in turn recognize that they give back to their hometowns and home communities. They ask government to stand with them by training local people. That is why we continue to have one of the best job growths the last year and are projected again for the upcoming year, and I think in fact, over the—up to the next three years. So that is the job situation in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think if you take a rational look at what happened then, you know, clearly in June of 2013 when there were almost 642,000 employed Manitobans in—then the PST was introduced in July of 2013 and, you know, it was a body blow to the economy and the province. And all of a sudden, over the next nine months, Manitoba lost 30,000 jobs. And so we went from 642,000 people employed in June of 2013 down to 612,000 people employed in March of 2014, a loss of about 30,000 jobs.

Now, fortunately, there's been a little bit of a recovery, and the current government and the minister is trying to explain this as a, you know, wonderful job growth but, you know, it's a recovery after a bit of a body blow delivered by the government to the economy and the province. And you know, it's—I mean, the numbers are there, they're real. The minister can try to, you know, explain away what he's likes. In June of 2013, there were 641,600 people employed in Manitoba and in September of 2015, two years and three months later, there were not as many people as that employed in Manitoba.

So we're still, at the latest numbers, below where we were in June of 2013. Now, it's not just the number of people employed. You know, we can look at our manufacturing sector, and let me give you some numbers in terms of manufacturing sales. You know, we can go back to—in fact, yes, let's go back to March of 2007. We had \$1.52 billion in manufacturing sales, and in October of 2008, we had \$1.515 billion in manufacturing sales those two months and yet, you know, in the latest months for which we've got reports—and I'll give you an example, May of 2015, the numbers are \$1.434 billion. We're still below where we were seven and eight years before, in terms of our manufacturing production and capability.

You know, it's a little bit disheartening to look on a comparative basis what's happened with Saskatchewan. Since 2006, some manufacturing in Saskatchewan has grown, you know, by more than

50 per cent. And, yet, in the latest complete years 2013, 2014, manufacturing in Manitoba is less than it was in 2007 and 2008. So it's—the government hasn't done a very good job, you know, of helping the—our province to adapt to the changing manufacturing environment, and so we've had a loss of a lot of manufacturing businesses.

You know, and in contrast, Saskatchewan, which has done a better job, have had a very significant growth in their manufacturing business. In fact, you know the interesting thing is that the growth, you know, in Saskatchewan is such that Saskatchewan, which traditionally has been, you know, an also-ran compared to Manitoba in terms of manufacturing, is now surpassing Manitoba in manufacturing in most months and on an average of—for 2013 and 2014, Saskatchewan had greater manufacturing sales than we had here in Manitoba. So my question would be, No. 1, why has Manitoba's manufacturing sector, you know, not done nearly as well as it might have done, and what is the, you know, the government's plan to try and improve things and get back in the game and make sure that, you know, Manitoba's manufacturing sector is doing a lot better?

Mr. Chief: Well, look, Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for the question, but, you know, if there's one thing I want to talk about is jobs in Manitoba. That's what people are talking about, and I don't know, the member seems to have a lot of information about Saskatchewan, but I'll once again reiterate, and I do want to say it is important for him to recognize that when I just quoted Mr. Kavcic from BMO Capital Markets, a senior economist, said this to a note to investors, that first we must praise the often overlooked but now rising star in the regional labour force, Manitoba.

You know, I—when he's talking about who's overlooking it, I don't know who he means, but, you know, to some degree it sounds like the member. Our employment growth rate continues to be one of the best in the country. And we are projected, again, to over the next year to lead, to be one of the leaders, with one of the fastest job growth rates: three out of four private, four out of five full time. I know the member would be happy to know that we have seen the largest wage growth in the last year to the average worker earning \$40 more per week than they did.

I'm not—this is not me. These are independent validators, private sector forecasters that are saying this, but it is important to note that when Robert

Kavcic gives this, he talks about a year-over-year clip. That's how people measure this, and that's why we've continued to see that. In fact, I will tell the member, here's some of the things that we hear from local media: construction workers needed; construction business booming in Manitoba; major projects boost construction job growth; jobs numbers up nationally, strongest in Manitoba; job prospects in Winnipeg looking up in third quarter; Manitoba alone sees bump in manufacturing sales.

And we do recognize that manufacturing, you know, there is a challenge, but it continues to be one of the stronger here, and I mean, we work incredibly close with Ron Koslowsky from CME. I'll continue: strength in diversity; Manitoba, an economic elite. Once again, I'm not saying these things. These are independent private forecasters. These are people who locally who are looking at these things: province economic growth ahead of the national average; Manitoba resales up. And they highlight again: Manitoba manufacturers end on a high note for 2014; Winnipeg's diverse economy to support growth.

I mean, these go on and on and on, and so, you know, I don't expect the member to take my word for the job situation here. And I was able to share about Valeant, a major manufacturer in this country that has a global reach, and I asked the good folks at Valeant in Steinbach which, by the way, where we make COLD-FX, which, I got to tell you, is pretty cool. But what did they say? They said, you know, they shut down some shops out in Ontario and they moved them to Manitoba. Why? Because they said it's more affordable to do business here. We recognize that you have one of the fastest and youngest demographics, and what we've found is that when you have a government that stands with us and trains that demographic, they are one of the most loyal people in this province and anywhere in the nation, so they stay with the company longer.

* (16:20)

And, when you train these people and as manufacturers move up, move into their technology and they move into making their businesses more efficient, expanding the reach globally, and you have a government that stands with them, not only are you taking the existing employees and increasing their skills and their abilities, they move into these jobs, they move up and then you bring in more, more young people. This is what Valeant said.

I proudly was out with Loewen Windows, and I know the member knows Charles Loewen and the Loewen family that contributes an incredible amount in our province, not only for jobs in that region, but they do an incredible amount for—I know the good folks that I represent in Winnipeg's North End; they are an incredible family. But I was proud to go out there. This was a company that, you know, had some struggles, too, during the global recession but now are doing incredibly well, major manufacturer for—the biggest for wooden windows anywhere in the nation. They have an international reach, and what are they saying? Well, they're looking to expand. They're looking to continue to grow here. These are the things that we have.

We have companies like Canada Goose that we're incredibly proud of, and how are we working with Canada Goose? Once again, Canada Goose is here, and they—you know, you can't even watch an NFL football game anymore without seeing the local reporters wearing a Canada Goose jacket. And we should all wear—have a lot of pride in that. So not only do you get COLD-FX but you got a company that makes Canada Goose so you don't need the COLD-FX.

But, you know, they're here, and we continue to see the incredible work of people under the leadership of Ron Kozlowsky and manufacturers and our local businesses. How do we do it? I'll gladly answer that question. You know, we work hard to make it affordable for these companies. We sell how proud we are of our demographic, and I shared that with the member from Tuxedo, that we—when we look at this young indigenous community—and I know the member from River Heights—I'm not saying this because I know you also see the incredible opportunities we have in that community and I know you've worked hard and you've been a champion for that community as well, but we showcase this; we highlight this. We make sure that when we tell stories that in Steinbach in Loewen Windows what made me incredibly proud is they talked about how they have been hiring people for generations from the local community, over a hundred years. But they didn't stop there. That people who've been in that community for years and years and years, they hire them. But they also do an incredible amount of work to hire new Canadians that come in. And so we showcase this. We highlight this to major manufacturers all over—all over the world and we say this is a place to do business.

But, at the end of the day, where we see the greatest opportunity and where these companies tell us makes the biggest difference is there's a government who stands with them to train these people to make sure that they have the skills that they can, as their businesses expand. This is why Manitoba, it's because of people like Loewen Windows, because of the folks at Canada Goose, because the folks at Valeant, because under the leadership of people like Ron Kozlowsky, this is why they are part and they have built Canada's—one of Canada's fastest growing economies. That's what we've done. We've listened to them. I've been able to travel and see first-hand, and this is what we will continue to do.

Rosemary Sparks: There's never been a better time to get involved in the trades in Manitoba.

And how do you respond to that? Well, you triple the amount of active apprentices to close to 11,000.

Mike Moore: There's never been a better time to start a business in Manitoba.

Once again, these are not things that I'm saying. These are things that I hear from people first-hand, and I proudly share that.

These people say this confidently because of the testament of the hard work of those businesses, both small, medium and major manufacturers, but they also know there's a government who will stand with them, and I think we should all be incredibly proud of not Saskatchewan, but of Manitoba because we do lead, we are seen as leaders around economic growth. We do lead in job growth, both in the private side and in terms of full-time jobs. That's the situation here. You know, these are the businesses that we stand with and we'll continue to use this approach.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister. It's—one can always find, you know, good anecdotal stories, but it's important as well to have a look at the overall picture and to be realistic. And, as I've pointed out, the number of people employed in June of 2013 was just shy of 642,000 Manitobans and that that number is actually not even back up there in the latest September 2015 numbers.

That—oh, it's important to be proud of who we are as Manitobans, and we have such extraordinary potential here in this province; the sky is the limit. And I believe that there is just so much more that we

could be doing to, you know, enable Manitobans and Manitoba companies to achieve their potential.

I think one of the things which the minister probably overlooks is the fact that, you know, when you look at the net movement of people from, you know, in and out of Manitoba, that the net extraprovincial migration, the movement of people from Manitoba to other provinces, has been going up the last few years, and significantly so, so that, you know, part of the reason for low unemployment is that we're losing a lot of people to other provinces who are leaving Manitoba and looking at other provinces for whatever reason.

So, you know, we need to be cognizant not only of what happens here but of what happens in neighbouring provinces like Saskatchewan. And we need to ask questions about, you know, why their manufacturing is going up dramatically but ours still is below what it was in 2007 and 2008. There's got to be some reasons for that.

One of the concerns that has been raised with regard to the current provincial government is a concern over the investment in research and development. And I have here, for Manitoba, the provincial government expenditures on research and development from Statistics Canada for Manitoba. And they were, in 2011, \$37 million; in 2012, \$30 million; in 2013, \$29 million. And we don't have more recent numbers, but those numbers have been going down instead of been going up.

And given the importance of research and development to the overall economy, I just wanted to ask, you know, what is the minister's plan in terms of spending and investments on research and development and the importance of that in relationship to the growth of our economy?

* (16:30)

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for the question, and I am glad that I have the opportunity to put some words on the record about some of the things that we're doing around research. I do want to let the member know that we just recently announced and have expanded the role of Research Manitoba. I think it's important to highlight the expertise that sits on that board. I know that he would know, certainly, the credentials of Dr. Postl and some of the good folks over there. But it doesn't just include people from medical backgrounds. It also includes people from academia, people like the good folks like Jino Distasio who worked quite closely with

Dr. Axworthy at the University of Winnipeg, and we've seen the kind of work that happened around—the work he's done with instituting urban studies. We have great people like Chris Johnson, who is an exceptional leader when it comes to start-ups around innovation technology. So having people like him on the board.

We make sure that we have people who sit on that board who come—that have been incredible role models and ambassadors for advocating for people who are poor, who come from low-income backgrounds. And I got to tell you when you bring all of these people together, they recognize that the approach that we take needs to be an evidence-based approach. It is by far the most—the best thing to do economically, but you need to bring people from a multitude of backgrounds together to do that, and these are very committed people who deeply believe in research. And we're proud to work with them.

And we're also—I do want to say for the record that when it comes to research and development, R & D, our tax credit is seen as one of the most generous in the nation. And I think that's something that we should all be proud of. We know that when you bring a group of people together that come from a variety of expertise like we see at Research Manitoba, one of the advantages you have when you do that, you can draw in other investment. And we just were awarded the largest federal investment when it comes to research through the Canadian foundation of innovation around the work and the importance of the work around Arctic research and, of course, establishing a global centre of excellence.

So, when it comes to research and the expertise and the people who are on the ground doing this with us and bringing them together, we are seen as leaders, and we'll continue to work and make sure that the approaches that we take are—that highlight research and development, that take an evidence-based approach in the things we've done—I was able to go down to the St. Boniface hospital where we established a research chair through Research Manitoba on the importance of dementia research. And, you know, people think research, they don't often recognize that that—when you do research, it's—it could be—it's participatory, that it's patient-driven. And it's making a difference every day.

And I tell you, to the member of River Heights, I know he would have been incredibly proud, when I was there, that the group of young people that were there working, they were on internships, summer

internships, and how proud they were to say that they were doing research with people all over the world. They were working with people from—other researchers from United States, from Ukraine, from Brazil to Croatia, and they were really proud that they were able to have this work here. But what made them most proud is that there was a strong message to them that if you believe in research, there is a great career for you right here in Manitoba. And you can have a global reach with research, like we see with the dementia research that happened here. But what made them most proud is they knew that that research led to them where they're having the biggest impact is right here in Winnipeg, right here in their own hometown.

And so, you know, we believe that—in research; we believe in research development. We are very proud of the work that we get to do with Research Manitoba. And I've got to tell you, it is our young people that are doing research and our experts, the people who have been in research and development the longest, that should be congratulated and should take a lot of pride in the fact that we were awarded the largest federal investment when it comes to research.

And I know the member knows and believes this as well, but we got that for the North, something that we're incredibly proud of. In fact, when our former premier, Ambassador Doer, talked to Barack Obama and his wife and kids, they were most interested in our North because of our polar bears. Well, we should be very proud that we are now—the world is watching us invest in a global centre of excellence for our Arctic and our North, and we take a lot of pride in that.

And I do want to say for the record, it comes because of the incredible work of people in our community.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the areas in—which is pretty important in terms of technology-based businesses is the presence of incubators, and, you know, I think that this, from what I understand, is an area that the minister has had an interest in. In fact, I think he was, not long ago, announcing some investments in the Manitoba Technology Accelerator, which is an incubator.

I'd ask the minister to tell us a little bit about what—the amount of funding that was provided, how long this is for, what its purpose is and what the reporting requirements and outcomes will be expected.

* (16:40)

Mr. Chief: Thank the member for the question.

