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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 16, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Point of order. Madam Chair, could you canvass the House to see if there's agreement to temporarily interrupt the Chamber section to put the Speaker back in the chair of the House?

Madam Chairperson: Is there agreement from the House of the committee to put the Speaker back into the chair for a short point of order? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

IN SESSION

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Would you canvass the House? I believe that you will find agreement for the section in room 254 to meet today in spite of the section rising yesterday.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement for the section meeting in room 254 to meet today? *Agreed? [Agreed]*

Thank you. The Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates in their three sections. Thank you.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): 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 Housing and Community Development.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Yes, I do.

I welcome the opportunity to provide explanation and information with respect to the budgetary and strategic planning considerations for Housing and Community Development for the upcoming fiscal year.

The government of Manitoba is committed to ensuring stability in our economy and views the activities within the Department of Housing and Community Development as an important vehicle to achieve stimulation and recovery, not only in the housing sector, but in the larger provincial economy as well.

Increased spending on Housing and Community Development not only provides stimulation to our provincial economy but also provides skill development, training and employment opportunities that help lower income citizens escape poverty.

Investment in affordable housing and social housing helps lower income families to access safe, affordable housing that is required to promote social inclusion and economic participation. This will also provide greater long-term economic and social return on investment that directly benefits citizens and communities in which they live, work and play. This is why the decision to increase spending is not only necessary but is also demonstrative of our determination to reduce poverty and its effects in our province and promote economic development in all regions.

Our long-term housing strategy, supported by a two-year, 327-million investment plan, provides a new vision and promotes strong partnerships to create more and better affordable housing in communities across the province. Our investments in housing work to provide sustainable infrastructure that will provide a range of housing options that respond to the changing circumstances of all Manitobans.

In addition, we recognize that our investments in housing activity are part of neighbourhoods and larger communities. Housing contributes to the community and economic development activities that build and foster the growth of healthy communities.

Budget 2010 represents the second year of our two-year investment plan that, with the help of the federal government's contribution of close to a hundred million, will invest 327 million in housing programs and capital projects that will benefit Manitobans. This historical commitment will create more than 1,900 jobs and 96.5 million in spinoff activities for our province.

We are proud that Budget 2010 provides approximately 118 million in funding to deliver on our commitment to renew the existing social housing stock and provide the much-needed renovation and energy retrofits to reduce operational costs and greatly improve the quality of life for families and individuals who reside in housing properties that are managed by Manitoba Housing and sponsor-managed co-operative and non-profit housing.

The Province of Manitoba committed to provide Manitobans with an additional 1,500 units of social housing over five years in order to provide more citizens in need with affordable, health, safe and suitable housing. To achieve this goal, we have committed to increase our previous investment by 28 million for the total investment of 123 million that will see the construction of 600 new affordable rental units and will add 600 new rent-geared-to-income units in the combined 2009-2010 and the 2010-2011 budget years.

Our larger complement of housing and community development programs will continue to provide housing at affordable rents at individuals, seniors and families in need, support community-driven construction or renovation of affordable homes for lower income Manitobans, support the operation of homeless shelters, provide low-income home-owners and landlords with funding to renovate and repair their homes, and provide opportunities for neighbourhoods and communities to access funds for worthwhile community development projects and activities.

We know that the provision of housing alone is not adequate for some of our most vulnerable citizens who have difficulty maintaining stable tenancies. This budget also provides an increase in funding for portable housing benefits which will provide a subsidy of up to \$200 per month to the

homeless and eligible persons with mental health issues for their shelter costs. The benefit also provides support to assist these individuals stabilizing and maintaining their housing situation.

The integration of the successful Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative into Housing and Community Development enables increased co-ordination of related programs with their associated funding mechanisms that provide community organizations access to the most appropriate resources and broadest range of project support. An increase in funding for the expansion of Neighbourhoods Alive! in the Elmwood area of Winnipeg will support improvements to housing, education, safety, and crime prevention in the community.

Additional funding is also budgeted for other ongoing and new community development activities including the granting capacity of Community Places program, the co-operative start-up fund that complements the new co-operative tax credit, which will facilitate a variety of projects and benefit our community.

The creation of the new Department of Housing and Community Development represents a promising opportunity to strengthen our communities and enable them to reach their full potential. Through this new department, we are poised to better integrate housing initiatives with other social and economic community development policies and programs. Homes do not exist in isolation from their communities, and the marriage of these two policy areas will strengthen efforts to create and sustain healthy communities for all Manitobans.

Mr. Chairperson, I want to inform—for the information of the committee—that ministers are already reducing a 20 percent—have—we're receiving a 20 percent reduction in salary as announced in Budget 2010, a year earlier than what is required under the current law. As committee members will note, this reduction is included in the total calculation of expenditures and is reflected on pages 8, 9 and 11 of Budget 2010 Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue. The 20 percent reduction will continue if the applicable legislation is enacted by the Legislative Assembly.

Housing and Community Development will continue to develop its capacity to be more responsive to the needs of Manitobans within the communities and to the clients in which we serve. We have to take an opportunity to thank the staff that

have eagerly joined the new department, Housing and Community Development, and have continued to work together as we integrate all of these services to ensure that we can provide a better Manitoba for all of them.

And also, we cannot go forward without acknowledging the support that we receive every day from the non-profit organizations in the private sector, which also encourage the support of development of housing in this great province. Thank you.

* (10:10)

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

Does the official opposition critic, honourable member for Springfield, have any opening comments?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): No.

Mr. Chairperson: 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 30.1.(a) contained in resolution 30.1.

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

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am very pleased to be joined by Joy Cramer, who is the Deputy Minister of Housing and Community Development; Darrell Jones, who is Manitoba Housing Chief Executive Officer; and Brian Brown, who is the Financial Management Comptroller.

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

An Honourable Member: Global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Global discussion. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for her opening statement and, as this is a new department there is a lot to learn and probably an area that I don't have a lot of knowledge in, so this will be a good opportunity for myself to understand what it is that department does and the work and the individuals that run the department. Education and Labour tended to be the last 10 years of my political career,

so this is a little bit of a change for myself and that's good, always an opportunity to learn something new.

I'd like to thank the deputy minister and the other two individuals for being here this morning and we'll try to make this as painless as possible for them. I would like to also thank all the other individuals the minister referenced, the non-profits, but also the other staff in the department, those individuals that do make the system work, and it's an important department and we appreciate the fact that there's a real need for public housing.

Anybody who's ever travelled to India, and I know our Chairperson would understand this better than the rest of us, but when you see the kind of housing needs in other countries and the kind of poor, poor housing that people are living in, I think we have a better understanding of what we should be doing as a nation and as a province to ensure that those who have the need are housed appropriately so.

With that in mind, I would like to ask the minister: What is the department's annual advertising budget?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Do you want me to take that under notice? In the honour of time that we have, so limited, what I'll do is I'll take that under notice and I'll provide that with you as soon as I can.

Mr. Schuler: And you know what, on that one I used to spend a lot of time with various ministers in the Department of Labour, and the Honourable Nancy Allan used to take a lot of issues under advisement and was really good at putting it all together and I would get a whole package. And, no, I understand there isn't everything available here, so if we could get that at some point in time we'd appreciate that.

The next question I have is, what advertisement campaigns did the Department of Housing and Community Development run in the budget year 2009-2010?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The only formal campaign that we did was for Bridgwater Forest around the province of Manitoba. There were some initiatives that we developed such as the HOMEWorks! Strategy which was, you know, there was brochures that were developed to get the message out to communities, but it wasn't a broad marketing strategy that was attached to that.

Mr. Schuler: Could we get the direct costs in what ads were run, and I understand that's probably not

something we would get today, but is that something that the minister could provide to the committee at another date?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, I'll commit to providing you the cost of that and examples of some of the material that we use.

Mr. Schuler: What is the total number of units that Manitoba Housing oversees?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's 34,900, and in that combination, there's ones that we direct manage and there is a certain portion that is sponsored managed.

Mr. Schuler: So, 3,490 units—

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Nine hundred.

Mr. Schuler: Thirty-four thousand—

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Nine hundred.

Mr. Schuler: Nine hundred units. The minister corrected me. And so how many buildings is that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So there are—in those—the 34,900 units that we do have, there are 1,200 projects. Now, that would include both the direct-managed and the sponsored managed and non-profit. And what you need to know is that there's multiple buildings in some of those projects.

Mr. Schuler: And again, I don't know this, so I'll ask. Is there an annual report that's done on all the projects? Is it possible to get a list of all the projects we have with an address, you know, just for the committee's sake, just to have an understanding of the magnitude.

I'd have to say, 34,900, that's a lot of units. And 1,200 projects. That's a magnitude which—like, I don't know if it's possible to get a printout of all the projects and their addresses, like, where they're located. Is that possible?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, we can provide the member with the master list for all of our units.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that.

How many buildings are managed directly—or projects?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have—we direct manage 13,100 units, and within those units there's 541 projects? *[interjection]* Fifty-one projects.

Mr. Schuler: Is it possible to get the list split out by which ones are managed directly and which ones are managed indirectly?

* (10:20)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, we can provide that as part of the master list.

Mr. Schuler: The minister—the committee thanks the minister and her department for that.

Of the buildings that are not managed directly, how many are managed by a company *[inaudible]* that would be for profit.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We don't have the breakdown of that, but we can provide that to you.

Mr. Schuler: The committee thanks the minister for that. Just to be clear, there's a certain amount that are managed by property management companies—*[interjection]*—Linden properties, whichever, you know, Oak properties—*[interjection]*—whatever.