I am actually quite, as the member knows, quite passionate about innovation tech. I think, you know, when we look at innovation tech, it—you know, we—it is moving so incredibly fast that everything that we do, how we get support in our health-care services, how—you know, one of the examples I remember that I like to use is even how we use entertainment and go do recreation. When the Winnipeg Jets were here, you used to get this beautiful ticket, and you'd have these beautiful Jet tickets and you'd go to a game. But now you got to get them all online. So things are moving really fast.

The Manitoba Technology Accelerator, MTA, announced three—we—was announced for three years of funding at \$300,000 annually. I do want to let the member know here's what it's for: Their mission is to accelerate science and technology commercialization. The program provides business mentoring, coaching, active participation, networking, infrastructure, finance and investment services. High-tech start-ups are important to Manitoba's long-term economic growth—today's start-ups, tomorrow's employers and providers of exciting new job opportunities for Manitobans young and old.

I do want to say that—and I was happy to share this with the member from Tuxedo today in question period about Innovation Alley, and the member should know that MTA is one of the—not only one of the cornerstones of Innovation Alley but should know that they were there right at the beginning. So they believed that that could be an incredible place. And I was able to share today that, you know, Adelaide Street, not long ago, when people looked at it, they saw a lot of struggle and challenge and difficulty. Well, man, you go down to Innovation Alley now, you see incredible potential. What you see in Innovation Alley is a strong message that anything is possible. And without question, it's because of the good folks at MTA, people at Startup Winnipeg, AssentWorks. I mean, the list goes on and on and on of people who have turned that into one of the most exciting places in the city, in fact, so exciting that one of the mayor's first orders of business, Mayor Bowman, and I do want to congratulate him, is he renamed it from Adelaide Street to Innovation Alley.

It's an incredible place to be, and you get to see. And, once again, you know, when you look at innovation tech and you go down to Innovation

Alley, what you find really fast, the message is clear, that these are young people that have made the world an incredibly small place. And having MTA establish a network for them to provide mentorship, which is a key ingredient in terms of what any aspiring entrepreneur will tell you, to have and sit with someone with an expertise that has—that is an established entrepreneur, is incredible, which, by the way, in Manitoba, I always say, you know, we often, we know that we're the most generous province in the nation, and we measure that in terms of how much we give to charitable donations. But the fact is we're the most generous because when we face adversity, we always help others to do the same thing.

And you just got to go down to Innovation Alley and you will see a group of people who have had success, and what are they doing now? They're hanging out with aspiring entrepreneurs to make sure that they have success. But you go down there, what you will see is young people that say that they know they can have a global impact but still make the biggest difference right here in Winnipeg. And I proudly—I proudly sat with Kerry Stevenson, Michael Legary yesterday. They gave a keynote address about Innovation Alley, which MTA was a cornerstone of that, to 350 small businesses, and said here's what happens when we work together.

So we proudly announced the funding for that, and it was a multi-year, sustainable, long-term funding. And I think it's incredibly exciting for our province, and it's a testament again to the good work of the people who made that a reality over there. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: I want to tell the minister that I have heard a lot about Innovation Alley and I have been there talked with Michael Legary, and I've been very impressed with some of the things that are going on, and I think it's, you know, it's exciting to have great potential and, hopefully, that potential will, indeed, be realized.

What I'm—would like a little bit more detail on, the funding is for three years. Is there a requirement for an annual report? What is the expectation in terms of actual outcomes and deliverables for the funding? And, can the minister provide a little bit more details along these lines?

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for the question. So, I'll just say again for the record, get me rolling here, so MTA received \$300,000 of funding. That's for over a three-year period. They have a

board of directors that, of course, are made up of community leaders. They would do audited financial statements that would be—that we reported back. We would work closely with them as part of that, as part of our funding arrangement. So, that would have to happen for us to release funds to them. So, they would have their financial audited statement annually.

There are some metrics for some performance that I can tell the member now. The kinds of metrics that we use for performance would be the number of companies that they've worked with, how many of those companies have graduated, the number of partnerships that they were able to create. We, of course, when we're working with MTA, we do recognize that they—that a major supporter of MTA is the federal government, and so they continue to get resources and funding support from the federal government.

* (16:50)

You know, those are some of the things that we could do formally. Informally, we, of course, have officials from our department that work closely with them to make sure that these performance measures are being met, and if some of them aren't, we try to work with them to make sure that they are being met, and we'll continue to work closely with MTA.

Mr. Gerrard: The Manitoba Technology Accelerator, I believe, rose out of a former organization, the biochemical—Biomedical Commercialization Canada, which was set up adjacent to the institute of biodiagnostics, and I believe it evolved into the Manitoba Technology Accelerator with some of the similar people involved.

And my understanding is that the way that the BCC or biochemical communication—commercialization Canada operated, that there were companies there who were very concerned because they weren't getting the services that they were paying or supposed to get, right, and that there are, as a result, some lawsuits before the courts related to this matter. And I, you know, really bring this up just because I think it's important that the minister is aware of this and that the, you know, that there is adequate follow-up and that there is adequate process for accountability. I mean, one would not want to see, for example, provincial dollars supposed to go for, you know, bringing companies forward and allowing them to flourish being used for legal expenses to defend lawsuits as a result of what happened or didn't happen, whatever the situation was at the

biochemical–Biomedical Commercialization Canada. And I think it would be, you know, important for the minister to be aware of some of the past history and to make sure that there's not problems which emerge in the future.

I think that this whole area of incubation of technology business is extraordinarily important. We want to grow the technology sector in this province, and giving businesses a helping hand is—can be, you know, a really, really good way to grow the technology sector in this province, which is an important and future-thinking sector, if there can be, you know, a little more important to the province in many ways, partly because, you know, these are good companies, but partly because when you get a whole lot of good companies working together that you get a synergism and that they can help each other and that they can result in some pretty strong growth, and not only in companies but in employment, in—you know, in good things for Manitoba.

But I think that it's important that, you know, this be based in, you know, mechanisms which are put in place at the provincial level to make sure and to watch what's going on, to have—I presume there would be annual reports of some sort that would be reports of what's happening. I would expect that the Province might actually interview and talk to some of the companies who are receiving services to ensure that they're getting the services that they've been promised and that things are working out well.

Oh, it's a extraordinarily important area to do well, but there's a, you know, a varied history across the country and around the world of how well incubators have worked, and there've been some comments broadly about this area. So it's important to be doing this to helping our technology companies, but it's important to be making sure that it's done in a really strong and accountable way that works well for companies.

And I'm just, you know, asking the minister if he's aware of some of the history and whether he's going to be keeping a close eye on the situation and make sure that all is well under the current arrangements and that things are actually moving forward in a very positive way. So thank you.

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for—I didn't take it so much as a comment, but, you know, maybe advice. And, I certainly appreciate that.

You know, there's nothing that he had said that I disagreed with, and I do appreciate his advice and, of

course, his concern for putting it on the record. And I did say, and will continue to work with, not just MTA, but all of the organizations and businesses and people that we have agreements with, and some of them are contractual agreements.

We do—I do want to say that, of course, we want to make sure that—and we work very hands-on on this about the, you know, the annual audited financial statements, and they're available for people to see. We work closely with MTA and others that there is a performance metric in terms of what we—our expectations are for them to—how they're working with companies, the kinds of graduates, the kinds of partnerships that they're creating. We do recognize and, of course, work very closely with the federal government and we know that, with us and the federal government, our requirements are quite strict.

And I do want to say, and I thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) again, he talked and touched on eligible and ineligible expenses. And, we, of course, we pay close attention to that. We will continue to pay close attention to that with all of our partners. We recognize how important process is, and that process needs to be accountable, it needs to be transparent.

And I do want to say, as we're doing that, we're certainly not trying to make it more difficult for people to do their work. We know that they do a tremendous amount of work. But, certainly, as they are doing work and we're supporting that work, that there is a process that needs to be about accountability, about transparency, that there needs to be continuous follow-up as we work closely with them. Part of the follow-up is, of course, around expenses and how they're using their expenses and the kinds of outcomes we hope to get from the kinds of things that we're doing.

Often we know that the businesses and organizations that we work with—we're not the only funder. So, you know, sometimes they're getting private sector support, and there's requirements for the private sector support. Some of them get other levels of government, both municipal and federal government with our support, and so we know that there are robust ways in which there is expectation, not from us but also from other—not just from us, but from other levels of government, and private sector donations that we make sure that we do the follow-ups, that we make sure that the audited financial statements are there and they're available for people in the public.

So, I do want to say for the member that I do appreciate his advice, I do appreciate his concern for this.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Jennifer Howard): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now continue consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

Would the minister's staff—the First Minister's staff and opposition staff please enter the Chamber.

Since we haven't convened in a while, I wonder if we might ask the First Minister and the Leader of the Opposition introduce the—to start first by introducing the staff that are joining you.

First Minister, would you like to introduce—

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes, I'd like to introduce Donna Miller, Clerk of the Executive Council, and Giselle Martel, the assistant deputy minister with fiscal management and capital planning with Treasury Board Secretariat.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, very much.

And Leader of the Opposition, would you like to introduce your staff.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'd like to keep it secret, Madam Chair. No. This is Rob Pankhurst and Michel Trudel.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Pallister: I welcome you back, Madam Chair, to this Chamber, and the Premier. I hope that both of you and our staff here had a great summer in our beautiful province.

We were ending the session this past spring with some questions concerning purchasing and untendered contracts as you recall, and I had some questions in respect to that to begin.

First of all, I believe and the Premier, I'm sure, will correct me if I'm wrong, but the intention of his

responses and of some of his colleagues in the early part of the year, in their responses to questions about the proposed \$5 million of additional purchase of the Tiger Dam's types of equipment for flood prevention. The question centred around the process that was used and around the intention, expressed intention, by some of purchasing that equipment, and our concerns were about whether or not it would be tendered. And the Premier in his responses to me attempted to convey the position that his preference was that these purchases be made by way of tender.

That flies in the face of information that we have now received which we had not at the time. At the time we did not realize that there had been previous tenders offered—not offered, I'm sorry, previous purchases made of flood fighting machinery over a number of years that were not tendered by the government and we learned this only after the session ended. So the information was not available to us at the time. We didn't know.

So I guess my question for the Premier is now knowing that \$9 million approximately of Tiger Dam's equipment and machinery was purchased over a number of years without any tenders, is he still sticking to his position that it was his intention—and a changed position it would be—to now go to tendering an additional \$5-million purchase?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, I want to thank everybody for being back and the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) for her role as Chairperson here today.

Before I get into the tendering, I just did want to indicate that our new Clerk of the Executive Council is Donna Miller, who I've introduced, who was previously the Deputy Minister of Justice; and the former Clerk of the Executive Council, Mr. Sussman, has moved over to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority having won a competitive competition for the job as the head of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. We also have with us Giselle Martel, who is recently been appointed the ADM of fiscal management for Treasury Board Secretariat.

With respect to the issues of government contracts, you may have heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) earlier today indicate that over 80 per cent of government contracts are done through a tendered process, but some contracts are sole-sourced because that's the only way of getting the information—the services.

He mentioned Bombardier, for example, for water bombers which protect us from forest fires. They're the only company that manufactures water bombers, so we negotiated a contract with them to provide that plane to us in Manitoba. And they also are the only vendor for things like parts. So, once you've got the machine—the plane, you have to source the parts on them in order to keep them properly running.

There are other occasions where you're in an emergency situation and you have to have ready access to supplies, and those sometimes have to be acquired extremely quickly because life and limb is at risk in that emergency situation. That could be a forest fire, that could be a flood. In the case of floods, there have been occasions, as I understand it, Tiger Dam tubes have been secured on a very short notice to protect property and life in communities.

So there are others—there's another example that we've been given here. Firewood for campers, for example, in northern parks are often bought from local vendors. And sometimes, for example, gravel to improve parks' roads has bought from local vendors to save on freight charges.

So and now all of this information is being posted online not just in the Legislative library as a result of the Auditor General suggesting we make these contracts more transparent. So they're now posted online. And there's additional measures once we pass the budget implementation tax legislation, what they call BITSA; there will be other amendments which will make a disclosure of contracts better, quicker and more transparent.

So we'd like to see the opposition pass that bill as soon as possible, so we can add further transparency to the way contracts are rendered in this province and under what conditions that they're rendered.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll go back to my question, I guess, and just see if we can get a little more illumination there.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) claimed earlier in the year that he wanted this new \$5-million purchase that was promised by a couple of his ministers to Manitobans. He wanted it to go to tender. Yet \$9 million of Tiger Dams were purchased without tender over the previous six or seven years, and this doesn't support his thesis that he wanted a tender to occur now. Unless he can explain the reasons for the sudden change in approach, I think he's going to

leave Manitobans very puzzled as to the legitimacy of his arguments.

I'll ask him again: why \$9 million worth of Tiger Dams were purchased between 2009 and 2014, but, suddenly, in 2015, not having shopped, not having looked at the market to provide best value to Manitobans, not having really tried to give an opportunity for other competing companies or competing interests to take a look at giving Manitobans the best value for the dollar, having totally missed the opportunity to get that value in this \$9 millions—\$9-million purchase—a number of different contracts, I think, six in total, how can he now claim that he wanted to shop this one? What was the sudden change in his strategy?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe it was 2015; I think it was earlier than that. But the contract was for the \$5-million Tiger Dams—was, in fact, tendered for. There's no question that it was tendered for. I don't think there can be in any doubt about that. The record shows that it was tendered for. It was not awarded, but it was tendered for.

At the—what happened was that the federal government made \$5 million worth of Tiger Dam tubes available to, I believe, the indigenous organization. I'm not sure—I'd have to check, but the federal client was either the Interlake tribal council or Peguis First Nation. I wasn't involved in it, but they did make \$5 million worth of Tiger Dam tubes available for First Nations communities in the Interlake. We had a tendered contract, and it was not awarded because we discovered that the federal government had already provided \$5 million worth of Tiger Dams.

*(14:50)

So—in previous situations, as I indicated, there are occasions when facility—equipment is purchased on an emergency basis to deal with a very serious risk of flooding or forest fires or other natural disasters.

In our case, we've been dealing more in recent years with flooding situations, but we have pretty high level of and pretty high frequency of forest fires as well. I think this year most of the media attention was on forest fires in British Columbia and in Saskatchewan, but there were, the last time I checked, there were above-average number of forest fires in this province as well this year, none of them apparently as severe as we saw in the other jurisdictions in terms of their impact and their cost,

but we did have an above-average year for forest fires in Manitoba as well.

We had a below—we didn't have the serious problems in '15 on flooding that we had in '14, when we had an unprecedented summer flood starting in late June, July that I believe racked up a bill of over \$200 million. And, of course, there were floods in '9 and '11 as well.

So where there's a necessity to provide safety to communities, the Disaster Management folks will acquire equipment, not just Tiger Dams, other types of equipment as well, as required and engage and employ people to fight those circumstances. And that's because we put public safety as a top priority, and that's exactly what the Disaster Management people are there for, is to ensure that public safety is put paramount in any of their considerations.

Now, in the case of the Interlake one, that was a different situation. There was no imminent flood that we were aware of at the time, and so it was tendered.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier's (Mr. Selinger) at risk of trying to mislead whoever reads these proceedings, Madam Speaker, because it wasn't tendered. And it didn't go to tender and there was no request for proposal until the end of 2014.

The Premier's spokespeople have said that he claimed he wanted it to go to tender in the middle of October, yet the actual statements, the commitments made by his government and by his Deputy Premier and his Minister of Infrastructure, were commitments that were made to purchase \$5 million of Tiger Dams almost half a year earlier, before that, no reference to tender whatsoever.

Maybe the Premier could explain how it could be that these ministers would both commit in writing to people in the province that they were going to buy \$5 million of floodfighting equipment and it took a half a year for him to come up with the idea of shopping for the \$5 million worth of floodfighting equipment. Could he explain the reason for the delay?

Mr. Selinger: The 2014 contract was put out for tender in an open, public and transparent way. That's the bottom line.

And there was a desire to work with the indigenous communities and the First Nations communities to ensure they had equipment and greater capacity to fight floods. That was a reoccurring experience that they were having in

some of their communities and it was causing severe challenges to the community. People were being dislocated. People were being required to not be able to live in their homes, to have to go elsewhere to be protected.

So it was understood that there needed to be some additional equipment made available in a way that was thinking ahead for future events which had not been yet identified, which were not yet imminent. And so the procedure was to go to an open tender, and that's exactly what occurred.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier refers to recurring flood events, and yet over a six-year period, he uses an emergency as a reason for not shopping for floodfighting equipment. That shows an incredible lack of foresight, lack of planning; that shows—that illustrates—hardly illustrates thinking ahead was at work in these decisions.

He admits now that \$9 million worth of floodfighting equipment was not tendered and attempts to say that it was an emergency and safety was of paramount importance, but, clearly, if the events are recurring, as he says, and thinking ahead was supposed to be what happened, it didn't happen.

The reality is that the ministers in his Cabinet who went out and notified people that these \$5 million worth of floodfighting equipment were going to be purchased didn't reference in any way, shape or form tendering as part of the process, nor did the Premier, until a few months later, after a complaint was made to the Ombudsman.

So I'm puzzled as to why it would take—the Premier is now saying there was a desire for this floodfighting equipment to be purchased in anticipation of future events, yet past events were that we had recurring flooding, and that each year floodfighting equipment was purchased without tender is clear and evident.

I'll ask the Premier. There is a process for reporting untendered contracts which is clearly one that the government did not follow. We were not able to have the information on untendered contracts during the last session of our House, last sitting of our House, and so the reality is we did not know until much later that these contracts had been untendered contracts.

There's a piece of legislation—we'll find it—but it says that you shall put this information on—make this information available. It's a law. It's a law which wasn't adhered to. I'll refer to it in my next preamble,

so just—section—The Financial Administration Act, section 80(4): The Minister of Finance shall, without delay, after receipt of a statement, make the information available for inspection by the public during normal business hours and ensure that the information is available for inspection by the public during normal business hours, et cetera, et cetera—

Madam Chairperson: Order. Order. I just want to—I'm inclined to allow a broad leeway in questioning, but I just want to remind the honourable member that the issue of disclosure of untendered contracts is a matter currently under review by the Speaker because of a matter of privilege raised, so that doesn't mean the whole thing is off limits, but the issue of disclosure is something under advisement, so I'd just ask you to be aware of that when you're putting your question, that we can't discuss something that is currently being reviewed by the Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Is the issue the disclosure of the Tiger Dam contracts, in which case I could ask questions about the process and so on. Would that be—

Madam Chairperson: Well, let's go along and ask questions and, as I say, my inclination is to allow, of course, the free exchange of information. But the matter of privilege refers to the disclosure and the exact section that you just quoted was quoted by the Opposition House Leader. So I want you to be able to ask the questions and get the information, but I just offer that to you.

Mr. Pallister: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. Well, I'll look for your guidance. If I step over some line, I want to know, okay? I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

So, in any case, the rules are clear. The rules say the information's supposed to be available; it wasn't available.

So, first of all, to the Premier (Mr. Selinger): Whose responsibility is it to get the information and make it available?

Mr. Selinger: I'm just looking over the information on this. So my understanding—my recollection is is that the—before there was any complaint brought forward that the tendering process had started to go ahead with tendering the—for the Tiger Dam tubes, around 5 million, and the tendering process did occur, but there was no awarding of the tender because by then they'd discovered, as I understand it, that the federal government had provided that.

So, on the question of making information available, presumably the department responsible for—and I have to check the facts on this but, presumably, the department responsible for entering into a tendered contract would make the information available once the decision is made. But I'll have to check the facts on exactly how that was done and what procedures were followed.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's got to check the facts on who is responsible for reporting untendered contracts because he isn't aware of who that should be.

Now, the tender in 2009, it was—there was no tender. There was over \$3 million of untendered contracts given out and no information was disclosed. No information was put on the computer in the library. That was in 2009, and the Premier's referenced the department as having been where the responsibility lies to abide by this legislation.

* (15:00)

Which department would be responsible, then, for putting information—for bringing information forward, and could the Premier explain the process that go—that is used? When an untendered contract is given out, how does the information flow? Does it get to—does it have to be approved by Cabinet first; or can a minister just approve it; or is there a dollar amount that a minister can say, okay, go ahead and make that purchase, or that it gets above a certain threshold; or, you know, what are the rules? If it gets above a certain threshold, somebody in Cabinet has to see it. What's the process for who sees a proposal for an untendered contract? How's that work?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the member is asking about the procedure for reporting untendered contracts. I just want to point out to him, again, that the 2014 contract was tendered, not awarded, but tendered. He then references the 2009 purchase of Tiger Dams. I do remember one thing for sure, that 2009 was a very significant flood year. One of the worst floods in Manitoba that year, so that was a year that required some rapid response as the waters rose in communities and lives were at risk.

So the member has quoted a reg. I'm presuming that's a reg under the general—the GMA, the general manual for administration. I would appreciate it if he would actually table that reg in front of us here, that he's quoting from so we can make sure that we have the proper reference, and, once we get that, we can then—the—we can then give him further information.

But, usually, it's the case that under the GMA or the General Manual of Administration, there are specific rules put in place for—under tendered contracts, and those rules are made available to all of the various departments, that for whatever reason, feel they have to proceed in that way. So I'd ask then—him to table the reg that he was referencing.

Madam Chairperson: The First Minister's request for the tabling of the document, you're not required to. The official Opposition Leader isn't required to, but, if he would like to make that regulation available that you were quoting from, we can make copies and everybody can have it.

Mr. Pallister: The Financial Administration Act is something the Premier should be aware of. There was a chapter in the Auditor General's report last year, which referenced this entire issue and referred to this as a law, and it is a law, of course; the Premier should be aware of it. And we'll continue along this line, if I may.

The Premier claims now that—something that didn't happen for years. He now claims he wanted it to happen last year. Nine million dollars of untendered contracts, and, suddenly, he now claims they were going to tender for these contracts this past year. Yet the dates don't match, and the facts don't match, and they don't support his argument at all. But my questions are about the disclosure of the information that we should be able to see, all Manitobans should have the right to see, and, certainly, we in the opposition need to see.

So I have to ask: why would it take—there was no emergency referenced, for example, in any government release in 2010. There was no indication of any emergency. The Premier uses emergencies—it's almost—emergencies are being used as an excuse, annual emergencies, in some cases, as an excuse for not shopping for floodfighting equipment in this instance. But, in 2010, there was not an emergency; there was no reference in any government media release of any emergency.

There was no emergency at all, and yet an untendered contract was given out for over \$2 million by Finance Minister Rosann Wowchuk. The minister at the time was the member from—Thompson. And my point is, the information on that contract was not disclosed for nine—1,966 days. Why?

Madam Chairperson: Just for the information of honourable members, we look back at the matter of

privilege that was raised by the opposition House leader. The matter, to quote from it: this matter involving the lack of past and ongoing disclosure of untendered contracts as required under provincial government rules be referred to a standing committee of this House.

So the Speaker has taken that under advisement.

So my advice would be to honourable members that we try to steer clear of directly referencing and asking questions about the lack of past and ongoing disclosure of untendered contracts. It's not to say we can't ask questions about the topic or about the contracts, but the issue of disclosure, my view is that that is currently being reviewed by the Speaker and we should not reference it here until the Speaker has ruled. So I just ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

I believe that you had—the Leader of the Opposition had put a question.

Mr. Selinger: I think the question was directly bearing on the question of privilege, which was the point, I think, you were trying to make, if I understand it correctly, and therefore I would have to say that we need to give the Speaker the opportunity to review that question of privilege and comment on it.

But in general, the point I was trying to make earlier was that, if I recall 2009 correctly, which I believe I do, that was a year where we had the—one of the worst floods on record, because 2011 hadn't occurred yet, but it was a very serious year for flooding. I remember there was quite a bit of concern about the road in—Highway No. 75 being shut down for a period of time, that impacting on Morris, Manitoba, and the ability to move goods to our major market in the United States, and there were homes and properties and lives at risk. And I'm assuming that, given the context of a serious flood that year, that the department may have believed it necessary to acquire these kind of materials in order to protect communities, to protect homes and to protect individual families from flooding. So that's what I'm assuming the context is.

Mr. Pallister: So we have \$9 million of untendered contracts from one company. Can the Premier make available to the House any research that the government did in respect of the choice of this company for the provision of floodfighting equipment, some research, some comparative analysis, something that would demonstrate some

attempt to actually determine the value of the purchase in advance of making the purchase and then continuing to make the purchases over a number of years? Some research, any research?

Mr. Selinger: I believe I've said before that the Disaster Management people acquire a variety of materials to allow them to fight floods and keep individuals and families and communities and homes safe. Sometimes they use super sandbags; sometimes they use regular sandbags; there's these—sometimes they use Tiger Dams; sometimes they use Aqua Dams, depending on the circumstances. They use a variety of materials, a variety of pieces of equipment to respond to specific situations.

So they don't rely exclusively on one technology to deal with these issues. They use a variety of different technologies available, such as I've described, and they make those available to their floodfighters as well—and that includes people in the local emergency measures committees, operations committees in local communities, because the first line of response to these events is the municipal emergency operations committees, and they often are composed of members of the municipal council. They often call upon very significant volunteer support from within their community and they often receive volunteer support from outside of their community, depending on the severity of the circumstances.

And so we try to equip them as rapidly as possible with the technologies that we think are—that our disaster financial people—Disaster Management people think are appropriate to those circumstances, so they try to have a variety of different technologies available to fight floods.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) says that the department or group he referenced there purchases from a variety of different companies, but from the disclosed list of untendered contracts and our comparison with those that were tendered, we've been able to ascertain, although I admit the information may not be fully disclosed and may be partial, that the only time that any department tendered for these products, the winner of the bid was not Tiger Dams; it was this Aqua Dams, Layfield.

* (15:10)

So they tendered once. The company they'd given all the untendered contracts to before wasn't the one that won the tender. And then, within a few

months, they gave another untendered contract to Tiger Dams.

I'm puzzled by that and I'd like the Premier to explain, when he says other companies were used, he's talking about, what, 75, 80 per cent of the purchases from one company, untendered. The only time they tender another company wins it and they go right back and buy an untendered amount of goods from the company that lost the bid a few months before.

I want the Premier to explain to us why.

Mr. Selinger: My—the specifics of that are what's under review in the question of privilege, as I understand it. If he has information that he wants to provide it, I would like to see it tabled and we'll take a look at it if he has that information available that he's putting forward right now.

My understanding is that the Disaster Management people acquire materials to fight floods, and sometimes they have to do it in a very rapid fashion, given the circumstances they're facing. And sometimes that requires them to acquire Tiger Dams. Sometimes they acquire Aqua Dams. Sometimes they acquire super sandbags. Sometimes they acquire regular sandbags and the equipment that fills those sandbags.

There's a unique product in Manitoba that looks like a bit of an octopus, quite frankly. It's got a number of tubes that come out of it that—eight or nine of them, I believe, and you can have several people at the end of each of those tubes that comes down and they fill sandbags very rapidly. It's a very efficient technology. I believe it's invented by a Manitoban and unique to Manitoba, but it's a piece of floodfighting equipment which may not be available through any other vendor. So it may have been acquired without a tendering process because they're the only ones that make it. But it has proved to be a very efficient piece of technology to fill up regular sandbags. I've seen this equipment in operation and I've seen the volunteers and, in some cases, the military using that equipment to get sandbags filled and dispersed to the front lines where the flooding is, perhaps along the—for example, along the Assiniboine River, and in very rapid fashion.

So, again, if he has a specific set of information he wants me to review, I'd like to see the facts in writing, so I can take a look at it, or we can have it reviewed by the Clerk, or even anybody else that's reviewing it. The Auditor General did make

recommendations, as I understand it, to improve the compliance with disclosure of tendered and untendered contracts. We've responded to those recommendations and have taken additional steps to have better disclosure for any untendered contracts, not just on the Legislative Library website or computer terminal, but, more broadly, now, to post them on the website. So that's why we've given the Auditor General those independent powers.