I take it, then, there are others that are managed by non-profit charities. Is that correct? Would the minister have an idea of how many of those there would be?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there are 260 non-profit and co-operative groups in which we work with. And we can provide the member with the list.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that. So there are obviously property management companies that manage some of the properties. There'd be non-profit and charities that would manage some of the properties. Who would manage the rest of the properties? Is there a—are some managed directly by the department? How does that work?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yeah, that's correct. There are some that are—ran by not-for-profit organizations. There's some that we have agreements with property managers. There are some that we direct-manage ourselves.

So it's a combination. It depends on, geographically, where this property is, how those decisions get made and what's in the best interest of the community.

Mr. Schuler: And how many projects are directly managed by and controlled by the department or public entities?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It—the number of properties that we manage directly is 551 projects. So that total number, that includes the 13,100 units. That's what we're responsible for, and that would be under our Tenant Services and Asset Management branch of Manitoba Housing that manages that portfolio.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister provide the committee with the names of the management companies that are contracted to manage property? I take it there's a series of them?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, we can, but we'll have it under notice. Can I—do I—can I clarify with the member, though, are you talking about all of our not-for-profit or co-operatives and then some of them that are ran by the private sector?

Mr. Schuler: No, because the minister was going to endeavour to get us the ones that are run by profit and non-profit and charities, and there were 260, she thought, and that was going to be broken up into a group. And then it's one of these that's just way too easy. I mean, that list then is obviously run by a non-profit charity.

So I mean, because the numbers are so big, I mean, that's—just to get a handle on where that is. What we're basically asking for as the committee is: What are the management companies? Who are they that are involved with government in managing some of these properties?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll endeavour to gather that information and provide that to the member.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister provide the committee with what would be the general terms of those agreements? Because I take it there would have to be some kind of—is it a five-year agreement? Is it a blanket agreement? And, like, what percentage—like, how do they pay these management companies is what I'm trying to get at.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, in Housing, we negotiate with some non-profit organizations or co-operatives around rent supplements, and so we will have—we have five-year agreements with those proponents, and we can provide you a copy of that.

When we're talking about the property manager aspect of it, often what happens it's the not-for-profit organization negotiating directly with the property manager. So we do not oversee those negotiations. That's their responsibility.

Mr. Schuler: So, just to understand, there—are all the properties non-for-profit and charity, and then they can decide to bring in a property management company? Or are there some projects which the government just directly has property management companies administer?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will endeavour to answer this question for the member.

So what we do is we go into an agreement with a not-for-profit organization, and a good example—I'm not going to give an example because I don't think that they have a property manager.

But of a particular project, and that particular project we negotiate with them our agreement, maybe to build the—it's a brand new build, to build this facility. And after it's built and they are managing it, they can themselves go and negotiate with a private property manager—a deal. So that is what happens.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Schuler: Okay and, again, I just want to be really clear because I—the—there are 1,200 projects, and so they are all run by non-profit or run directly by government. So there's only those two. And, then, if somebody chooses to, a non-profit organization can have a property management company come in, and that would not be under the purview of the department, then. That would be a side agreement signed by the non-profit?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yeah. It would be a standard property agreement that—with the not-for-profit would negotiate with the property manager.

I think it's hard for us to talk about the private sector and name names, right? Because we might leave somebody out or it might not be a person that's directly involved with the portfolio. But I know we're very familiar with SAM (Management). I think you've heard about SAM (Management) yourself. And so that is an example of an organization that would be—you know, another co-operative could negotiate with them to provide services for them. Beaumont gardens in Fort Garry is a good example of that.

* (10:30)

Mr. Schuler: And, again, the non-profit would be able to go and basically pick anybody—like, they could go to Globe General Agencies or—I'm trying to think of—funny how you drive by these apartment blocks and you should know all the names; then it comes to you, you can't remember any of them. But, you know, so they could basically go to anybody, depending on what they're looking for, and negotiate a deal?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, I thank the member for the question. So what I can advise is that we do have operational reviews that is under our portfolio administration. And we will go in, and we will

review agreements that not-for-profits will have signed with property managers and assess them.

There are particular—we'll have to—we can provide this to the member. Like, there are particular expectations that not-for-profits have to meet. Some of them is the rent that they are going to charge. And we are in constant conversation with them and evaluating that and ensuring that they're following through with the contracts we sign.

Mr. Schuler: Is there a list of property management companies that the department recommends? Is there a list that they don't recommend, or does the department not involve itself in that area at all?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The not-for-profits are not-for-profit organizations. They manage their own buildings, so we trust that they will go do their own due diligence and make sure that they can get the best deal for themselves and for their tenants.

Mr. Schuler: And, again, I just want to be really clear on this one. So there's no involvement by the department or departmental staff on choosing of property management companies. That is done by non-profit boards and corporations; that's done directly.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that.

Of the entities that are directly managed by government—and that would be 551 projects—are any of those managed by property management companies, or are all those managed in-house?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Those 551 projects are all managed by TSAM, Tenant Services and Asset Management branch of Manitoba Housing.

Mr. Schuler: Okay and TSAM, does that fall under this department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: So the minister directly administers that as well, and it's also a service that is offered to non-profits. Correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We should probably—you know, I will offer a full briefing to the member about the department and how it's organized, because it is—it's very complicated. It's still a Crown corporation, Manitoba Housing, that works within, now, this new Department of Housing and Community Development. So I offer that to you if you're interested in sitting down with myself and the

department staff and having a thorough conversation about it. So we could really have a dialogue, rather than a Q and A, which would be helpful, I think. I offer that service. I'm not done yet.

But what the question was, now, all of our property is managed—the 13,100 units is directly managed by TSAM. The only time that we would get involved with a not-for-profit organization is if they were having difficulty managing and we needed to provide them some support and they've asked us for that support. Then we would offer to give them some information, whatever that level of support is necessary.

Mr. Schuler: And that sort of does explain it. Minister, I'm probably one of those politicians that believes it's not one or the other. It's one and the other. So I'm really good with the Q and A today and, yes, I'll take her up on the briefing so, I'm good with that, and again, this is a very big department and just trying to understand how it works and how does it function. The minister does this full time and has the department head to walk her through it. For the critic, it's more challenging, so.

The next question I have is what is the current vacancy rate in public housing in Manitoba, if any?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Now, as everything with housing, it's not simply reported what our vacancy is. Our vacancy rate in the province is 4.9 percent. However, we have been being extremely aggressive—and I have to congratulate the department on their vacancy management strategy where they have been going and making phone calls and encouraging individuals and telling them about other opportunities. We've been able to, more recently, and I can't remember, in just a few months, move 300 people into some of our units and provide them with good quality housing.

The other part that you need to know is that there is a certain percentage, and that would be 5.9 percent of our stock, is now not for rent—is what we call it—and it's not for rent because we're going under great renovations and I think you've probably heard about the announcements, recently, Lord Selkirk Park, renovating 314 units. We're doing similar project in Gilbert Park. We're doing some work in Brandon, and in order to get those refreshes, as we call them, completed, we need to have vacancies. So we're—there's vacancies being created by people moving out and, as those get created, we are doing blocks of units there.

And I just—just so the member knows, it's a really exciting project in Lord Selkirk Park where we are hiring local members to do the work. So it's a really rewarding initiative and I'm very proud of the staff and the work that Minister Mackintosh did to formulate it.

Mr. Schuler: How much funding comes from the federal government for housing in Manitoba?

* (10:40)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The federal government has provided us with a hundred million dollars over the next two years for our HOMEWorks! strategy, and that would include the RRAP money, capital projects, stimulus. This was the stimulus money.

But, on a yearly basis, and I'm sure the member is familiar about the historical perspective of what's happened with the relationship between the federal government and provincial and territorial jurisdictions, is that there's been an agreement and that, every year, it's been reducing. And so this year we can report that we will be receiving \$64 million from the federal government, but it will continue to decline.

We continue to advocate with the federal government about their role in housing, and participating with us fully to provide that. And we're right now working on our next agreement for RRAP and AHI and homelessness.

Mr. Schuler: When these contracts are let—and were looking at—if it's \$64 million annual funding plus a hundred-million stimulus, we're looking at about approximately \$220-plus million over two years. Obviously, that means that there's going to be some new facilities built. The minister did announce that. I think we saw the announcements over the last couple of weeks.

How are those contracts awarded to build these new units?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just have to put on the record a point of clarification. I just want to make sure that the member knows exactly, the \$100 million that we received for the two years was last year's budget, '09-10, and this year's budget, '10-11. I just wanted to clarify that for the member.

So there is—if you're talking about new bills that you're asking about, where are we deciding to do that—well, it's very exciting. There's historical investments that are being made across the province to build new, that we haven't seen this kind of

activity as far as housing, in a very, very long time—I'd like to say since the '70s, probably. And what we're doing is we're working with proponents. Often what we get is, we have what we call a project development fund, where organizations can approach us and they are awarded a \$60,000 grant. And they take that grant and they develop their dream project based on what their needs are. So what we do, as the department is, we evaluate a particular community, do an assessment, demographic assessment, on what is going on in that community, what are their needs and then also based on community interest. That's how the decisions are being made.

Mr. Schuler: Of that \$100 million, which, \$50 million would have been allocated to the provincial government last year and then \$50 million this year for stimulus funding, has last year's \$50 million been spent or is that still in the development stage?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I can assure the member that that money is fully committed and we are confident, with the federal stimulus money, we have the deadline that we need to complete these builds, by March 2011, and that's the target we're working towards. *[interjection]* Or, 2012? We have until March 2012 to fully spend that expenditure.

Mr. Schuler: Does that include the \$50 million for this year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, that's both years are fully committed.

Mr. Schuler: Is there a list of those projects available?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, there are. We can provide you with the information about the projects that have already been announced. There is quite a few announcements that we're waiting to organize with the federal government to get them out. But, yes, we'll make sure that—we can provide you with the ones that have been announced now and, then, as—you'll hear about the future ones.

Mr. Schuler: That would be appreciated by the committee. And, just briefly going back to TSAM, does TSAM ever contract any of its work out?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All of the major projects that TSAM's involved in is contracted out. But you have to realize that TSAM is responsible for a whole variety of tenant services. So they're responsible for constructions of units, but also maintenance of those units, as well as security and pest control.

Mr. Schuler: Are those contracts awarded directly? Obviously, we're talking anything 25,000 and over. Is that awarded directly or is that done by tender?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I can assure the member that they're all done through a tendering process that's fair and equitable.

Just for the member's information, now that we're talking about tendering and procurement, that there is a movement, because of the work that we're doing around community development and community economic development, to find out how can we provide local hiring and local opportunities for contractors if we're doing work up north or, you know, in rural areas, how can we stimulate that economy, too, but still following a fair and equitable tendering process.

Mr. Schuler: What are the criteria for tendering? Is it the lowest bidder? Is it local contractors? Is it reputation? What are sort of the qualifiers to quality for a tender?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It is a point system that we do, but you have to know that the lowest bid gets the most amount of points. But we're also looking at economic development, training opportunities. We're also looking at the capacity of the organization and the historical quality of work that they have performed.

Mr. Schuler: Is it possible to access the tendering process? Is there a form? Is there a criteria? Is it possible to get a copy of that, just to see what the criteria is?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yeah, we can offer to provide that with you, but whether the format looks like or the template. And you have to know that all tenders are put on our work system as well, so it's fully accessible to everyone.

Mr. Schuler: On another issue, what is the process—procedure for testing the fire alarm systems and other security systems in public housing?

* (10:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, in respect to the fire code compliance, fire detection, fire suppression, emergency lighting systems, they're inspected on an annual basis and any of—if there's any issues, we deal with them immediately.

Our property have all updated fire safety plans now. We've also hired a fire safety co-ordinator which can do some direct training with our property managers and building supervisors.

Mr. Schuler: And is there a policy that they have to be tested every year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, I'm informed.

Mr. Schuler: And that was complied with in the last budgetary year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, for the direct-managed property, they've all been tested. The fire safety plans are in order.

Mr. Schuler: As we seem to be running short on time, I'd like to move to Community Development.

How much funding has the West Broadway Development Corporation received in the last budgetary year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: In the respect of time, I can tell the member that in the last budget year they've received \$178,647 for operating money. We suspect that through some of our other funds that there has been additional dollars that has been granted to them for specific projects.

I will make a commitment that we will go through our information and make sure that we can provide you with a—with that total number.

Mr. Schuler: The committee thanks the minister for that. And can we also get it for 2008 and 2009? *[interjection]*

Can the minister also provide to this committee what projects the West Broadway Development Corporation are currently involved in?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are a number of projects that they're involved in. They're involved in community development as a whole. They have a food security project that they're working on as well as youth recreation programs we're supporting them in. Lots of work has been happening around housing and safety in the community. They are presently now working with many proponents of the redevelopment of their site and looking at the development of the green space.

So that's just a real rough overview of the stuff that they do, and you have to realize that with the funding that they receive through Neighbourhoods Alive!, many of the communities are able to leverage other grants in order to provide them with the services, to see the great results we've had in the communities such as West Broadway.

Mr. Schuler: Can we get a list of those projects?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister tell us: How was the board appointed to the corporation?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The community West Broadway Development Corporation has a community AGM where people are elected to the board and participate in the development of the programming.

Mr. Schuler: Are any of those board members appointed by the government?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No.

Mr. Schuler: Is it possible to get a list of the board of directors? *[interjection]*

And is the minister aware, are there duties and responsibilities—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, let me—supposed to call them.

Mr. Schuler: Sorry, I got ahead of myself by a year and a half. What are the duties and responsibilities of the board? Is there something laid out what their duties and responsibilities are? Is the minister aware?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yeah, there's some terms of reference and, you know, it's—the executive director that's hired at West Broadway reports to this board and they work on the development plans, but we can get you the specifics of that.

Mr. Schuler: The committee thanks the minister for that.

And remuneration for employees and board members, obviously there's remuneration for employees, but is there remuneration for board members? Is the minister aware of that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No, there is no remuneration for these boards.

Mr. Schuler: Thank you. I'd just like to move on.

Could the minister tell us in the last budgetary year what her ministerial travel was?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: \$670.94.

Mr. Schuler: Did the travel—did the minister travel with anybody else?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister tell this committee with whom she was travelling?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was Deputy Minister Joy Cramer and Special Assistant Rebecca Blaikie.

Mr. Schuler: And where was the travel to?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was for an FPT ministers meeting. First time that we've met with the federal housing minister in a number of years—I think five-plus years—and it was in Gatineau, Québec.

Mr. Schuler: I take it that the deputy minister's costs were paid for through the department, not—the \$650 doesn't include all three travelling, right?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: Could the committee also get the travel expenses and expenses of the deputy minister and the special assistant?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that.

Has the department paid for any of the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) travel expenses?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No.

Mr. Schuler: The travel that the minister declared at approximately \$650, I take it that was for one trip. It does not include any travel within the province, kilometres, that kind of stuff, or was there some flying that the minister did that wouldn't have been reported in that \$650?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I have travelled to the north with the department.

Mr. Schuler: So any travel that's done with the department is then recorded within the department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Schuler: And how much travel was that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There would have been two northern tours.

Mr. Schuler: Did the minister travel outside of the province, outside of the \$650 that would have been travel with the department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No.

Mr. Schuler: Is it a policy—and now I'm asking just out of curiosity—if it's within the province, is that then something that the department can pick up? If it's outside of the province is that then considered ministerial travel?

* (11:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is no direct policy, but when I am doing work on behalf of the department, it gets billed there.

Mr. Schuler: Was any travel outside of the province that was directly related to the department that the department paid for?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, besides the Gatineau trip?

Mr. Schuler: Correct.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No.

Mr. Schuler: There are many, many more questions, however, as the Estimates time being what it is, I'd like to thank the minister and her department for the answers, and certainly look forward to some of the information forthcoming. I know the committee will appreciate that as soon as possible.

In the meantime, I think the committee is ready to go through the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty—sorry.

Resolution 30.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$57,541,000 for Housing and Community Development, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,375,000 for Housing and Community Development, Community Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$170,000 for Housing and Community Development, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 30.1(a), the Minister's Salary contained in resolution 30.1.

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

The floor is open for questions.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I move that item 30.1.(a), Minister's Salary, be reduced by 20 percent, or \$9,000, to 37,000.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable Minister for Housing and Community

Development that I move that item 30.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent from \$9,000 to—I think, it's \$37,000. The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or judgments on the motion?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I put forward this motion to provide additional clarity. As members are aware, this reduction is already in effect, and, as noted in the Estimates documents, legislation will need to be enacted to make this reduction law.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly passed.

Resolution 30.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,250,000 for Housing and Community Development, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Revised resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? Agreed? [Agreed] Committee recess.

The committee recessed at 11:10 a.m.

The House resumed at 11:12 a.m.

SPORT

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Sport.

Does the honourable minister have an opening comment—statement?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Sport): Yes, Mr. Chair, very briefly.

It's my privilege to introduce the 2010-2011 Departmental Estimates for Sport. In recent weeks the sports community in the province of Manitoba has enjoyed some very worthy attention on several fronts.

I think the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) would join me in acknowledging the tremendous efforts put on by our Olympians and Paralympians that took part in the Vancouver Olympics very recently.

I know that six of our fellow provincial citizens, Manitoba citizens, found their way to the podium, including a gold medal performance by Jonathan Toews and Jennifer Botterill with the hockey teams, the men's and women's respectively, and, of course, Jon Montgomery of Russell who won gold in the skeleton event. And, of course, Cindy Klassen could not reach the podium this time around because of injuries that she has sustained over time. Her teammate, however, Clara Hughes, did make it to cap off her career. And we're very, very proud of the efforts of these athletes.

On April 13th, of course, the member for Springfield joined other members, including myself, in honouring the athletes as our special guests in the Manitoba Legislature. And I wanted to say how grateful I was for him and the official opposition's presence at that event last week—or earlier this week.

Not all the excitement occurred in Vancouver. Mr. Chairperson, 2010, of course, will continue to be a very significant year in sport for our province. In April—on April 15th Sport Manitoba officially opened phase 1 of their new home on—at 145 Pacific Avenue. Phase 1 will be housing the offices along with the meeting space for Sport Manitoba and 75 amateur sport organizations in our province.

The Sport for Life Centre will also be the hub for promoting and developing amateur sport throughout Manitoba and it'll be a vital resource for sport in downtown Winnipeg.

As well, in May of this year, Brandon will be playing host to the Memorial Cup Junior Hockey Championship and the city of Dauphin will be hosting the Royal Bank Cup National Junior A Hockey Championship. We look forward to those two events. Junior hockey is one of Canada's most watched sports, and these two events will have a significant economic as well as social impact with two cities and for the province of Manitoba. And our

government is providing support to both these events.