I remember being the minister of Finance that brought forward changes to the Auditor General's act to give them greater powers to do value-for-the-money audits and a wider scope to what they could review, and the reason we did that is so we can get the best information possible on how to improve public administration in Manitoba. And, when we get that information and those reports, we work towards meeting those recommendations and we're done that in this case with respect to any previously untendered contracts that were not properly disclosed.

Mr. Pallister: So, alterations of practice, in theory, once caught, Madam Speaker.

The Aqua Dams were purchased under tendered contract. This is not before the Speaker; we're talking about a tendered contract. The contract was for an amount I don't know right now, I'm sure you'll tell me, and it was tendered. So, good for the government. There were a number of other companies available providing that service. This isn't like sandbag-filling equipment with one provider. This is a choice, a choice to shop. The government shopped. Once. When they shopped, they ended up awarding a 2-and-a-half-million-dollar contract, after the tender was evaluated, to Aqua Dams. This was in February of 2011. Prior to this time, they had given untendered contracts for the similar goods and did not shop.

Having tendered, and having determined that one company gave the best value, they made the purchase of 2 and a half million dollars. Then, three months later, they decided to give an untendered contract for a larger amount to Tiger Dams. I'm puzzled by that, and I want the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to explain why the government, quite rightly, looked to get value from the market on a purchase in February on floodfighting equipment and then went ahead three months later and gave an untendered contract to a losing bidder. I'm curious as to why that would've happened.

Mr. Selinger: Appreciate the member giving me the time frame for that question. That's helpful to me because it helps me put in context the experience we were having in 2011. In the fall of 2011, I remember officials—as a matter of fact, I remember coming back from a visit to the United States to talk about things like disaster management and hydro, and the officials said to me—disaster and water management, water quality management because lots of water comes into Manitoba from outside the borders. And I remember officials saying to me that they were starting to become concerned about the potential for spring flooding. And so we started working earlier than normal to be prepared for that spring flooding. And, as I recall, we had some early meetings with municipalities who were, as I explained earlier, the front lines in responding to flood and natural disaster events in Manitoba. And I believe the department was properly instructed to start getting equipment together to meet the potential of that flood, but nobody had any idea about the severity and extent of that flood at that time.

We knew it could be serious, but, as the members probably will know, December's very early on. You know that the conditions in the fall may have meant that the ground was saturated at that time, for example, but what you don't know is how much additional precipitation is going to occur in the winter months of January, February, March and April. You don't know how rapid the melt is going to be. But it seemed prudent in that—with those early concerns being identified by our flood forecasters, that additional equipment should be acquired, and, if the member is suggesting to me that Aqua Dams were acquired through tender in the—it sounded like the February period of 2011, that seems logical and appropriate.

It also may be the case that as the extent of that 2011 flood became clearer and the seriousness of that 2011 flood—and let's remember, that 2011 flood was the worst on record in that part of Manitoba. There had never been a flood like that. It's very reasonable to assume that when the extent of that flood and the seriousness of that flood became better known, that additional equipment may have had to be acquired and was acquired in a more rapid fashion, because it became clearer the closer you got to the flood, that more equipment was needed to protect more communities in the Assiniboine valley, be it Brandon, even up or at St-Lazare, all the way through the Assiniboine valley, through the Souris valley, places like Melita. All of those communities

were experiencing very severe indications as the spring came forward and the melt occurred that there was going to be a flood unlike we had ever seen before in that part of Manitoba, and that included communities around Lake Manitoba and up into Lake St. Martin.

So it's not implausible to assume that additional equipment would've been required the closer you got to the flood and the ability to do it with the time frames required under a tendered set of procedures may have made it impossible to have that equipment available in a timely fashion to deal with that flood.

So I appreciate the member raising those issues with me. I do know that in those circumstances, the closer we got to the flood, the information we got started to increase the alarm and the requirements for us to move even more rapidly to protect communities. And, as a matter of fact, we put the federal government on notice that there may be a requirement for military troops to be available, but we always indicated that we would do everything we could with our own resources first and only call on the military if absolutely necessary. But we gave some warnings about that, and, ultimately, we did have to bring in the military because the conditions got so serious along the Assiniboine River and the dikes were at risk of failing in some critical areas that would've done very serious harm to some of the communities around Portage la Prairie and east of Portage la Prairie that we did bring in the military. And they brought in—and we—they brought in a lot of equipment and materials as well. And so the communities were working flat out to protect those communities and they were needing equipment to do that.

* (15:20)

And, as I recall the 2011 flood, we also had to make that very difficult decision about what we call the Hoop and Holler channel. We had a recommendation that we were going to have to have a controlled breach of the Assiniboine River dike in order to manage water and be able to have the best potential to control where that water went. And when that Hoop and Holler decision was made, we also needed additional materials to protect the homes and properties that were in the pathway of the Hoop and Holler breach, which was a controlled breach specifically to ensure that there wasn't an uncontrolled breaking of the dam—of the dikes along the Assiniboine River which would have been much harder to deal with the consequences of that and

would have been much harder to control the impacts on communities, of 'mich' there were many to the west side of the Portage Diversion.

So, as the member helps me fire up my memory of this experience, and, you know, we were involved on a daily basis trying to figure out how to deal with this matter, we had advice that we should proceed with the Hoop and Holler controlled breach. That required additional materials to protect properties that might be in the way of that breach, and we also had other communities that were at risk even to the west of that breach because the dikes were flowing extremely high. And we brought in the military to help address some of those issues, and I can remember being on the dikes with the military and seeing our troops out there, up to their necks in water, fortifying the dikes using materials they had to do everything they could to stop those dikes from breaching. Some of them were swelling up very severely and it was—there was the real potential there for them breaching and causing untold and uncontrolled damage on the community.

So there were a number of things that were done in that 2011 period that required timely decisions and rapid decision making, and our officials gave us their best advice and we responded to that advice by making the appropriate policy decisions to do everything we could to manage the excessive amount of water we saw in our system, an untold and unprecedented amount of water, and we were very fortunate in not seeing any loss of human life in our communities and protecting many of our communities, with the great thanks to volunteers.

I can remember Hutterite communities showing up in droves, with even schoolchildren that were available, to do the sandbag work and to help fortify those communities out there. So everybody—it was a team effort. We released hundreds if not low thousands of civil servants to be part of that effort, so the public service was mobilized, communities were mobilized, equipment was mobilized, the troops were mobilized, and everything necessary was done to protect our communities.

And when we compared the impact of what happened in Manitoba to some other jurisdictions, we seemed to have had less severe damage to some of our communities as a result of these efforts, and these efforts included the acquisition of equipment in a timely fashion to protect them.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) reminiscences. I have them too, and we all

do. Certainly, our former home was three miles from the Hoop and Holler itself, so I know what sandbagging is like as a personal experience, and I will always be appreciative of the people who came out and volunteered and helped in that flood. It was incredible. I was sandbagging in a home just outside the basin north of Oakville, a little community called Oakville, and the two gentlemen in the line next to me were Chinese and they were students at the University of Manitoba and they heard about the need. It was pretty impressive—pretty impressive—the way people pull together.

But it shouldn't be used as an excuse for mismanagement. And the fact is the Premier (Mr. Selinger), in all that answer, didn't answer the question. And it's especially in arduous and challenging times that we have to remember to be careful. Formerly, I headed the Emergency Measures portfolio in government, and I understand how critical it is when emotions are high and passion is all around us to be careful about protecting people and their best interest not just today but in the longer term.

The reality here is that the Premier didn't answer my question, and it is an important question, and it is this, again: The government saw fit to tender for floodfighting equipment in February 2011. The winning tender was a company that sells Aqua Dams. Three months later the government, untendered, purchased almost \$3 million worth of equipment from another company that had not won the bid.

Don't—I would prefer the Premier not use the emergency as an excuse for failing to explain why, when the government saw fit to shop and found a winning provider for a service, for a good, it chose not to buy from them but rather to buy from the losing bidder just three months later.

And I think it's a reasonable question; I hope the Premier agrees. And I would simply like to understand. I accept his argument—his excuse, I think really, that this was an emergency situation because it was in the middle of it. But to suggest that's an excuse for waste—or for wasteful spending practices is, I think, is wrong, is more than short-sighted. The very families affected by this flood are the one that have to pay the taxes to the government from their work and their purchases and so on.

So I—you know, I think it's critical that we understand why the government chose not to shop after it had shopped. It did the thing all Manitobans

do. We have a reputation, Madam Chair, you know it, for being smart with our money and careful in our own management of our resources because we know they're scarce. And my question pertains to that concept. I think it shouldn't change when the government's managing the money it takes from us, should it?

I would hope that having done the shopping and having determined there was a bidder who would provide best value just three months before that the government would have considered giving the business to the winning bidder. Why did they not? Could the Premier explain? Were they out of business at that time? Were they busy with something else? What was the reason for not going to this company? Was the company no longer wanting to provide the service or good at a competitive price? What evidence do we have of that?

Can the Premier explain why he gave the contract, after a proper tendering process was entered into, to a winning bidder who they then ignored just three months later to the tune of \$3 million of purchases? Could he explain that?

Mr. Selinger: I think I've given the member quite a bit of context, but I've now received more fulsome information here. And it does actually support the point I was trying to make is, is that materials were acquired—we're talking '11—the year 2011, in the run-up to what turned out to be the most severe flood in the history of Manitoba.

There were HESCO Barriers acquired: 4,880 units in January of 2011—January 14th, sole-source. Some would call it untendered. It's the only ones that made the product. Specialty flood product required in advance of spring flood. Flood outlook predicted major flooding. HESCO Barriers, again, another 4,620 units, two point one in change, sole-source.

Aqua Dams, which is a different product, I might add, than Tiger Dams. Aqua Dams, if I understand it correctly, are a larger form of flood protection. That was tendered out in February of 2011—both February 9th for 600 tubes, 2.5 million. But then on February 16th, they also tendered out 40 cargo trailers to carry those products and make them available.

Sandbags on March 4th of '11—2.4 million, 5.9 million bags acquired for the spring flood. And, as the dates got closer, it was harder to tender for these things. So you can see they tendered in March

for super sandbags, a different product than sandbags; 375,000 tendered for additional super sandbags—different companies in those cases. March 4th—one was a contract of 375,000 and one was contract for 1.175 thousand.

And then in Tiger Dam and ancillary equipment, there was 3,000—must be \$3,000 on ancillary equipment untendered. Sandbags were all—25,000 additional sandbags were acquired in April. Sorry, the Tiger Dams were March 17th, '11, and April 5th of '11, they acquired 25,000 sandbags, untendered, emergent request for quotes, additional purchase of—for an extreme flood event. I mean, as the time went along, they realized there was more and more of a threat to the community.

The—I think the reference the member is making is to Tiger Dams per—2,000 tubes for 2.8 million. It was an untendered emergent request for quotation. The note I have here says an additional purchase of tube inventory during response to extreme flood event. Flood event response was extreme and provincial inventory was nearing depletion. All suppliers of existing water-filled barriers were contacted and quotations received for immediate product delivery.

* (15:30)

Their backs were against the wall. The existing equipment had been depleted, and they needed new equipment in the form of Tiger Dams as quickly as possible. That's the explanation for it. They were on the cusp of a potential natural disaster that put communities, families and individuals at risk, and they felt they needed to get this equipment. Seems appropriate to me, given the circumstances.

They went on May 10th, and they got another 40 tubes for \$360,000 for the exact same reasons that I've enunciated here. They got some additional Aqua Dams, the ones were tendered for earlier, but in May 11th, they went with another 124 tubes of Aqua Dams at \$487,000 for the exact same reason: untendered emergent request for quotes, flood event response was extreme and provincial inventory was nearing depletion.

The extent of the event was tapping out all the existing resources, and they believed they needed more resources to protect communities, and the record shows that communities were better protected in this jurisdiction than in neighbouring jurisdictions where they didn't have as timely and fulsome a

response. I hope the member would take that in context when he makes his bald-faced accusations about inappropriate behaviour. People were trying to save lives in communities. That's why they ordered the equipment.

Madam Chairperson: Just as we're going along here, I think if we can all just remember that we're all honourable members here, and we want to have a free flow of information. I appreciate these are things that people feel passionate about but let's try and maintain a civil tone as we ask questions and put answers.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll continue with a civil tone as best I can.

So we're clear, then, that when it comes to the government doing flood prevention, it doesn't shop; it just does it because it cares so much. We're clear that regardless of the fact that when it does shop and finds that there's a low bidder that can give the best value using the market mechanisms of actually shopping, like Manitobans do when they spend their money, that within weeks, having determined who was the best value provider at the lowest cost and at the best quality, I assume, it then goes and spends millions of dollars with someone who wasn't able to win the bid just weeks before, all in the name of an emergency. This clearly illustrates a need for better forward planning by this government. That is—should be evident to anyone who's involved in flood fighting, I think, at the very least.

I'm not clear on a couple of things and I'd like the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to reference those. I asked him earlier—there—he could table any evidence that he or anyone in his government has ever done any analysis or research to determine what are proper floodfighting mechanisms, what are the proper types of machines to buy or, in this case, I guess, the actual tubes, you know, the Aqua Dams or the Tiger Dams.

By the way, the Premier should know that when we asked his department, they made no reference to differential qualities of different products. They simply said they bought the Tiger Dams because it was an emergency. So we have no reference to anyone until today he's alluded to it, no reference from anyone saying that Aqua Dams products wouldn't have worked well to help serve the purposes of protecting families in Manitoba, that three months before they would have; why would they not have three months later? I'm really puzzled at that.

Can the Premier (Mr. Selinger) explain the process, then, for approval? These untendered contracts he—you know, do they go through a Cabinet committee of some kind, or is the department able to just make the purchase? Could he explain the process for how untendered contracts such as these ones we're discussing today are awarded?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. I want to emphasize, again, that we're in the context of a very serious flood not seen before in the history of the province in that part of Manitoba and there was a growing concern about the safety and security of individuals, families and communities. And the department, the emergency management people, recommended equipment to us, a variety of equipment. Aqua Dams are a different product than Tiger Dams. They're bigger, they have different attributes, they respond appropriately in different sets of circumstances. Tiger Dams are a smaller tube and they have different characteristics and are more appropriate in certain circumstances. Broadly, my understanding is that Tiger Dams, because they're a smaller product, not as easily stackable, as I understand, are best suited for, you know, levels of water that are rising but only to a certain point. Aqua Dams, because they're a bigger product, allow protection against higher levels of flooding. So you need that mix of materials.