As well, 2010 will be an exciting time for sport in Manitoba as efforts continue with plans to host a first-ever World Indigenous Nations Games here in Winnipeg in 2012. This past February, the dream of establishing the World Indigenous Nations Games took an important step forward when we signed a memorandum of understanding with the Province and WIN Sport International, the governing body of the—for the Games.

So I'm very pleased that, even though we're faced with some tough economic challenges at this time, that these Estimates provide for sustained funding levels to support Manitoba and the Team Canada Volleyball Centre.

So, with those few remarks, Mr. Chairperson, I am open to questions, or perhaps the member has also an opening address.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the official opposition—honourable member for Springfield have any opening comments?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Yes, and if I were to say to this committee that I live and breathe sport and have done so for almost 10 years, that would be an understatement.

I think I've mentioned to the minister and members before—last Sunday, I think I spent six hours either at games or on fields watching my kids practise or play sports. So sports is definitely a big part of our life, which is ironic because I was not heavily involved in sports myself. It's often that your children are the opposite of what you were, and I am now the sports expert. I keep telling other parents on the sports fields that I'm one of the best soccer moms around and proud of it.

And it's a great thing to see young kids, young children, out developing physically. We've got great school systems where they develop academically and great religious institutions where they can develop spiritually and so on and so forth, but it's important that we have institutions and places for kids to get their energy out and do it in a very organized and important way.

One of the things that I have noticed over the last 10, 15 years of my career is there seems to be a real disconnect between elected officials and sports.

And I would say that's from school board, civic, provincial and federal level.

And I think one of the things we realized when we watched the Vancouver Olympics, and the minister certainly referenced them, is that the federal government—and so did provincial governments, but in the federal government put forward, I believe it was 105 million for the Own the Podium program, which was criticized, strangely enough, by England, that's going to be hosting the next Olympics. And I suspect that was a little bit of making sure that our Olympics didn't sound as good as they were—because they were outstanding—because they were a little bit concerned on how theirs might turn out, so there was a little bit of that.

But, if you were to sit back and reflect on the money that was spent on the Olympics, we could've taken \$105 million and spent it on more politicians. And I'm probably going out on a limb here, but I don't know if the country would be more unified with \$105-million worth of more politicians than we were those weeks of the Olympics, where we watched our athletes from every corner of the province, every kind of sport out there, working hard, doing their best for their country, and when they won, the glee and the happiness with which they would hold up the Canadian flag. And I'm not the biggest hockey player or know everything about hockey, but the last five minutes of the men's hockey game when they eventually ended up scoring and winning, I mean, those were just unbelievable moments for the nation.

* (11:20)

And everywhere you drive in the city you still see, you know, things about—the country's more unified because of the Vancouver Olympics and, you know, on and on and on.

And I think it's a message to us as elected officials, and it's a message to all politicians, that every dime, every dollar that you put into sport, you're actually building the nation. And, you know, I think we invest in a lot of things and think that we're nation building and we're not. Actually, I would suggest to you that that money was well spent, and I commend the provincial government for the monies that they put into amateur sport leading up to the Vancouver Olympics. Those were dollars well spent.

And we know for a fact that we have the largest generation of youth obesity facing us as human—as ever in humankind. It's the largest wave coming at us, and you can add on to that youth diabetes, as

well. And I think one of the ways that we should be dealing with that issue is by spending good money on sports.

And so I'm very excited to be the critic for Sport and very interested in going through the Estimates. The minister has been very generous, and I appreciate that, with mentioning the fact I've made it out to different organizations and different events and those are important and they're great to be at. And I certainly look forward to spending a bit of time talking about sports and sports-related issues here in the province of Manitoba.

So we'd be prepared to move on to the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

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

Mr. Robinson: I'm joined by the Deputy Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, which the Department of Sport falls under, Mr. Harvey Bostrom. I'm also joined by Mr. Dave Paton, Director of Finance for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, which also has certain responsibilities for the Department of Sport. And we have Mr. Mike Benson, the Acting Director of the sports directorate for the Department of Sport.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to draw the committee's attention to the public gallery, where we have visiting today grade 6 students from École Dieppe under the direction of Danielle Peloquin and Carlee Delorme.

Among these grade 6 students is Emma Carey, daughter of our Committee Clerk, Rick Yarish.

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

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Schuler: Before we get into the official part of Estimates, I do want to welcome all the students here today, in particular, Emma. Great to see you here. Your dad's a great guy who works hard for us, and, like I say, as long as he keeps his truck away from my car in the parking lot, we have a lot in common

and often we've talked about our kids together, and it's always with great pride that we talk about our children.

And, interestingly enough, today we're going to be talking about sports in Manitoba and the minister and I will be talking about it. So, great to have you here, great to have students, you know, at all times, but particular when we have Emma here to see a little bit what her dad does. So, great to have all of you here.

Mr. Robinson: I want to join my colleague, the member for Springfield, in welcoming the young boys and girls and the future Olympians, I'm sure, and future leaders. In time I'm sure that the member for Springfield and I will be put out to retire and you'll be taking the leadership roles as our future leaders here in the province of Manitoba.

Yesterday, I know that the member for Springfield and I had the opportunity of attending and honouring—which honoured a man that was 101 years old and honoured for—he took up swimming, I believe, at the age of 80, and we got to see this man and were very fascinated.

And in our culture as Canadians, generally, the two most sacred elements of any society are the children and the elders. So I think that it's very fitting that you are here today to witness some of the things that you'll probably—you may want to do in the future, and I commend the chaperones as well and the school for bringing the children to see how the government of Manitoba works. Thank you so much.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for those comments.

Actually, the guy who is 101 years old told us yesterday he's never taken a pill and he's never had surgery until today. He was going in for knee replacement surgery. And, you know what? One of the pieces of advice he gave us, one of the things you should always do, is breathe deep, strangely enough, I mean—and who's going to argue with a guy who's 101 years old, right? He said, you know, when you're outside breathe deep, get a lot of oxygen into your lungs and a lot of oxygen into your bloodstream. Oh, and by the way, he walked onto the stage and he walked off the stage. So, like, we're not talking a decrepit old man. He actually was in good shape and spoke well. So there's a piece of advice for all of us, breathe deep. Minister, time to breathe deep.

I have a question for the minister, and that—there was—and I'm quoting: The deputy ministers for each province and territory have been meeting and

working collectively to establish key priorities and strategies to address these goals and will present their plan to the ministers in August of 2009.

And that would be a report on—I wanted—the minister's probably going to ask me—a physical activity and inactivity. It was a group of deputy ministers that were supposed to get together. Is that report done, and is it possible for this committee to get a copy of that report?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I'm familiar with what the minister or the member from Springfield is talking about. When we met as ministers, the last meeting was held in Charlottetown prior to the Canada Summer Games last year. There's been ongoing work, of course, at the deputy ministers' level with other jurisdictions, provinces and territories nationwide, and one of the subcommittees of the table of federal-provincial-territorial ministers, of course, is the deputy ministers' interprovincial working group, and one of the areas that they addressed is the physical inactivity of some of our Canadian children, and the member pointed out some of the challenges that we're faced with—obesity and the lack of wellness among many of our young people in the province of Manitoba—earlier in his earlier remarks, and that's one of the areas that we need to address.

One of the challenges that the ministers responsible for recreation and sport committed to about five years ago—and that was the need to increase physical activity nationwide by 10 percent, and I believe that the deadline for that was some two years ago, and we did achieve that in order to make Canadians more physically active, and we still have a great deal of work to do in achieving even higher numbers and ensuring that Canadians are active in either recreational pursuits or any kind of physical activities.

So the interprovincial committee continues to work, and the next meeting is scheduled for 2011, I believe, that the Sports ministers are going to be meeting, but the working groups on physical activity and other such subcommittees continue to carry on with the work, Mr. Chair, and I can report to the member that this work is ongoing, and I believe that he and I share the view that, indeed, the target and the goal is to make Canadians more active and healthy, and ultimately that is the goal.

Mr. Schuler: Was there ever a key priorities and strategy report written? And it was supposed to be

done by August 2009. Was that ever completed, and is it possible to get a copy of that?

* (11:30)

Mr. Robinson: I'll avail myself to see what we have available. I know that there's been progress reports made on physical activity, and I will ensure that the—my office forwards a copy of any updated reports to the member for his consideration and for his reading.

Mr. Schuler: And that came out of the Active Healthy Kids Canada. You know, when you look at some of the physical activity levels, they gave it an F, you know. Organized sport and physical activity participation, you know, was a C. Active transportation, D, that means, you know, riding and walking to school. I mean it really paints a grim picture of our children and their physical activity.

And I think this is something that has to concern all of us, whether we have active children or not, and I would say to the minister, and far be it for me to brag about my children, because, you know, I would never want to be caught doing that at committee or in the House. That having been said, all three of my children are involved in way too much sport, I think. I think sometimes I question my sanity when I'm driving from pillar to post, but that doesn't matter. I mean, the fact that my kids are actively involved in sports, there are many, and I think one of the numbers here is like eight—the proportion of children—youth meeting the guidelines increased from 9 percent in 2005 to 13 percent in 2007. Like—we—you know, Houston, we have a problem.

And, you know, I certainly take great interest in that, and we know that there's a lot of societal reasons why, and this has to be part of the greater debate that we have, in fact, to the disconnect between elected officials in sport. You know, maybe this is one of those things that we should be, you know, raising with our colleagues and out there talking to, you know, whether it's school boards or municipal leaders, you know, other MLAs and MPs that, you know, there is a way to mitigate a crisis in health care coming at us, and that's going to be dealing with sport. And I know the minister has been doing that, and he's been doing a good job on it.