They also purchased super sandbags, which are a much larger sandbag than regular sandbags and can be deployed more quickly, but—more easily put in place once they're filled. And so there's super sandbags, there's sandbags. HESCO barriers are another product that are deployed in certain sets of circumstances. They're more stackable; you can take them up sometimes up to three layers of super—of HESCO barriers. And you can mix them, I believe, with super sandbags, although I'd stand to be corrected on that.

So, on May 13th, there was 16,000 super sandbags that were ordered, as well, in an untendered way. Again, the explanation is flood event response was extreme and provincial inventory was nearing depletion. They were running out of materials to protect communities, to protect lives, and they had to act rapidly, and that was what they were there for. Our Disaster Management people are supposed to take appropriate decisions to put the life and security of our communities and our individual families at the top of their list. And I support them in taking those actions, because they were doing it for the right reasons, in a very difficult situation where they were working under extreme stress, often seven days a

week and around the clock, to protect our communities. They should be supported in making the decisions they made to acquire these types of equipment and technologies.

There's another super sandbag contract—820,000 bags; these are large volumes of material. It was an untendered emergent request for quotations. It was also in response to an extreme flood event, the very same event—this was in July of 2011. They were still fighting serious issues here. Flood event response was extreme, and provincial inventory was, once again, nearing depletion. They give an explanation. I believe this document—I don't know if the member has this document, but I'd be happy to table it, because it gives a more fulsome explanation of what was done. By the time they got to September of 2011, they were tendering again; they were replenishing inventory. There was not—the extreme event was not as present in our communities, so they were starting to replenish inventory. So they—and in—so they went out and they got 1 million bags for \$410,000 to replenish inventory because a lot of their stock had been run down during that serious weather event of 2011—spring-summer of 2011.

So they went out and got some untendered Aqua Dams in June of '13, and the explanation was an ancillary equipment required to replace depleted ancillary inventory from previous flood events to utilize existing Aqua Dam inventory. So they made appropriate judgements to ensure that supplies were in place.

And, in '14, where we had, again, another unprecedented experience last summer, not the summer just previous past but a year prior to the summer we've just gone through, where for the first time that we can recall there was a summer flooding event, not a spring flooding event, which started late June, early July. They went and ordered 1.25 million bags of sandbags, with an untendered emergent request for quotes. From—these are different companies by the way, too, so I just want to make the point they're not all going to a single supplier.

Additional purchase of inventory and response to extreme flood event—multiple suppliers contacted, low quote that met immediate delivery timeline accepted. But it was untendered; they just got the best deal they could as rapidly as possible that could get those suppliers.

So I make the point, again, to the member opposite, that our emergency response people are empowered to take the necessary measures to protect

life and limb, communities, families, homes, in these very extreme events, unseen before in the history of the province of modern times. They may have occurred a few hundred years ago when—but they hadn't been seen before in our history of settlement in the province. In '11 and in '14, the summer event was unseen before in the valley; the 2011 event was at a level and threshold and intensity they'd never seen before; and our officials, I think, did everything they could within their resources.

*(15:40)

And then we called on additional resources. We called in additional volunteers, we called in the public service, we mobilized hundreds if not low thousands of people in the public service. They were going out there in buses, often after they completed a 'vay' of work to be volunteers. We had to mobilize the military, ultimately, to provide support, and they did a terrific job, as they did in 2014 again when we called them in at the time when we felt our resources were not capable of responding in a timely enough fashion to the severity of the events. And so when you bring all of that together, we've had some pretty good results in fighting floods.

We've not seen any loss of life. We've seen less damage to property and communities than we've seen in other jurisdictions. And, yes, we mounted a very vigorous response to these events, which is what our people are good at, and we gave them full support to do that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I asked the Premier (Mr. Selinger) about what the process is that is used in terms of the untendered contracts and he went into another diatribe, some of which was worthy, you know, was worthwhile because he was praising some people that deserve praise, but most of which was simply an attempt to avoid answering the simple question I asked him.

He says that emergency responders got the best deal. He has no idea if they got the best deal because the contracts weren't tendered. He has no idea.

The concerns I raise that strike such fear in his heart are raised by the Auditor General of our province. They were raised in a report last year in which she noted that in the sample period that she analyzed, over half the contracts were untendered contracts, no way to determine if there was value being achieved for Manitobans, value for money being achieved by the government purchase.

The Premier hides behind the emergency, and each time he does that he highlights the lack of foresight and the lack of planning on his part.

Now I'm asking him again: What's the process for approving these untendered contracts?

Mr. Selinger: It's very clear the member did not listen to my answer. I gave him a very complete answer on that, and it's very clear that the member completely does not appreciate the severity of events that were occurring, and they were unprecedented events.

He's saying you should plan for something you've never seen before. We planned for the worst situation we have plus additional protection, and then when conditions get worse than that, we make decisions to protect our communities. And I say to him our people did a good job of preplanning based on the information they had, and when they saw the information and conditions get worse, based on forecasts and the best meteorological data they could get and the best data about the levels of water coming through our system, they responded appropriately and they acquired equipment appropriately.

Where they could get it through a tendered process, they did. Where the time frame was so short and communities and lives and families and individuals were at risk, they often made decisions to do untendered contracts. And even in some cases where they did untendered contracts, they would seek multiple quotations if there were multiple providers and they would pick the best quotation of the company that could provide the fastest delivery of product to protect the communities, because safety was the No. 1 priority, to protect individuals, families and communities, and they did that.

I have made that clear in my last answer. I only regret the member didn't hear it and does not fully appreciate the extreme risk that communities and individuals and families were under. He would have us doing a tendering process in an emergency situation, which would've ensured that the materials were not available in time to meet the needs of these individuals, families and communities.

Where they did preplanning, they did it through a tendered process, either—before and after these events. Where the events unfolded and reached untold levels and unpredictable—unforeseen levels of risk to the communities, based on the best

information they had, they took dramatic action to protect communities.

And have I said earlier, they did a very good job of that, with the support of local communities, with the support of local emergency operations committees, who needed the equipment. The Disaster Management people responded to what the people on the ground were saying in terms of the equipment they needed and they got equipment and technology available to them as rapidly as possible so that those local volunteers and emergency operations committees could do the best job possible to protect their communities.

And I can tell him that those local mayors, those local councillors, those local volunteers did a terrific job, and we did everything we could to support them with the best equipment possible in as timely a fashion as possible as these events unfolded.

Mr. Pallister: And my family were some of those protected, and I'm trying to make sure that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) uses the opportunity not to be so defensive but rather to be transparent about how the process works, and that's why I'm asking the questions, and he knows that. He didn't answer the question, and I'll ask it again. No, he did not answer the question, Madam Speaker.

Did Treasury Board approve the untendered contracts?

Mr. Selinger: I've answered the question twice for the member. He clearly hasn't heard it.

Our officials could act on getting equipment as required to protect communities in extreme situations of risk.

Mr. Pallister: Did Treasury Board approve these untendered contracts?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to give him the fourth answer.

The officials were able to access equipment and get equipment in a timely fashion to protect communities that were extreme imminent risk. And they did that. They would then make that information available and where they didn't that has been corrected. But their first duty was to protect individuals, families, homes and communities. And that's what they did. They got the equipment necessary to do that and they did a very good job at that.

In—with the local volunteers and emergency operations committees, they acted with all due timeliness to support those communities, and the volunteers and people doing those operations—many of those people were doing that work seven days a week even though they had other jobs and careers and families to look after. But they were out there giving their all to protect their families and communities and we, through our Emergency Measures people or Disaster Management people, when they told us they needed product and the product was depleted, they got that product so that they could do their job.

And I can tell you, if that product wasn't provided, the outcomes would have been far worse and the questions would have been much more serious because more people may have suffered losses or injuries or damages, either to themselves or to their property and homes, than we saw because of the timely response in getting this equipment to those people.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier does a disservice to those people he refers to by hiding behind them when he should be giving straightforward answers to straightforward questions.

The question I'd asked him, and he refuses to answer, is the question I will ask again.

Does Treasury Board approve, or does Treasury Board not have to approve the purchase of the floodfighting equipment, these untendered contracts that we're referring to in our discussion today? Does it go through the Treasury Board of the government, or does it not?

Mr. Selinger: I gave the member the answer. The emergency Disaster Management people can make decisions to protect individuals, families, communities and property in extreme situations where timeliness is of the essence to ensure public safety.

Mr. Pallister: So, is there a limit on the authority of local emergency responders in terms of purchases and the dollar amount, or in any other way? Or can emergency responders then make purchases of untendered goods or services to any amount at all?

Mr. Selinger: The emergency Disaster Management people make purchases sufficient to respond to the needs of protecting those communities, and that's what they did.

Mr. Pallister: Then, could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) explain why every one of these untendered contracts was entered into by the Government of Manitoba and not by an emergency response unit, or any other local community? If the Province of Manitoba signed the contracts, why does the Province of Manitoba not have a process for reviewing the contracts within its own operations?

Mr. Selinger: Our provincial Disaster Management and emergency people supply materials to local emergency operations committees.

Sometimes they have their own inventory, sometimes they have their own material ready to go. And, when they—and they use that to the full extent possible. But where it is depleted—we often provide it to them in advance when we do the pre-planning and, then, when they see that material depleted and they see the risk continuing to be there and they need more materials, our people are in daily contact with them. They identify what's needed and they find a way to get that material to them as rapidly as possible.

So, there is, obviously, materials ahead—made available ahead of time, but when the situation becomes unprecedented and the risk becomes unprecedented, and the risk is imminent, our Emergency Measures people can take the necessary steps to protect communities, families, individuals and property. And that's what they did.

Mr. Pallister: I'm puzzled, then, and the Premier can shed some light on this issue.

*(15:50)

When he had the rebellion there a year ago or so, and subsequent to it, arguments were made by some that the cause—this root cause of this disconcerting and unprecedented event, was a desire by the Premier and his colleague from Thompson, and others, perhaps, I don't know, to give, maybe, the Deputy Premier, to give another untendered contract to the same supplier they'd bought \$9 million worth of untendered flood equipment from over the previous five or six years.

But, if it is well understood among his government members, his Cabinet ministers and Treasury Board members that this was the practice for any number of years, how could it possibly be that these rebels, so-called, would choose to take such an unprecedented action against the Premier and his leadership on the basis of untendered contracts?

If—in other words, if there had been \$9 million worth of untendered contracts go out already, what's the big deal with another \$5 million?

Can the Premier explain to me, if he holds this argument that this rebellion was caused by untendered contracts and a dispute about how they were handled, does he hold that in any esteem at all? Does he think that that was a legitimate cause for departure, in fact, if that was the cause of the departure of five of his Cabinet ministers?

Mr. Selinger: The incident in question was a tendered, open, public and transparent process; and that's what was done. There may not have been full information on that to some people that were concerned about it, and that is understandable, and it's not always necessarily the case, that everybody is fully informed of the process that's going on at the administrative level. But the fact of the matter is, the contract was tendered after a discussion at the Cabinet about that. And that was the way it was preceded. It took time to do that because there was no imminent threat at that stage of the game.

And it also turned out that the federal government had advanced resources to buy those particular products, and that is under investigation at the federal level now, about how that proceeded. But this was done through a proper tendered process. The contract was, ultimately, not awarded because the federal contract seemed to have supplied those materials in lieu of the provincial tendering process.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier, in referencing the issues of him wanting to go to tender later in the year in October, and we all know that the promise was made by his minister to the Interlake tribal council in July or August—we can get the exact dates, but—believe it was in writing as well, both from the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and for the Deputy Premier; both committed to purchasing this equipment.

So we know the commitment was made by senior ministers of government to purchase the equipment. And I can see the concern if the members who chose to resign their Cabinet positions took exception to this \$5-million contract. It's a big contract. It's a big contract not to shop, and there's no emergency. So I get it.

You know, now—unless the Premier would like to say there was an emergency in July in the Interlake, but, you know, I don't—I'm not aware of one, but maybe he's aware of one. But now he says—

he alludes to some people not needing to know or something like that. He made a reference to something like, not everybody knows.

So I have to ask him to explain that. Perhaps this rebellion could have been prevented if everybody knew that he intended it to go to tender when he says he wanted it to go to tender. Would that have mattered? Could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) explain that?

If he had communicated to his Cabinet and colleagues that he wanted to go to tender on this contract sometime earlier, say, when it was promised that these goods would be bought, back in July. If he had let everybody know, would that have stopped this rebellion within his caucus?

Mr. Selinger: Speculative question; I can't speak to what other people would or would not do under hypothetical situations that didn't occur. All I can say is, is that the contract for the \$5 million worth of Tiger Dam tubes was tendered in the—I'd have to get the exact date on that, but it was, I believe, it was in the spring of 2014.

The subsequent serious flooding that occurred in '14 was only—it was very unprecedented because it only arose in late July, not late June, as a serious event, rolling into July. It sort of transpired over the month of late June, July. But, at the time that the contract was tendered for, there was no information to indicate that that was going to happen.

So the equipment was being tendered for because of a belief and an understanding that it was appropriate for communities that have been flooded many times in the past to start getting better equipment so that they could develop a more timely, local response capacity among themselves in the Interlake. These First Nations communities had seen lots of flooding over the years, and it seemed reasonable that they would start acquiring more equipment and more expertise on how to respond to these matters themselves, and that seemed reasonable.

I remember my officials saying to me that they'd thought it was the sensible thing to do, was to find a way to equip those communities with better equipment and training so that they could do the job for themselves, given the frequency of events that had occurred. And so that was the idea, was to go through a tendered contract to find a way to get that additional equipment for them.