So any—if I could see that report, I would love to and just educate myself with it. I would really appreciate it and, you know, I would say to the minister, although I'm on the ground floor when it comes to sports and spend a lot of time, and I certainly don't have the access to the incredible

studies that he would and just educate myself, would be, you know, for myself would be very helpful. Anyway, I appreciate the minister indicating that he would be prepared to do that.

The next issue I did want to talk to the minister about, and that has to do with the whole infrastructure issue within the city and across the province. And in the late '60s, early '70s, there were a lot of facilities that were built, and they were built by federal, provincial and municipal governments because of different anniversaries, Canada and provincial. And we now have a report out from the City of Winnipeg, and I was wondering, could the minister give us some comments on what his thoughts are with the kind of state that our infrastructure is, and this is one is, in particular, is about arenas, about the state of our infrastructure in the province.

Mr. Robinson: One of the first things that I did when I became the Minister responsible for Sport some years ago, was discussion with the other ministers and our federal government. Since then, of course, we've had a number of ministers responsible for Sport and, maybe one of the problems that we have at the national level is we don't have a champion that can push forth some of the requirements and some of the desires that we as provincial sport ministers have.

But I would have to say that we do have an infrastructure deficit in the province of Manitoba. Many of the recreational facilities and the sport facilities that the member for Springfield refers to were built around the year of the Centennial—1967. Many of them are outdated. Many of them require some upgrades. And I asked the other sports ministers and territorial ministers to join with me in calling on the federal government to bring about a separate infrastructure project to deal with the recreational and sport facilities that need upgrading.

Some of our facilities in the province of Manitoba, the member knows, require some immediate attention. Some of them have been condemned because of the no-accessibility for wheelchairs, as one example, the fire hazards at some of these facilities bring to the general public.

So those are some of the areas that I identified because I've had the opportunity of travelling and visiting many communities in western Manitoba: Boissevain, Brandon. I've heard the same complaints in northern communities, and it's sad to say that many northern communities don't even have an

indoor facility for recreational activity. And that's probably where we need the most help in terms of recreational activities and promoting the whole notion of having healthy populations.

So the member is quite correct that there, in my estimation, that there appears to be some deficiencies on recreational facilities throughout the province of Manitoba, and in the city of—even though, having said that, we have made attempts to upgrade the facility in Dauphin and Thompson and The Pas, as well. And I'm very proud of the improvements that have been made there. There's some improvements and joint arrangements with the municipal governments and the federal government on the other requirements that are needed in the city of Winnipeg, obviously.

There was—I read in one of the newspapers, very recently, the requirement of certain recreational facilities in the province—or in the city of Winnipeg. And I have to agree that we have to start paying some attention to some of these, but I think that it requires the political will of all three levels of government, whether it's municipal, federal and provincial. We need to bring the minds together and ensure that the recreational needs of our fellow citizens are met, and especially the facilities which, in some cases, pose a risk to the general public whether they're fire-hazard risks or accessibility. We have to make sure that we do the due diligence that is required to ensure that we have proper facilities in the province of Manitoba for our recreational facilities.

Mr. Schuler: I'm sure the minister has heard this argument: Well, you know, the rinks were just fine when I was growing up. What's wrong with them today? Or the minister probably hears about northern communities: Didn't we just build them a rink, you know, 20, 30 years ago? Right? And they probably were magnificent facilities back then. And when, you know, you were using them 20, 30 years ago, or 40 years ago, they were great facilities. But, like everything else, they get old. And I think that's one of the things that we've sort of lost sight of.

I—each of us probably owned our own home or apartment. You know full well if you're not upgrading your home or apartment every 15 to 20 years, they end up getting dated and the costs then just start to compound. They get more and more expensive the longer you wait with upgrading. And that's what's happened, I think, with a lot of these facilities till we get to the point—and I know the

minister probably has the report in front of him. They list a whole series of arenas, and the best that comes out of the lot, I think, is Sam Southern and St. James Civic, which actually get a three out of five, and the rest are either ones or twos.

And that is really concerning, especially when we're trying to get young people excited in sports. It always amazed me, as a young person, and maybe it's just—it was just a sign that I was definitely cut out for politics, but I would go into churches, for instance, and there'd be these magnificent buildings just, you know, cathedrals and even churches here in the city, and they'd have these great, great buildings and lovely, and I loved being in them. And then you'd want to go to Sunday school and they'd stick you in the basement. And I always used to think, you know, everybody always said, well, you guys are the future, and they always stuck the future in the basement. And now you see the new design of churches coming out. We have these beautiful educational wings and we try to make, you know, it a much different experience for our young people when they attend church or otherwise.

* (11:40)

Well, the same thing would apply with sports facilities. And I was in the East St. Paul arena, and you sort of walk in through the front, and you know what? A magnificent lobby, I'm sure, 30 or 40 years ago. And I don't want to offend my council or my councillors but, you know, it's a little grim when you walk in there. And we need to make these facilities not just be new and safe and all the rest of it, but they also have to be appealing places for young people to go. I mean, just because, you know, we got the best 15 or 20 or 40 years out of it, you know, it doesn't mean that our children now should be satisfied with it.

I think that's one of the problems that we face. That it's got to be something that not just, you know, sort of passes and, well, you should be happy with what you have. I mean, we should be looking at places that (a) the kids feel safe in and that are places where young people wish to go. And I believe that this has a definite justice component to it and I think it has a human services component to it as well. I think, you know, if you can make these places some place that young people want to go, you do keep them off the street.

I want to share with the committee a small story and then I pass it back to the minister for his comments. My youngest daughter was a U9 soccer

player and had only played in some of the older soccer pitches. And then, on a Saturday at 10 o'clock, two months into the indoor season, she was told we were going to play at the University of Manitoba soccer pitch. So the next morning, got her up—this is my little Corina—and got her breakfast and I said, so how did you sleep? And she said, well, you know, I didn't sleep very good, dad. I said, oh, well, that's not good, you have this game, you're not feeling good or whatever? She said, oh, no, no, no, not that. She said, dad, we're playing at the U of M today. And it was really one of the most interesting things to see, you know, this team of little girls walking onto the soccer pitch at the University of Manitoba. It was like arriving at the Taj Mahal—like, wow, and they're, its big and it's new and it's, you know, all—it was just such a fantastic experience for them.

That's the kind of experience we have to give young people because (a) we need to get them involved at 4, 5 and 6 years old, but then we also have to keep them in sports to keep them healthy.

And it's those kinds of facilities—and I know we can't build those kinds of facilities everywhere in the province and, you know, there are probably remote locations where it's not reasonable or feasible to build that kind of a large facility, but they have to be facilities that young people feel safe in, that they're proud to be playing in there.

And I—you know, again, far be it from me to use committee time to brag about it, yet the girls did win that game. And, you know, it just—it brings a different play. They're different athletes. And we know from the way Canada performed at the recent Winter Olympics, is that just that it happened? No, it's because money was put in, facilities were provided, there's a lot of pride, you know, and it goes on and on and on. And that's how we're going to get our young people engaged in sport.

So I appreciate the minister and the fact that he's been trying to raise this and I don't know if he wishes to comment on this and then I'd be prepared to move on to the next topic. But it certainly is a passion of mine, and I look forward to working with the minister on these projects and I turn it over to the minister for comment.

Mr. Robinson: Well, I certainly share some of the views of the member for Springfield on—particularly on the infrastructure deficit that we have on recreational and—recreational facilities and arenas throughout the province of Manitoba.

There's a lot of work that has to be done. We've been trying to engage the national government, through successive governments now, to initiate a project strictly aimed at trying to address that one issue, as I said earlier. We have, in spite of that—those attempts, which sometimes feels like they're futile, we have been able to get some of the facilities upgraded and in some place—in some cases, replaced entirely, for our fellow citizens to use in recreational pursuits and sporting activities.

The MTS Iceplex, which is going to be a multiuse building, is opening up in Headingley. It's scheduled to open in the fall. It's going to be a four-rink complex and we look forward to that.

But certainly that's one initiative that took some political will from the R.M. and the City—or pardon me, the Province and the federal government.

So that, indeed, is a step forward. There are many other communities that have the population that substantiates a facility for them to warrant the need for a recreational facility, but don't have one.

Recently, we helped out a community in northern Manitoba, a community that's been in the news a lot, and that's the Shamattawa community, in upgrading their arena, which was built, but never used. As a result, the building was faced with mould and the ice skating that was to have occurred there never occurred, and, over years, just dilapidated. And then it was upgraded very recently at a very reasonable cost—in my opinion—with the help of the provincial government and the federal government, jointly. And we were able to open the facility this past winter, Mr. Chairperson, and we're very proud of that.

Another important initiative has been through the work of the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre, WASAC, as they call it, the acronym W-A-S-A-C. They have been successful in motivating a lot of our young people into activities and take them away from high-risk activities and, perhaps, one would say, activities that are not acceptable in society—gang activities and the like. So they've been able to take them away from that and engage them in some activities in the city of Winnipeg, and the Aboriginal youth, particularly in the city of Winnipeg, have been engaged in a lot of activities.

And they've been able to work outside of Winnipeg as well. Their focus has not only been in the city of Winnipeg, but, indeed, they have worked

in places like Shamattawa, Pauingassi, Duck Bay and Pine Creek, and also in the Allan Lake community as part of their outreach. And a key motivator in that has been a great young man that I view as a champion, indeed, Kevin Chief, and I have a lot of respect for Kevin and the work that he has done.