And, in the meantime, the federal government had proceeded to provide them that equipment. I don't know the specifics of how they did that, whether it was tendered or otherwise. I have no knowledge of that; that's a federal matter. But they're currently looking into it. We'll see what they come up with. But we followed a set of procedures based on the fact that there was no knowledge or forecast of an imminent high-risk set of events occurring. In fact, those events did occur in the summer of 2014 along the Assiniboine River up into Lake Manitoba and up into Lake St. Martin, which would have had an impact on some Interlake communities. But other equipment was provided for by the federal government, and we had our own inventories of equipment.

So, at the time of the moving forward, it was done through a tendered approach because there was no foreknowledge of an imminent risk to any of those communities at that time.

Mr. Pallister: Well, then, I'm not clear, then. The Premier claimed earlier, and I understand he was quite emotional about it when he did, that emergencies cause quick decisions to have to be made and local officials can purchase whatever they want to prevent floods. Then he admits that there wasn't an emergency in the Interlake in July, and so I'm asking, I guess, then, how could the emergency purchase of \$5 million of floodfighting equipment be made by one of his ministers and not be known to the others?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the member has completely misconstrued the facts that I put on the record—completely inaccurate. I said that there was a belief that additional capacity, in terms of equipment, was necessary because of previous frequency of flood events in that area of the Interlake. At the time that decision was made to go to a tendered contract, there was no foreknowledge or forecast that there was going to be a serious summer flood. The summer flood of 2014 was a very unique event in modern times. It may have occurred in the past, but, at the time that that occurred, nobody had ever seen an event start in late June into July with all this additional water coming into the watershed in the Assiniboine valley, and that's because the weather events were more severe at that time of the year than had been seen in many years that anybody could recall. So the procedure followed was to follow a tendered procedure, and that's what was done.

Mr. Pallister: So the flood event in Virden and the area in the Assiniboine basin, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) now using as rationale for the promised purchase by his government of \$5 million of floodfighting equipment for the Interlake tribal council? I'm puzzled as to this.

Can the Premier explain if there was an approval process for this \$5-million commitment that was made by his Deputy Premier? I'd like to know what it was. The Deputy Premier, in writing to the Chief Glenn Hudson, Interlake Reserves Tribal Council, commits to \$5 million of floodfighting equipment being purchased. If this was not an emergency, I want the Premier to say so. If it was, and his Deputy Premier authorized it, then I want to know what process was followed within his government. What process was followed? Was the Deputy Premier able to make that commitment without going through any Treasury Board process or any Cabinet process, or did he make that commitment having achieved the approval of his colleagues through those mechanisms? It has to be one or the other, does it not?

* (16:00)

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: –I've put on the record, again there had, based on previous experience, been an understanding that serious flooding had occurred in the Interlake area, and I think it's actually put on the record by other ministers, including the Minister of Infrastructure that, at the time, there was a real need to make sure that capacity was provided, and that was the thinking that, based on previous experience, there needed to be additional capacity for those communities to fight floods.

And so the decision was made to follow a tendered procedure to do that. There was also a desire to keep the emergency channel open as well to allow for continual flows of water, and part of that discussion with First Nations communities in terms of keeping the channel open was also to ensure that they had additional capacity to deal with future unknown risks that might occur.

But the event that I understand it in two thousand—the summer of '14 was an unforeseen event in terms of the weather. Nobody knew that these very serious rain events would occur in the southwest basin of Manitoba, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, that those serious weather events would

occur—very intense, very high-volume events in the summer of 2014. And I remember we had to mount a rapid response to that because it hadn't been seen before, and so we did. But the decision to let the contract, as I understand it, had been made by tender before that. The process was unfolding as the summer events occurred. But then, when the summer events occurred, it was necessary to keep those channels open, and there was more pressure to move forward on this contract, and so it was moved forward on.

The—I think the other compounding factor was the fact that the federal government had also, unbeknownst to us at the time, gone ahead and made available \$5 million worth of Tiger Dam tubes. So, even though the contract had been properly tendered, it was not awarded because this other equipment had already been made available to the Interlake communities, First Nations communities.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier claimed earlier that when there's an emergency, you don't need a tender; you don't need to shop. You've just got to act out of a caring notion and with immediate haste. And he said that's because an emergency is an emergency. So now he says there was an emergency in the Interlake, and they had to get these contracts done quickly and they had to get the firefight—or the floodfighting equipment quickly, so they decided to tender but didn't tell anybody about it until five months later when his spokesperson claims he wanted it to go to tender but it never actually did.

Now, how can that possibly be? If the reason for not tendering is that there is an emergency, how can there have been an emergency in the Interlake which caused the Premier to decide to go to tender five months later? I don't understand. Can he explain that?

Mr. Selinger: It's very clear that the member does not understand what I've said several times now—*[interjection]* Thank you for confirming that, that he doesn't understand it—*[interjection]* Thank you for confirming it again. Would you like to confirm a third time that he doesn't understand? *[interjection]* Thank you. Three times, he's confirmed he doesn't understand. It's—the record is clear now.

The reality was is that at the time that the tendering process unfolded, there was not knowledge of an imminent, serious weather event that was going to occur in late June, July of 2014. So the tendering process made sense because it was based on providing equipment for future events not yet

foreseen, and there was no imminent need to have that equipment immediately available. So they went through a tendering process, which is the appropriate way to go.

As the summer unfolded, there were serious weather events, late June and July, that required people to take action to protect communities, and that intensifies the pressure to get this tendered process done. Also, at that time, the federal government had made available that equipment, \$5 million worth of equipment, through procedures that I don't know how they did that, but they made it available. So they provided equipment. So it was not at the time that the tender process had been completed. And, by the way, there was inventory in place that was able to make equipment to communities as required to fight these events. There had already been quite a bit of inventory available.

The events I read into the record earlier for 2011 made it very clear that the inventory had been depleted, and when the inventory was depleted and the threat was still emerging and getting larger, then there was a necessity to proceed with the acquisition of further technologies and materials without tendering because of the imminent threat to communities. In 2014, my understanding was that there was materials available to these communities and the tendering process could go forward in order to provide future capacity.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier of Manitoba says there was an imminent weather event of such urgency that there was no imminent need to actually purchase the floodfighting equipment. This is a strange comment.

He also alludes to a decision to go to tender. When was that decision made, and who made it?

Mr. Selinger: The decision was made after a Cabinet discussion, and I instructed the Clerk of the Executive Council to proceed by tender to get the equipment.

Mr. Pallister: Approximately on what date was that decision made?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get that specific date for the member, but we'll work on acquiring that date. It's already on the record, I think.

Mr. Pallister: I believe the spokesperson, Rachel Morgan, commented to the media, although the Premier did not, that it was sometime in mid-October.

Could the Premier confirm, does that twig his memory at all?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'll have to confirm the timeliness of that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's try a little harder, here. The announcement was made of the purchase of the equipment by the Deputy Premier in August, and by the Infrastructure Minister earlier in July.

So was the decision made by Cabinet prior to those announcements?

Mr. Selinger: I said I'll get the chronology for the member. I think it's already on the record, but I'll get the chronology. I don't have it in front of me right now, but I'll endeavour to get it for him.

Mr. Pallister: Well, if it was later, and the announcements were made first, I'm just curious, then, as to how the Deputy Premier would know that the machine—this floodfighting equipment was going to be purchased when it hadn't yet been announced by the Premier that it was going to be tendered.

How would he have known?

Mr. Selinger: My understanding is we had been discussing, for a period of time, that there needed to be additional capacity for the Interlake community to be able to fight floods based on the number and frequency of floods that they had experienced in previous years. And I remember having a discussion with some of my officials, that they thought that was a reasonable thing to look into, to provide additional capacity for those communities, and that they were in discussion with the federal government on how to do that.

As the events unfolded there became additional sense of urgency because of the unforeseen weather events in the summer that built up quite a bit of water in the Assiniboine-Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin system, and they wanted to proceed. And equipment was available to meet the immediate threat, but they wanted to keep the channel open, and so they wanted to proceed with moving on this equipment, even though the imminent threat had already passed. There was a need to keep the channel open and they wanted to work with First Nations communities on keeping—opening the channel, keeping it open, and acquiring additional capacities. So the tendering process made sense. The announcement by the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Infrastructure, Emergency Measures, was a broad commitment in principle to proceed based on previous discussions and previous experience with the severity and frequency of weather—flooding events in that area. And the federal government was part of that

discussion along with the First Nations communities. As it turns out, the federal government made resources available to acquire up to \$5 million worth of equipment and, now, they're looking into how the procedures were done on that.

Mr. Pallister: When was the federal government's tender concluded?

Mr. Selinger: I have no information on whether there was a tender and, if there was one, when it was concluded. That's entirely in the purview of the federal government.

Mr. Pallister: So the bands and the federal government were in discussion before the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Infrastructure went out and announced the purchase of \$5 million of floodfighting equipment.

What dialogue did the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or any of his cabinet have with federal officials in terms of determining a cost-sharing formula or somewhere the responsibility lay for making the purchase?

Mr. Selinger: I think the member's making quite a bit of assumptions about what the facts were on the ground, there.

It's not clear to me whether or not there had been discussion with the First Nations prior to the announcement, and the federal government on a specific purchase of equipment. I don't have the time frames of when that was done. That was in, as I said earlier, in the federal purview.

* (16:10)

There had been broad discussions about the need to increase additional capacity at the officials' level. I was informed that the officials have been discussing how to increase capacity for those communities to fight floods based on the frequency of flooding-type events that had occurred in the past.

And this is what we do with all of our communities. We work with our communities to try to provide capacity to fight flood events, particularly if they've gone through it many occasions. And we try to, in some cases, put permanent protection in place.

For example, Brandon, after the 2011 flood, it was quickly identified that they needed a permanent dike given how triple—they used super sandbags in this case along, as I recall, 18th Street to protect the low-lying residential and commercial areas over

there. But, after that, there was a recognition that there needed to be some permanent diking in that area and that was proceeded with. And that paid off very positively for future protection of that community as—including in 2014.

Interlake communities also needed that protection. Many community dikes were built after the 2011 flood. First Nations communities in the Interlake required additional capacity to fight floods, as they were building up their defences, and that's under—most of that is under federal jurisdiction, but we were trying to work with them and the federal officials to address how we could 'proftried' more capacity to fight floods in those communities.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm curious as to how effective that partnership may have been in respect to this, because there was a media event, as I recall it didn't have federal officials at it, to announce the \$5-million purchase. Chief Hudson—former chief Hudson of Peguis First Nation I know is involved, I expect, in dual capacities, as was a minister of the government.

And that's—this is why I'm asking the questions about the dialogue with the federal government in respect of that. So the—maybe the Premier could—we'll just back up for a second, or go up a bit here 35,000 feet. Help Manitobans understand. Is this a constitutional responsibility of the federal government to do flood protection on reserve? And, if it is and the Premier's—and his colleagues are helping with it, it would seem it would require some type of ongoing dialogue.

The Premier says he's not aware of whether the bands were in dialogue with the federal government. And then in—a commitment is made by his government to purchase \$5 million of floodfighting equipment. If it was made in the absence of such dialogue, this would raise the question as to the degree of efficiency in the relationship, at the very least, and protecting Manitobans' interests, specifically those of First Nations people, but, more generally, of all Manitobans who must pay taxes to the government.

Maybe the Premier could help me understand that. Where does the authority or responsibility lie in respect of these issues and—I understand that flood protection on and off-reserve gets to be a difficult question. I understand the territories don't necessarily coincide with the set out boundaries of many First Nations communities. But I'm just curious as to how that co-operative approach is being taken by the

government in respect of working with the federal government.

Mr. Selinger: First of all, I have to say that when any community in Manitoba is at risk, it doesn't matter what the jurisdiction is, we try to find a way to work with them to protect them from serious flooding. The member knows that First Nations communities are under federal jurisdiction according to the Constitution, but, you know, we've always tried to be supportive and work with their local capacity and their local resources, and supplement and support those resources as necessary to protect communities. And that's the approach we take.

We—clearly, dialogue with those local communities and federal official about future capacity and future resources that could be put in place outside of the immediate emergency response that's required. And we try to work with those communities to see what other measures we can take through our resources and through our infrastructure to protect those communities.

It's important for the member to remember that the Floodway was a great infrastructure project done in the 1960s, as I recall. And the flood protection system that was put in place was, I believe, funded through federal-provincial cost sharing in this province. And the diversion into Lake Manitoba and, subsequently, into Lake St. Martin was part of that overall plan of flood protection for Manitoba that, I believe, was jointly funded by the federal, provincial governments. I probably—if history serves me correctly, was done under the prime ministership of John Diefenbaker and the premiership of Duff Roblin in the '60s to put those resources in place because there had been the famous 1950 flood that had occurred in Manitoba. And there had also been very serious drought in Saskatchewan, and I believe the federal government under Prime Minister Diefenbaker wanted to do things to protect the Prairies from both drought and flooding, and I think Premier Roblin was noted as a builder and wanted to do things to protect not just the city of Winnipeg but other communities as well.

But the diversion channel created some risk for communities in Lake Manitoba and particularly some of the First Nations communities in Lake St. Martin. And those risks were brought to the forefront in the 2011 flood, which was an unprecedented event, and there had already been claims made prior to that because of flooding that had occurred in part due to the channel in the south end—in the north end

of Lake Manitoba. And there had been ongoing litigation for years to resolve those matters—both litigation against us, I believe, probably the federal government as well, and we were looking to resolve those matters with those communities.

I also was informed that in 1979, I think it was under Premier Sterling Lyon, there had been a proposal by the provincial government to provide an additional channel out of Lake Manitoba into Lake St. Martin to provide further protection. But, at that time, there was a decision not to proceed with that. So the diversion channel was intended to manage risk of flooding in Manitoba along with the floodway that was built—as I believe—as I recall in the 1997 flood, which was the worst one we'd seen up to that point in modern times to a one-in-100-year protection.

When we came into office in 1999, the review of the 1997 flood had occurred, I believe, by a well-respected engineer named Farlinger, and he had recommended a number of things that needed to be done, and we proceeded to work with the federal government to secure strategic infrastructure funding to increase the capacity of Winnipeg floodway to a one-in-700-year level. And, as well, we did a number of projects in the Red River Valley to protect communities with ring dikes, and we provided individual homeowners in the Red River Valley with resources to build their land up to the 1997 level plus additional free board—or protection of an additional two feet.

When the 2011 flood occurred, we felt we had to provide a response to those communities as well to take them to the 2011—to look at the 2011 experience and identify what additional protection was needed for those communities. And that additional protection required some long-term measures to be put in place, but it also required some immediate measures to equip communities with capacity for future flood events while the long-term measures were being put in place.

A number of programs were rolled out. One of them was called the Individual Flood Protection program which provided homeowners, but for the first time in history cottagers, with resources to build up their properties for additional protection. There were dike projects—community dike projects put in place in the Lake Manitoba area. There was a concerted effort to work with the communities in the Lake St. Martin area in what became called, and what is currently called, Operation Return Home.

And that was a venture between the First Nations communities, the federal government, and the provincial government to provide long-term protection to the communities in the Lake St. Martin area. And that process continues today because there are still, I believe, about 1,000-1,100 people not back home yet from that 2011 flood.

* (16:20)

But we're working with those communities to provide long-term protection, which means making more land available, acquiring more land at higher levels, having certain areas that are protected from future development—on permanent development that would put families or permanent property at risk. So all of that has been done in co-operation with somebody hired by the federal government to work with First Nations community, and somebody hired by our government to work with those First Nations communities and to get people home. But we're trying to do it in such a way that they won't have the same experience that they had in 2011 and experiences that they'd had even before 2011, of the flooding.

So I believe there was an organization that was available at the First Nations—among the First Nations, called the Manitoba Association of Native FireFighters, MANFF, for short. I understand that there were some issues there of capacity, so our officials would certainly work with them and First Nations community directly to provide support in the eventuality—in the events that occurred in 2014 and 2011 to ensure that they had immediate protection and then after 2011 to ensure that they had long-term protection. And, as the member will know, this government put aside and booked \$100 million for long-term flood relief for those communities and put that money into—on the books so that that money would be available to provide resources to protect these communities for the long term.

Mr. Pallister: So the rebels shouldn't have worried so much, then, I guess, is what the Premier's saying is—the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) said, in a letter, to Chief Glenn Hudson on September—no, I'm sorry, it's earlier than that. We received it on September 3rd, I believe. I see a date on this. But it says: Thank you for your letter—oh, maybe it was sent out on September 3rd. I'll—we'll have to double-check on that, Madam Chair.

But it's—it refers to: Thank you for your letter dated August 5th of 2014, so last year, regarding the

invoice for the purchase of floodfighting equipment. And it goes on to say that I've asked Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization to work with the tribal council to finalize the details and provide the financial support towards the purchase of the floodfighting inventory.

The letter doesn't allude to any contracting or tendering. It doesn't allude to delays of half a year or longer. It doesn't mention any of that; it just mentions that the financial resources will be available, the financial supports towards the purchase of floodfighting inventory.

But, from what the Premier said, that discussion must have already gone through Cabinet and possibly Treasury Board. Did it?

Mr. Selinger: If the member is referring to a document, I'd ask him to table it so I can review it for dates and appropriateness.

Mr. Pallister: This document was provided and copied in June to the Premier, and it refers, again—I'll remind him because he'll have it in a box there somewhere, I expect. I'm not trying to spring anything on him. It's a letter that I believe we discussed in June. But it is the letter to Glenn Hudson from the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) in his capacity as the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and it simply—it makes a commitment to purchasing floodfighting equipment.

But my question doesn't pertain to the letter. It simply pertains to the prior approval. Obviously, a letter was sent out. It makes a commitment. It's a 5 billion—million-dollar commitment, approximately. Must've been approved by Cabinet. Was it approved by Cabinet or not?

Mr. Selinger: Bottom line is government proceeded with a tendered set of procedures, and the outcome of the tender was—were not awarded because the federal government had already stepped in and provided the equipment.

Mr. Pallister: Well, this rebellion wasn't a small thing; the Premier knows that. He and his family paid the price for it in many ways, I expect. I think it was a deeply personal thing for him, and it disrupted the operations of government and resulted in a, frankly, a damaged budget being produced as a consequence of perhaps a combination of a variety of factors, most of all, an inattention to detail by the government as they focused on inward issues. So there were—there was a major dysfunction on display,

a historic dysfunction, as a matter of fact, and the causes of this are important.

And I, again, I mean, either Cabinet knew about this \$5 million or they didn't. And I'm simply asking the question: Did Cabinet—was Cabinet aware of this commitment? The Premier (Mr. Selinger) keeps going back to six months later. You know, six months later, he wanted to go to tender. But six months later, half his front bench had resigned in frustration, and I'm getting a little frustrated now.

So, you know, I'm asking a simple question: Did Cabinet approve the \$5-million expenditure or did they not?

Mr. Selinger: The decision was to—was made to proceed by tender. That was done. The tender was not awarded because the federal government had stepped in and provided the equipment. That's what happened.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister:—those are talking points, and so does the Premier.

A half a year later, the decision was made. The Premier said that. His spokesperson has said that. A half a year later, the decision was made to go to tender following a complaint—a whistleblower complaint to the Ombudsman—a half a year later.

But what I'm talking about now is how a minister of the government could authorize a \$5-million expenditure in writing. What process was followed? That's what I'm asking. And I'm asking again. Under this Premier's leadership, does Cabinet approve these \$5-million authorizations or not?

Mr. Selinger: And I've answered the question. The decision to go for additional equipment to serve the First Nations of the Interlake was made through a tendered process, because at the time of that decision, there was no known imminent threat to that community. In situations where there is an imminent threat to any community, our emergency Disaster Management people will make timely decisions to protect those communities, as we've discussed for quite—in the previous part of the session today.

So different circumstances require different responses. In this set of circumstances, there had been a long-term view that these Interlake communities, First Nations communities, had experienced frequent flooding in those communities. And they had expressed a desire to have additional

capacity to deal with those floods, as they negotiated and worked with other levels of government to provide longer term protection in those communities, including long-term protection on Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, including channels that would protect all of those bodies of water from rising to the point of putting communities at risk.

But as the member knows, the Interlake is very low-lying ground. It's low-lying territory. And there is, even in—even with the long-term solutions being acted upon, and even with the dikes having been put in place in many communities, even with the individual flood protection initiatives, and even with some, I believe, commitment by the federal government to provide additional permanent protection to some of the residences in the First Nations communities, there still needed to be some capacity to fight flooding. And so we decided that we would be part of that solution on providing some additional equipment, but we decided that the best way to proceed with that was through a tendered process. And that's what we did.

As that process was occurring, the federal government decided to provide their own \$5 million worth of equipment to the Interlake tribal council, as I understand it. And they did that. So, when our contract—when our tender process came to a conclusion, it was not awarded because that equipment had already been provided by the federal government.

Mr. Pallister: Did Cabinet approve the \$5-million commitment or did they not? Before the *[inaudible]* did Cabinet approve the commitment to purchase \$5 million of floodfighting equipment or did they not?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to have to ask the member to repeat that question.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the commitment was made by the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Infrastructure in July or August to purchase this equipment.

I'm asking: Did Cabinet approve that commitment before it was made or did they not?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the record, but I believe there was approval in principle, and I directed our Clerk of the Executive Council to proceed with a tendered approach on that.

Mr. Pallister: And according to the Premier's chief spokesperson, that direction was given in October, but the commitment was made in July. And I get the

concern of some of the members of the front bench opposite as to why there would be a problem with that. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) doesn't seem to.

* (16:30)

I asked the Premier—it's been widely reported that the Premier kept lobbying for an untendered contract, as did the Minister of Infrastructure, for some weeks and months through the summer and fall of last year. I asked the Premier a simple, straightforward question about that in June. I said, when three ministers of government met in November to discuss the payment of the \$5-million untendered contract, did they do it with the full knowledge and approval of the Premier? And the Premier replied that there was no meeting.

But there was a meeting. According to the schedule we obtained from the new Minister of Finance's (Mr. Dewar) office, there was a meeting. So the Premier misled me, misled the House, in his response. There was a meeting. The meeting was held within a week of the new Finance Minister coming into his office. The meeting was with the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), and it was to discuss flooding issues. There was a meeting, which leads me to believe there was a continuance of the lobbying going on to make an untendered \$5-million purchase both those two gentlemen had approved, in writing, some months before.

I want to ask the Premier if he would mind apologizing for misinforming the House in respect of this, because we now know there was a meeting, and the question I asked him should not have been responded to in this way. I don't want to raise a point of privilege on it. I simply would like the Premier to apologize for misleading me and misleading the House, unless he was totally unaware of the meeting. And, if he was totally unaware of the meeting, there's no need to apologize. I understand; I do. Many—I expect many of his colleagues have meetings he's not aware of, and that's fine. If that's the case, that's fine. But to suggest there was no meeting is wrong. There was one. So I'd ask the Premier to respond.

Mr. Selinger: If the member is alluding to a specific meeting, I'd like him to give me times and dates of that, what he's talking about, so I can be certain of what he's referring to. But the one thing I do know for sure is the contract only proceeded by tender, and that's the proper procedure, and that's how it was done.

Mr. Pallister: I'll let the Premier use one of his three dozen staff to do some research on this. It was the question on June 29th in question period. I simply asked him about three government ministers meeting in November to discuss the payment of the \$5-million untendered contract; did they do it with his knowledge, or did they not. And he said there was no meeting. That's an authoritative answer that means, by definition, that he knew there was no meeting.

I get a—I get, then, a FIPPA response saying there was a meeting. So I've got—I expect the Premier's already reviewed it. The meeting was on November 7th between 2:30 and 3:00. It was the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) discussing flooding issues with the new Finance Minister of the province of Manitoba within a week of his appointment, and it creates the impression that the whistleblower is quite on with their comments and concerns that minister-government ministers continued to pressure for the awarding of a contract after the fact, that the Premier claims to—claims as fact with no evidence to support it, that he wanted it to be tendered.

So, again, you know, I asked him about a meeting. He said it didn't happen. It did happen. And I think that clarification and apology is necessary in this case.

Mr. Selinger: I think the member may be incorrect in his facts. The decision to go to tender was made prior to any meeting that he's alleging. I don't—he'd have to give me the facts, the times and places and who was at the meetings. He's saying he's done that. I wasn't at the meeting. I had previously required that the contract proceed by tender, and that's what happened.

Mr. Pallister: Again, that doesn't offer any clarity. I asked the Premier about the concerns expressed in a whistleblower complaint to the Ombudsman in respect of a meeting, which it was alleged took place. He said it did not take place. We now know that it did take place. Now the Premier has said that he wanted to go to tender in October. That's what his spokesperson says. The rebellion occurred right around that time. Is the Premier suggesting that the people who rebelled against his leadership were misguided and misinformed as to his intentions, or did he simply not tell them that he was planning on going to tender prior to their decision to leave

Cabinet, resign from Cabinet and speak against his leadership in the party that he leads?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I just have to reiterate for the member that the contract proceeded by tender after, as I understand it, approval in principle at the Cabinet level. And, if I understand the events correctly, it proceeded by tender prior to the alleged meeting that the member is suggesting occurred, and he's identifying certain individuals at a meeting. The facts of that, I can't verify. I wasn't there. But I do know for sure that I'd require the contract to go to tender, and that's exactly what happened.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) claims today that he can't verify the facts of the meeting, but he was quite clear in his response to my question back in June that there was no such meeting. It strikes me as a bit of a contradiction or a little bit of a flaw here in his response today. It was very clear there was no meeting back in June; today he's unclear and wasn't aware of a meeting. He's dancing around the issue, and, quite frankly if he communicated that there was going to be a tender on the \$5 million of Tiger Dam contracts in the middle of October or earlier, I'd appreciate it if he just simply put on the record that that was true and that his Cabinet was fully aware of it at that point in time. Would he do that?

Mr. Selinger: What I put on the record was that there was approval in principle to purchase Tiger Dams, and I required it to be done by tender, and that's how it happened.

And, with respect to the specific meetings in Hansard, if he wants to provide that material or I can look it up myself, the specific facts of who he says was at meeting may not be accurate, that may be the reason that I said that the meeting didn't occur. But in some respects the most important point was how did the contract proceed. And the short answer and the complete answer is the contract proceeded through a tendering process and that tendering process was fulfilled. And, after the tendering process occurred, we became aware as a government that that equipment had already been provided by the federal government, so the contract was not awarded, even though it had gone through the proper process.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier can check with his Finance Minister whose department responded to my request for his meeting schedule, and he will know that the Premier—the Premier will then know because it's evident today that he didn't know, he wasn't aware. Obviously, he would have said if he was

aware, I'm sure. However, back in June, he said no such meeting took place, so perhaps not.

A meeting took place between the Finance Minister and the two ministers who committed to making a \$5-million purchase of Tiger Dams apparently without Cabinet approval or foreknowledge because if that foreknowledge was there, if that Cabinet approval was there, the Premier would have put that on record today. But he is not putting it on record today, which tells me that Cabinet and Treasury Board were not aware of this \$5-million commitment that was made by these two ministers before it was made. If they were, let the Premier put on record that they were aware and that Cabinet approved the \$5-million purchase. Don't go back to the story about he ultimately wanted to go to tender six months later. That's not what I'm asking him.

There was a rebellion that occurred here, that occurred in our province. It's important to be frank about it; you don't want it to happen again. The causes of it matter. They affect all of us. They affect this House. They affect the people who live in this province, and I'm asking for an honest answer here.

I want to know, did Cabinet approve this \$5-million purchase before it was announced or were they kept in the dark about it? Which one?

Madam Chairperson: Just before I turn to the First Minister, we're coming close to the line. The—all members in this Chamber are honourable members; all members are assumed to be providing honest answers.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the clarification from the Chairperson, and again I'm just going to be very clear. My understanding was that there had been approval in principle to proceed with the purchase of up to \$5 million of Tiger Dam equipment, and that I required it to be done by tender.