As well, after the North American Indigenous Games were held here in Winnipeg in 2002, the number of people joining sporting activities increased dramatically, and we're very proud of that. And I mentioned at the outset as well, too, the tremendous opportunities that we have in engaging world—the World Indigenous Nations Games that I was telling the member about. We look forward to the world coming to the city of Winnipeg in 2012 and having the city of Winnipeg again play host to that.

Now, back in 1999, 2002, for the World Indigenous Games, the Pan Am Games in 1999, and any activity that requires volunteers, Winnipeg and Manitoba have always been tremendous in extending their volunteerism. And I'm very proud of our fellow citizens in that regard, and I know they'll step to the plate again in 2012 when the first ever World Indigenous Nations Games comes to the city of Winnipeg.

As a matter of fact, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which operates as an organ of the United Nations, will be meeting next week in New York City with roughly 1,800 delegates and 75 countries attending. And they have asked the province of Manitoba to be a part of that to talk about the World Indigenous Nations Games, but, moreover, to talk about why we are trying to place emphasis on recreation and sport. And I think it's quite evident that why we're trying to do this is to address some of these social ills that we as a society here in Manitoba are faced with, whether it's gang activity or whether it's the whole issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, and women generally. Those are the areas of why we're trying to engage young people and people generally into recreational and sporting pursuits.

* (11:50)

And the member correctly points out—using his children as an example—we have to have our children interested in other areas, and I commend the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) for being the good parent that he is in ensuring that his children have every opportunity.

Regrettably, not all our citizens in the province of Manitoba have that opportunity to become engaged in recreational and sporting activities that are organized and, as a result, fall into activities that are not good for them and good for the community in many northern and remote areas and even in the city of Winnipeg.

So I commend him for being the parent that he is and I'm sure that he encourages his children as well, even though that becomes a full-time occupation as well, at the same time representing the good people of the province of Manitoba and the good people of Springfield.

But there are things that are expected of us as parents. As our children are younger, we need to obviously engage our young people but, moreover, the other children in society have to also be encouraged. So in a roundabout way I hope I've covered some of the areas that the member for Springfield has pointed out.

And, firstly, the infrastructure deficit that we are faced within the province of Manitoba, nobody will argue that point for a moment and I think that there's a lot of work that we have to do, Mr. Chair. We have an infrastructure deficit in terms of recreational facilities in the city of Winnipeg, outside of Winnipeg, and in rural and northern Manitoba. Indeed, the need is tremendous and the work has to carry on.

Mr. Schuler: The minister mentioned a very interesting project and an outstanding young man, and I want to reference both of those. With the—and I'm going to get it wrong and I apologise to Mark Chipman already for it—the MTS sportsplex. I think I got it right. I had the opportunity to meet with him, and it's an interesting concept and I don't know if the minister is, and his department, are watching it closely. It really is a private-public partnership where the federal government put in, I believe, \$5 million, the provincial government put in \$5 million and, then, Mr. Chipman put in \$17 million.

And in my discussions with him, he said, on that basis, it then becomes a viable project. And here are four pieces of ice and, really, you need one Zamboni, you need one plant to keep the ice going in four rinks, you have one HVAC system, you have one set of staff, you have one canteen. And you take any one of the arenas listed in that list by the city of Winnipeg, the plants are getting old. I don't know what kind of ice cleaning machines they have. They're getting old. You know, on and on and on.

And it's an interesting concept. Is that something that the minister is, with the department, looking at as perhaps a model on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Mr. Chair, of course, we support the vision of people like Mark Chipman. That's why they're leaders in the community as they are, and I think that the work that they are doing is very important.

The MTS Centre that I referenced earlier, as well as the True North Entertainment Centre. It's one of the examples of what we can do when we put our minds together as government representatives or the private sector, and engaging the national government to do these initiatives, but getting some buy-in at the same time from—whether it be unions or other groups like that—to ensure that there are opportunities that we build a facility. But it needs maintenance and the member referenced that earlier in our comments when we started this portion of Estimates.

But the iceplex that I referred to at Headingley is something that's been championed by the community for quite some time, and the provincial and national governments are coming forward to support that initiative in the community of Headingley, and we look forward to that opening.

But it's more than just the facility, the upkeep, the integrity of the building has to be maintained, and the member correctly pointed out, I couldn't have put it any—in a better way myself, that one of the things that we need is constant upkeep, whether we own a home or not. We have to continue doing upgrades to ensure that its lifespan is expanded.

And one could look at a body. We're told in many cultures that a body is a temple and we have to take care of our bodies in order for it to last. And a great example of that was a gentleman that was 101 years old yesterday, of how we should take care of our bodies, and it may not—certainly, my body doesn't look like a temple, Mr. Chair.

But the important thing is that we have to maintain the upkeep, and we have to ensure that the work, the diligence required to upkeep the buildings are there, and these partnerships that Mr. Chipman has been able to embark upon are truly commendable. And I think that we should look to his example as we go forward on several fronts, that this is one example that we can draw upon. The MTS Centre is one example of what partnerships can accomplish, and I think that the member for Springfield will agree with me that a number of

concerts have been used for the facility, cultural activities, the Manito Ahbee Festival in early November is another example, and, of course, the home of the Manitoba Moose.

So we—and, of course, having said that, we wish them well in their current series with the Hamilton Bulldogs; I believe game 2 is tomorrow.

So, having said that, we have many initiatives that—and we have good people in the city of Winnipeg, good leaders from the private sector and we draw upon them for their expertise and their thoughts. And I know I have not heard the outcome of the Premier's Economic Advisory Committee summit that was held in the last couple days; I just heard highlights, but, indeed, that they have some recommendations for this province to improve and continue improving the lifestyle that we all enjoy to a degree here.

I'm not saying that things are perfect in the province of Manitoba for one moment; there are still many challenges that we have to overcome. And we are committed to ensuring that this one area that the member talks about trying to facilitate discussions and trying to facilitate round table dialogue on how best we can address these issues is the way to go, and I certainly want to take his comments and use those as perhaps direction for this government to pursue.

Mr. Schuler: The minister also mentioned Kevin Chief, who I had the opportunity to share a lot of time with and a great latte—I had my favourite latte at Starbucks—and I think we enjoyed our time together immensely and had a really good chat on the kinds of things that he's doing, certainly in the Aboriginal community and with inner-city youth, and that's his focus. And it was Mark Chipman that I—when I'd spoken to him—he's working very closely with Kevin Chief in what he's trying to accomplish.

And one of the things that we discussed was we have to go to these young people who (a) are looking at gangs or, more importantly, those that are in gangs, and we have to tell them, you know what we'd like you to do is we'd like to get you out of your gang and to join our gang. And our gang, by the way, is better, is smarter and will get you a lot further than your gang. And that's organized sports.

I mean, if you play on a hockey team—you can call it a gang if you want—but it's a hockey team. You know, we use the puck and nets, and that's how we score and move ahead of others and we actually develop our bodies and our minds. And the minister

will know that youth who are involved in sports score better academically, and we somehow have to convince those young people that where they're going is really taking them nowhere and that what they have to do is they have to be part of a team, whether it's soccer, whether it's basketball, volleyball, hockey, whatever it is.

And the model that Kevin Chief has set up is a very interesting model, and we had a really good talk and, you know, once in awhile you do sort of touch on politics and the—you know, I looked at him as young guy who just defies narrow political definition. I mean, he's just an amazingly bright individual. And I know the minister's had a lot of opportunity to spend time with him and probably mentor him in some respects and get feedback from Kevin Chief. And I would say to the minister there's a young individual—if we're looking at developing models of a way to get young people out of gangs, out of their destructive gangs and into our sports gangs where they move forward, I think Kevin is certainly one of those individuals. So I certainly hold Kevin in high regard and look forward to some amazing things coming forward from him in the years to come.

* (12:00)

In the understanding that we do have to watch our time to a degree, I'd like to move on to some more mundane questions and not the kind of great discussion that we've been having.

I would first of all like to ask the minister: In the last budget year, what was his ministerial travel, like how many trips did he have and at what costs would those trips have come at?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I attended the ministers responsible for Sport federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Charlottetown, New Brunswick, prior to the Canada Summer Games in the month of August, as well as—the travel that's not been printed yet, of course, is the Olympics, for the opening of—any opening activities there, with the opening of Manitoba house, and the conclusion of the Olympics that were held recently in Vancouver, so that'll appear in time. But the travel expenses would be those three trips.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister tell us, on those three trips, who travelled with him?

An Honourable Member: On the—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister.

Mr. Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize.

On the trip to Charlottetown, I was accompanied by—and the trips, the two trips to the Vancouver Olympics—by the special assistant that I have is Jean-Marc Prevost.

Mr. Schuler: So the minister only travelled with one other individual?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, because the staff that are required for these activities were travelling under other budgets, so I don't feel it necessary for me to report it at this committee.

Mr. Schuler: Did the minister travel at all where the department paid for his travel expenses?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, the three trips I identified will be what will be presented. I believe that the entire cost of the trip to Charlottetown was \$1,100, and the two trips to Vancouver have yet to be calculated.

Mr. Schuler: And those costs would be for the minister's travel alone, not those who accompanied him, correct?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, that's correct, Mr. Chair. And, of course, the member knows that these costs are posted on the Internet every quarter. January to the March travel will be posted on—I guess it'll be in the month of May. And all the expenses have yet to be processed on what I just told this committee.

Mr. Schuler: And again, I just want to be really clear. Did the minister travel at any time where the department picked up the cost of the travel?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, the trips were charged to the Department of Sport for the three trips that I've reported to this committee.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, and I just—again, I just always like to be really clear—so there were only three trips ever taken and the department never paid for any other trips?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Mr. Chair, that's correct.

Mr. Schuler: And the departmental staff on those trips. How many departmental staff travelled with the minister?

Mr. Robinson: The trip that I was taking to Charlottetown included the director of recreational services for the Department of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport at that time, and as well as the deputy minister, and it also had as part of our delegation the CEO of Sport Manitoba, which is an

arm's-length agency of government which delivers the sports delivery system in the province of Manitoba. Mr. Jeff Hnatiuk accompanied us, and Mr. Hnatiuk, of course, has played a pivotal role in promoting amateur sport in the province of Manitoba.

With the trip to the Olympics, it was staff that were already there, including Mr. Benson, that were part of the Olympic secretariat that we had permanently located in that city during the course of the Olympics and Paralympics. And the meetings that I attended to were facilitated by the secretariat and also by the Protocol Office of the Province of Manitoba. They included meetings with the Canadian Olympic Committee and the four host First Nations that hosted the Olympics and other meetings that were convened for our delegation to be a part of.

Mr. Schuler: I thank—the committee thanks the minister for that.

Could the minister tell us, were—was any travel by the Premier, or a delegation led by the Premier, ever paid for by his department?

Mr. Robinson: No.

Mr. Schuler: The committee thanks the minister for that.

Just in the Estimates book—and that is on page 7 out of the blue book—just for clarification, and I haven't been the critic for that long, there is Sport Manitoba and then the Sport Secretariat. Could the minister tell us, where is the Sport Secretariat housed?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, we have the—of course, the member will recall, yesterday, we went to the opening of the Sport Manitoba facility on Pacific Avenue, and they have their own staff and, at the same time, representing roughly 80 sporting disciplines to be housed in that facility.

In the Sport Secretariat, which helps facilitate some of the activity of the department, we currently have four employees—or three employees, rather, one director—the acting director, Mr. Benson, a consultant and one administrative assistant in that current department. So those are the full-time positions that we have, and their job, of course, is to not only maintain a liaison between Sport Manitoba and the Province, but, indeed—within the Province we have several departments that have an interest in the promotion of sporting activities in the province, whether it's Aboriginal and Northern Affairs,

Healthy Living or some of these other departments, so it is Mr. Benson's responsibility, along with his staff that he works with, that they ensure that that's properly done. And Mr. Benson has just assumed that responsibility and I'm very proud of the hard work that he and his staff are doing in promoting recreation and sporting activities and opportunities for the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell this committee who is the consultant that he referenced within the Sport Secretariat?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, the person is Joel Fingard, and he's got an added responsibility of also keeping a close eye on the Manitoba Boxing Commission and what goes on there. The Manitoba Boxing Commission, of course, the member and I both know that there are some new realities—that simply in the fight game, it's no longer just straight boxing, that there's ultimate fighting. So we want to ensure that we have some eyes that are full time, so Mr. Fingard is engaged in ensuring that that is carried out in the proper way.

Mr. Schuler: From what I can tell, the grant that's given to Sport Manitoba didn't increase this year. Is that correct?

* (12:10)

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Mr. Chair, that is correct, and one could argue that, with the amount of work that they do, that they deserve an increase, and this government will critically look at the financial status of this organization and, indeed, will make the proper decisions, I hope, in the time to come to ensure that they're able to continue doing the work that is expected of them, not only by government, but by the general public in a proper and adequate way.

Mr. Schuler: When was the last time that they received an increase in their budget?

Mr. Robinson: The last time they received an increase in their budget was during the period of 2003-2007, where they got a \$1-million increase over that period of time.

Mr. Schuler: The addition to the Sport Manitoba building, is that also supposed to be self-funded by Sport Manitoba?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, the Province is providing \$16 million in financing the Sport Manitoba's relocation to the east-side Exchange District. The Province is also considering funding options for phase 2, which is very important,

critically important I think, under the same careful review process that occurs when considering any major capital project of that nature.

And the department has worked closely with Sport Manitoba in ensuring that the agency is relocated into an area that will benefit the community the most, and I believe that its current location is a tremendous one, and certainly with the accessibility to the community, along with housing the other important facets of sport, makes it a very fine facility.

And I look forward to working with Jeff Hnatiuk and the board of directors of Sport Manitoba in ensuring that we promote amateur sport continuously in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, a freedom of information request was sent a while ago, and it was asking for the name and position title for all Manitoba government employees working at the Manitoba pavilion in CentrePlace at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games, the compensation paid each Manitoba government employee working at CentrePlace during the Vancouver Olympics, broken down by salary, accommodation expense, travel expenses and other incidental expenses.

The minister referenced that that has been delayed. Why is there a delay on the expense report, and when does the minister think that the information will be forthcoming?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I'm familiar with the request, and the information is still being put together—the Olympics and following the Olympics, of course, started the Paralympics, and our pavilion was one of the only pavilions, in fact, the only provincial or territorial pavilion to remain opened during the course of the Paralympics. So it's, been very recent speaking—relatively speaking, that we actually brought home the staff that were involved with the Olympic and Paralympic activities in Vancouver, including Mr. Benson, who joins with me in this Estimates process this morning.

So the report will be, I would think, in—within the next 60 days will be completed and sent to the proper people that requested the information through FIPPA and be granted the information that they so desire.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and the minister also referenced the Boxing Commission, and my question to the minister is, what is the government's position on

ultimate fighting, boxing or similar activities in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Robinson: Well, one of the—it is—initially when the sport itself was introduced in the province of Manitoba, and, of course, I didn't think at that time that the sport would become so popular as it is, not only in Canada, but all over the world. And it's really taken over, I think, the attention of the glamour sport, I would call, of straight boxing. In some places it's regarded as a risk, and that is why we have asked the Manitoba Boxing Commission to take special measures that these don't take place in underground settings, that they be regulated. And that's what the Boxing Commission has attempted to do.

We have no control if an event is to occur in a hotel, as an example, or a tavern, which has happened in our experience in the province of Manitoba, certainly not regulated by any governing body.

We have three very capable people at the Manitoba Boxing Commission. The chairperson is Dan Vandal, and his commissioners are Mr. Robert Tapper and Rosemary Broadbent, and these three people regulate the—or ensure that the Boxing Commission is conducted in a fashion where it's—I would say that the No. 1 priority of this Boxing Commission is to ensure the safety of participants in these combat activities, and, of course, one of the priorities is in the area of straight boxing and onward to the ultimate fighting, which is becoming hugely popular throughout the nation and globally, I would say.

Mr. Schuler: Yeah, the Premier of Ontario has taken a very hard line against ultimate fighting and has indicated he's banning it outright. I take it that's not this government's position?

Mr. Robinson: Not at the current time. I mean, if the Manitoba Boxing Commission deems it appropriate for them to set up some red flags about the safety of the sport itself, then, obviously, the government will take a look—a hard look at it and make a decision henceforth.

But the—so far we've been lucky in the province of Manitoba that there's been no deaths occurring from the sport itself. There has been some injuries and, granted, that's one of the risks that occur in combat or at least hand-to-hand combat activities like boxing or ultimate fighting or wrestling, for that matter.

So these are things that are closely monitored by the Manitoba Boxing Commission, and we are looking to them for advice. If, indeed, it becomes a time in our history that we have to examine and have a look at it, then we will gladly do that.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for the great segue way. He mentioned injuries and I appreciate his frankness on the ultimate fighting.

I do want to also raise the issue of boards when it comes to soccer pitches, and as soccer was developing we had a hybrid between a pseudo-hockey, soccer kind of a game, and over the last 11 years that I've been involved with soccer, I've noticed that there's an awful lot of injuries when children are playing with boards in soccer pitches. And I'm talking about three facilities in particular. That would be the Garden City community club, Gateway community club and then Coverall in Headingley.

*(12:20)

And I understand that there is now a move afoot, and I've sent a letter to the club indicating that I think it's a health issue. And I think the federal government, under the infrastructure program, is putting new turf in at—we call it the Seven Oaks soccer pitch, but it's actually Garden City Community Club, and it looks like they're going to be taking on the boards. And there is a Community Places grant in that I know the—Dave Chomiak, the MLA for the area, is looking at.

Has the department looked at boards in soccer pitches? Has it come up on the radar screen? I don't know if the minister has taken a position on it.

Mr. Robinson: That's an initiative that I'll have to check with Sport Manitoba staff and I will be asking the CEO, Jeff Hnatiuk, to respond directly to the member. I'll certainly raise the issue that the member just raised. With what he tells me, it does concern me as well, about the safety factors involved. So I will raise that with Mr. Hnatiuk and have Mr. Hnatiuk respond the member or, indeed, it would serve more purpose to have a meeting or a briefing with the activities at Sport Manitoba and the member for Springfield, I'll certainly avail myself to ensuring that that occurs.

Mr. Schuler: I've referenced in previous discussions the University of Manitoba soccer pitch. And, with the development of that soccer pitch, I think everybody realized that you can actually play real

soccer indoors. And it's sort of like the light bulb went on, and everybody said, well, wait a minute, so why are we playing off the boards?

And it's not—to me it isn't an issue as much as it's not real soccer, is I have been at games—let me put it to the minister this way, once you get over 11 or 12 years old, I don't know if I've been at a game when there hasn't been, whether a minor injury or a major injury, at a soccer pitch where there are boards. And it was interesting. I spoke to one of the presidents of the club and he said to me, well, nobody's ever, ever raised that with me before. And I said, well, no, we carry the kids out the back door and they go to Seven Oaks Hospital. You know, we don't run to the club president when the kid's writhing on the floor because they injured their leg or injured their shoulder. You don't go to the community club president with that; you go to the hospital with it.