The member is asking was that all figured out at the time of the letter being published or sent out. A commitment can be made, A broad commitment can be made, and then it still has to be subsequently processed through the proper channels of government. There had been, as I indicated earlier, quite a bit of discussion and acknowledgement that there needed to be some additional capacity provided to Interlake communities, and I haven't got the letter in front of me right now, but at the time that letter occurred, I believe the events of the summer of 2014—I believe you said July 29th, is that the date of the letter? I just want to confirm.

I'm asking the Leader of the Opposition if the letter he's referring to is July 29th or was it August 5th.

* (16:40)

Madam Chairperson: The Leader of the Opposition may respond, but is not obligated to respond. My understanding for clarification, and someone can correct me, the letter that's being referenced to has previously been tabled. I think the question is the date of that letter. So, if someone wants to provide that information, they are welcome to. But I'm not going to obligate anybody to.

The First Minister, to conclude.

Mr. Selinger: I'm wondering if the member would like to clarify the date of the letter.

Mr. Pallister: Two different letters—one from the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton). The stamp on it says September 3rd, but that may have been the date that I got the response. I can't tell. I believe that it was previously stated that the letter was, as you stated, the end of July.

The second letter was a week later and that was the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson). Both, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) quite correctly states, reaffirmed a commitment of \$5 million. Now he says a broad commitment can be made, and I'm paraphrasing because I don't remember the exact words, but I think it was that a broad commitment can be made—this is helpful—a broad commitment can be made by a minister prior to the approval of their colleagues.

Is that what happened here?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for giving me that information again, because I don't have the documents in front of me. So I'm trying to put this in context to recall the situation—the letter of July 29th by one minister, a subsequent letter of August 5th. It sounds like the Leader of the Opposition received this information in early September. At that time, there had been an understanding that we wanted to provide some capacity to the Interlake communities for equipment, but, by the time those letters were written, that would have been in 2014, the severe weather events of the summer of 2014, late June—early July, would have been substantially unfolded by that time.

The crisis started occurring in late June and continued on through July, and there was a desire to get the channel open to lower the lake and protect

Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, both the emergency channel—the emergency channel to get it open so that those communities could be protected. And I believe the ministers were putting that letter out there to give some assurance to the Interlake First Nations communities that they were going to move forward on getting support for that additional capacity as part of giving them some comfort that when the channel was opened, that that wouldn't be the end of the story. They would get some additional capacity.

So I think it was in that context of trying to ensure that the channel could flow, communities could be protected, and, at the same time, there would be a more—a clearer commitment moving forward on providing that additional equipment. And so they made that commitment; that was brought to Treasury Board. Treasury Board recommended, in principle, that it go forward for the \$5 million and I required it to be done by tender procedures. And that was after the events of the summer of '14, so there was no more imminent threat; that's the point, and that's why the tendering was appropriate. There was no imminent or immediate threat to the community, so we proceeded by tender.

But, as subsequent events became clearer, the federal government had provided that equipment. So, even though the tender was done properly, it was not awarded because the communities had received this equipment through federal resources. So I'm just trying to piece the whole story together for the member, so he understands the context under which everybody was acting in good faith to protect communities from severe weather events in the present moment and in the future.

Mr. Pallister: So, then, Cabinet did approve the \$5-million purchase prior to the announcement in July, in the press conference? Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: I have to, again, apologize. I was seeking some information from my staff, if he could repeat the question, please.

Mr. Pallister: Yes. So Cabinet did approve the \$5-million purchase of floodfighting equipment prior to the announcement? The press conference was held July 25th, I believe, to announce the purchase. Cabinet was aware of that. That's not a statement; it's a question—I'm sorry; just to be clear.

Mr. Selinger: I have to check the record. I suspect that this—these letters were provided at a time when there was an urgent need to get the channel open to

protect the communities in Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, and they wanted to give a commitment, in principle, to providing this equipment, which officials had discussed for quite a while that they wanted to provide equipment for additional capacity in that community. It still had to go through the proper channels.

You know, I remember the summer, for example, I went to an announcement in the Interlake about the federal government flooding—providing additional flood protection to build the channels and they had not received Treasury Board approval prior to making that announcement. But they were trying to show good faith, that they wanted to be part of the solution there.

I think this was a genuine attempt on the part of the ministers to show that they were willing to support additional capacity in for flood 'fighting' in those communities at a time when they wanted to get the channel open to provide immediate relief and relief over the winter. I mean, when you get these channels open, it stops the lakes from rising; it provides a solution to lowering the lakes over the winter, because, as the member knows, once these—once the Portage Diversion provides all this additional water into the lake, it takes some period of time to empty it.

And, because of the way the original diversion was designed, there was quite a bit of water going out of a very large lake called Lake Manitoba into a much smaller lake called Lake St. Martin, and there was about a 15-foot drop in elevation between Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, and so what might be a few inches in Lake Manitoba could wind up being several inches if not feet of water in Lake St. Martin. And that was exactly why the emergency channel was built in 2011, because we wanted to make sure that the people in Lake St. Martin weren't flooded out as the channel was—the portage—the north end of the Lake Manitoba was opened up. Their channel was opened up to keep the water down and to reduce the water in Lake Manitoba.

So the emergency channel was put in place specifically to protect the people of—communities of Lake St. Martin from the enormous volume of water coming out of the Fairford channel in Lake Manitoba. That was the purpose of it. And I believe in the summer of 2014 there was a view that the buildup from the unprecedented summer flooding in Lake Manitoba required the channel to be open in Lake St. Martin, and they wanted to assure the

communities that when that channel was open, they wouldn't be forgotten in terms of additional capacity to fight flooding in the Interlake and in those communities.

So that's why they offered that commitment and principle, and of course it had to go through Treasury Board, which it subsequently did and was subsequently approved in principle, and then I required it to be done by tender, which is how it proceeded.

Mr. Pallister: So, subsequent to the announcement, the Premier's just said it went through Treasury Board. So the approval for the \$5-million purchase of Tiger Dams equipment was approved by Treasury Board, could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) share with us the approximate date that happened?

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger:—earlier, I'm going to get him that date but an—I believe it was in October, but I'll verify the date for him.

Mr. Pallister: So the approval for the Tiger Dams contracts went to Treasury Board, and it went to Treasury Board; the request went to Treasury Board for the purchase of \$5-million floodfighting equipment in October. It went to Treasury Board.

Did it go to Treasury Board before the Premier decided it was going to be tendered, or after?

Mr. Selinger: Before.

Mr. Pallister: So all these media reports about concerns about untendered contracts are absolutely wrong. And based on the Premier's statement today and the rebel ministers who rebelled haven't clarified why they rebelled, but it obviously couldn't have been about this because you got Finance ministers and people on Treasury Board who rebelled, who knew full well that the Premier wanted the contracts to be tendered.

So I want the Premier to help Manitobans understand what was the basis of the rebellion if it was so clear to everybody that rebelled that there was going to be a tender. It couldn't have been that.

Mr. Selinger: I've put the facts as I recall them on the table, subject to verification, as I've said. I've made it pretty clear how things transpired in my recollection, and I'll try to verify the dates for the minister.

I do know this matter is being reviewed as you have correctly pointed out, and it's being reviewed and that's appropriate that it's being reviewed by the Ombudsman and by the Speaker. And so, you know, I'm trying to avoid compromising those reviews, but at the same time I want the member to know that proper procedures were followed in terms of the tendering. Ministers acted in good faith to protect communities. That's my view of the matter, and people were trying to act in the public interest in these affairs which is what they're supposed to be doing.

* (16:50)

And that's the way we've acted in all the floods that we've dealt with, is to try and ensure the communities are protected in the short term, communities are protected when imminent threats occur with appropriate equipment, and then when they can forecast events coming, we try to get early preparations in place with municipalities and First Nations communities and we try to order equipment through the appropriate procedures. In some cases, that's through tenders. In other cases, equipment is acquired through sole-source contracts, as I—was pointed out here, because they're the only suppliers of equipment. In other cases, equipment is ordered without tender because there's an imminent risk and extreme risk to communities.

So different circumstances require different responses, but underlying all of those responses is an obligation to serve the public and keep the public safe, individuals, families, communities. And that's what our officials did, and that's, I believe, what we did as elected officials, is we acted in the public interest and tried to ensure that imminent threats were dealt with, medium-term threats were dealt with and long-term threats are addressed in terms of our infrastructure spending, and which is why we've proceeded with these very, very significant infrastructure commitments to build additional channels, make them permanent; why we've proceeded with individual flood-protection initiatives in an unprecedented way in Manitoba, including cottagers, why we've proceeded with dikes, community diking projects; why we've tried to increase our forecasting capacity and technology in the province to foretell these events when they're coming and prepare communities as best as possible.

And all of these things are done to ensure that Manitoba is a safe place and to help the economy of

the Interlake recover, because as these projects are put in place and infrastructure projects are put in place, that gives greater security to the community, to people that live there and a greater ability to be able to act on those things that they need to do to make a living and grow their economies out there. Infrastructure is widely considered to be important as a component of allowing our communities to prosper. And infrastructure with respect to flooding is very important because it's often the difference between life and death or tragedy or natural disasters destroying communities.

And, as I said earlier, the efforts in Manitoba are widely regarded as being very successful across the country, both in how we manage natural disasters—we have visitors from around the world to come and see how we do these things—and when you compare the damage that was done to communities in Manitoba compared to the damage in the same events in other jurisdictions, we prevented a lot of damage in Manitoba that occurred in other jurisdictions. And that's because of the excellence of our emergency operations committees, the volunteers, the local leadership and our provincial personnel who handle disaster management and emergency measures, plus hundreds if not thousands of civil servants that gave of their own time to support these efforts.

So I'm quite proud of what's been accomplished in Manitoba and what the efforts have been made to do that. And I do honestly believe people acted in the public interest to try to provide timely responses to ensure communities were safe. And I believe that happened in the summer of 2014, as it happened in the spring of 2011, as it happened in the spring of 2009, and as it happened in 1997, and any other events which may have occurred in there that I haven't documented and put on the record at the moment.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) speaks with some pride about his disaster management performance, but the disaster in his management was a rebellion of historic nature. He speaks about preventing damage, flood damage, but the damage that has been and continues to be done as a consequence of the dysfunction within his organization is very real. And the people who rebelled did so also—he speaks of good faith and integrity—they did so believing they were acting in good faith and with integrity, and they had a rationale for acting the way they did.

But, based on his answers today, it clearly couldn't have been the handling of the Tiger Dams contract, if everyone on the Treasury Board, including members of the rebellious group, was aware of the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) intention to tender; that couldn't have been the rationale, an untendered contract offered to, through, via a sole-source provider, a close friend of the minister, didn't—that wasn't a surprise to them, according to the Premier. They had precedent. They knew before it had happened and it was going to happen again.

Now the Premier claims that he wanted it to go to tender. If that wasn't the reason, there must have been some other reason for the rebellion that remains undisclosed. I don't know. But I know the cost of that rebellion is real to many Manitobans who depend on government services and depend on the stability of a government in their lives. That's most of us.

I asked the Premier several times if he would tell me, in earlier estimates, what Anna Rothney's severance amount was, that departure tax that was negotiated upon her leaving to go elsewhere for employment, and he told me they'd be in the Public Accounts, but they aren't.

I want to ask the Premier: What is the amount of severance that was paid to Anna Rothney?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I gave a global amount for the severance payments which were equivalent in adjustments, with the appropriate adjustments made in terms of the amounts of severance that were paid when—from the government that the member was a member of when severance was provided during the government of the 1990s. It's roughly equivalent, with inflation factored in.

So the severance payments were there and they are going to be reported according to the law in the Public Accounts. And that information, as I understand it, is there, and I haven't looked at the Public Accounts but we can take a check and see what's there and the member can check himself. It's all available. Public Accounts are published according to the law.

Mr. Pallister: In advance of the Premier's intensive research on this subject, we will inform him that they are not there and the amounts paid to Anna Rothney are not there either.

I will also remind him that the amounts paid under previous governments were far less than this, inflation adjusted. Not even close. Not even remotely

close, in fact. And that they were disclosed, these are not disclosed. Not being disclosed.

Liam Martin's severance was disclosed, I give the government credit for that transparency, but the others were not. And, again, I'm asking the Premier to tell me what Anna Rothney's severance was, because I think Manitobans deserve to know that. Not a global number, I'm asking specifically for the number amount of her severance.

Mr. Selinger: Again, all—the law will be complied with and amounts will be provided as required by the legislation governing the Public Accounts and the public compensation disclosure act. Those numbers will be there as required by the law. We've said we would do that and we're doing that. We're doing that based on sound legal advice.

Mr. Pallister: I don't have in front of me the transcript of our discussions in June, but I can recall quite clearly the Premier admitting to me, and taking it upon himself, that he wouldn't release the numbers then, but he'd release them to Public Accounts this fall. Here we are and there are no such numbers there.

So, again, I ask the Premier: Would he provide me with those numbers in the interest of transparency and openness? I think these are not his dollars that were spent, but they were as a consequence of the rebellion that his government went through, that these staffers decided, well, with inducement by a generous payment to leave, and that is a cost to Manitobans; the Manitobans should know what the cost is.

So, again, I would ask him to undertake to provide that detail, because he did undertake to provide that detail this past spring, and I think in the interest of keeping his word it would be wise to provide that information now.

Mr. Selinger: And, as I indicated, we will keep our word. We'll provide the information as required in the Public Accounts according to the public compensation disclosure act, and that will be done.

And I do remind the member that it took about 15 years before there was any disclosure—he actually never did disclose it, we had to do our own research, to find out what the severance payments that were made in the 1990s under the government that he served in to people that left government and received severance payments—payoffs. Some of those people were involved in the vote-rigging scandal, the largest electoral scandal in the history of the province, and

still hasn't disclosed it. We had to dig up the information ourselves.

So the information will be provided in the Public Accounts based on the best legal advice we've been able to receive, and it will be there according to the requirements.

Mr. Pallister: I think I put the Premier (Mr. Selinger) giving his word to Manitobans he wouldn't raise the PST and then raising it and costing

everybody thousands of dollars right up there as a big scandal. But, if it doesn't answer—

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 22, 2015

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