And, actually, I think this is a health-care issue. And I said to the club and I've said to all those involved, you know, the day somebody breaks their back or their neck by going into those boards cause, remember, you don't have the padding of a hockey player, and yet you're playing basically the same sport. And when you have two 12-year-olds—and I would suggest to the minister and I know he's got children as well, and when you, you know, you're pumping down the field and it's easy to bump into the player next to you. And I've seen it over and over and over again where the other kid goes into the boards.

And I would even go so far as to tell the minister that I've spoken to coaches and they have indicated to me that they've lost up to three players in a season because of boards. And it's just—it's really become one of those things of mine that I just—I suffer watching soccer games when they're playing with boards because I cringe when the kid's going through those boards. And I have helped carry children out of soccer pitches and into vehicles, and they've been driven to hospitals.

And if the minister would ever give me the time, I would pick him up in my vehicle and I'll buy him one of my favourite lattes, and I'll drive him to a soccer pitch and we could sit and watch. And I guarantee the minister, there will be an injury.

And I'll just put a little pitch in for Seven Oaks soccer complex. They also have the best fries in the city.

But, the boards, minister, the boards have to come out. And I think we have them out of Seven Oaks and then the next one's going to be—going after Gateway. Minister, the injuries are just appalling. Many kids have stopped playing soccer because the boards—anyway, I leave that issue with him.

And I have one other little one, and I don't know if he wants to comment.

Mr. Robinson: I am going to read *Hansard* and get the detailed information that the member has provided for us, and we will formulate a letter, my department, with my signature, and write a letter to Soccer Manitoba for their—to bring this matter to their attention. Certainly, I think that what the member describes is quite alarming and I am prepared to work with him in addressing this problem we have collectively.

Mr. Schuler: And I'll peruse *Hansard* as well and see if the minister's going to take me up on that, the latte and a soccer game, but I'll have a good read through and see if he actually took me up on that one.

My last question is with the stadium. Did the minister have any personal involvement in the decision making on the new stadium proposed for the University of Manitoba?

Mr. Robinson: No, I didn't have any personal dealings on the stadium issue but, obviously, as being a part of the government that supports it, I wholeheartedly endorse it because I believe it's good for the community. It's going to be a facility that'll cater to many needs in the community and I think it's a tremendous asset to the city of Winnipeg and the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Schuler: And am I to understand that in the winter months they're looking at putting a covered dome over the playing field?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, to my understanding, that's part of the proposal, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Schuler: And have they decided, and I know this is starting to get very technical, but is it sort of the same turf that they have at the indoor soccer pitch at the U of M? What kind of a turf are they looking at for the stadium?

Mr. Robinson: I'll have to ask other people that are in the know about those detailed questions. I don't have the information before me, but I'll certainly make some inquiries and try and get back to the

member in short order to address some of those questions that he's addressed to me.

Mr. Schuler: And back to the Sports Secretariat, a question just popped up. Where physically is that located? What building is that located in?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Chair, they're located at 213 Notre Dame Avenue. The secretariat, and that's where Mr. Benson is the acting director for a total of three staff.

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to thank all of those who are involved in sports, from the minister through to the department and Sport Manitoba, and all the 60 organizations plus, plus, plus that makes sport the great experience it is for children. Would love to spend more time, and perhaps another time the minister and I could sit down and share with him some more ideas. We've got to double and triple, quadruple the amount of children involved in sports.

But to all of you that make it happen, that when I sit and watch children playing or young people playing, and even senior men playing, and women, I mean it's not just about children, but everybody enjoying the kinds of stuff that we have right now. A thank you to all of you who make that happen and all of those in the departments and all of those volunteers. Anyway, thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 28.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,919,000 for Sport, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Sport.

The hour being 12:27, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

HEALTH

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health. As has been previous agreed, questions for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Yesterday, we were discussing the number of ADMs within the Department of Health and just before getting back to that, there is a comment I would like to make going back to cardiac surgery because we did spend a lot of time yesterday on cardiac surgery and I was thinking about it a lot last evening and I got the feeling from the minister's answers about bumping of surgeries that perhaps she didn't understand the significance of the point that I was trying to make because my point in bringing forward the number of surgeries that have been bumped or cancelled was that, year over year, they were increasing and, from 2006 to 2009, they more than doubled.

The minister kept talking about, yeah, but we're only, you know, patients are only getting bumped once, but I think she was missing the point that, in total, whether you're bumped once or twice or five times, you're still being bumped, and when you're bumped, it's an issue, whether it's even a bumping of one time.

So with the minister's answers, I think she was missing the point yesterday in what I was trying to make in that bumping, period, was something that Dr. Koshal had indicated should decrease dramatically once the program was amalgamated at St. Boniface Hospital.

So I don't know if the minister was just, you know, trying to defend that the thing wasn't as bad as what I was trying to portray, but I think she was missing the point, that bumping has more than doubled over that period of time, and I think it's serious even if a patient is only bumped once.

Knowing that she has to go forward and look at this, I hope she's looking at it in that broader perspective because I think that those are the questions that need to be looked at and asked of the surgery program, is to find out why this inordinate amount of bumping is occurring in the first place.

So I just wanted to make sure that the minister clearly understood the point that I was trying to make yesterday.

And we ended up, then, talking about the number of ADMs, and in 1999, there were three ADMs and in 2010, there were six ADMs in the Department of Health. In 1999, the government of the day, under Gary Doer, adamantly campaigned against increasing these types of positions, and, yet, within a short time of forming government, those

numbers started to creep up, and now they've doubled.

So I would like to ask the minister: Why has—why have she and her counterparts doubled the number of ADMs in Manitoba Health?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): We've had quite a discussion over the latter part of yesterday's session and the beginning of today, and I would like to take an opportunity to go back and speak to a few of the points that the member raised at day's end yesterday and the issue that she's raised today.

I'm going to start with that one actually. And I do thank the member. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify if there was any misunderstanding that, you know, on her part or on the part of anybody listening or reading the *Hansard*, that I would view the bumping of patients, even a single time, on the cardiac wait list as something that, you know, it is perfectly fine.

It isn't perfectly fine, and we know that any family that has a loved one that's awaiting cardiac surgery is certainly wanting that surgery to take place as quickly as possible, and patients, themselves, who are already in a situation where surgery is required, so compromised, we could say—I'm no doctor but I think that's a fair word—that any additional stress that they have as they await their surgery and then to learn that their surgery would, indeed, be postponed even to the next day, which is what the strategy to avoid multiple bumping has been all about, that indeed it's adding stress in somebody's life and that—that's not a positive thing.

So I don't want the member to think or anyone else to think that I view that bumping of any kind is without consequences. I would reiterate, though, that Dr. Koshal, you know, really was focussing on the fact that the issue of bumping and indeed multiple bumping became an issue of wait time. And that's why the focus has been so clearly on monitoring medically recommended benchmarks and times that people have to wait, and the efforts that in the case when people do get bumped oftentimes because an emergency has arrived at the door, which I don't think anybody would disagree needs to take priority, efforts that have been made to virtually eliminate the multiple bumping and, therefore, the amount of time that somebody would have to wait from their scheduled time to getting their actual surgery, in many respects in under 24 hours we think is a very positive stride in the right direction.

* (10:10)

We also know that the region continues to work with Dr. Menkis and people in the Cardiac Sciences Program to innovate in other ways to try to eliminate any kind of bumping. I, you know, would not be so foolhardy as to suggest that it's something that could be eliminated down to zero on a routine basis, because of the issue that I've raised about emergencies—unpredictable events—presenting themselves. But there is work—I want to assure the member—going on in the building of capacity in the program to try to, even in the case of emergencies presenting, avoid elective cases from being bumped. So that work is ongoing, I want to assure the member, and we look forward to continuing our relationship with the cardiac program in providing resources and expertise in enabling this to happen. So I thank the member for the opportunity to clarify any misunderstanding that may have occurred in our discussion yesterday.

I wanted to speak just for a couple of minutes on some of the issues that—that the issue raise—or that the member raised yesterday, concerning reporting of administrative spending and trying to tease out corporate and executive spending from, you know, the sweeping generalizations that tend to occur under that word—administrative spending—when, in fact, some of that administrative spending, indeed, concerns front-line care, things like patient safety, infection control, doctor recruitment, that sort of thing. And the member made mention of a recommendation from the external review that we write to CIHI and speak to them about clarifying definitions and so forth, and I wanted to assure the member that that correspondence did take place. We did take that recommendation seriously and did send our observations about how administrative data was being captured and some recommendations about how we think that that could be improved. So that is completed, I can let the member know.

And I would let the member know, also, that yes, as a result of the administrative review—or, pardon me, the external review for RHAs and ongoing work to improve transparency, that we are asking the WRHA and other regions, of course, to work towards presenting their data in a way that more clearly peels out corporate costs. So we're looking forward to having that evolve.

It was interesting to note, I think, that once we peeled out corporate spending—you know, took patient care-related functions out of the equation of

administrative spending—the WRHA corporate spending is at about 3.1 percent. And I think that there was a recommendation by the Tories in '07, around the election time, that that spending be held to 3 percent. So we're darn close to the bull's eye, I'd say, and we're going to continue to work on that. The WRHA continues to work on that.

I was interested in some of the comments the member was making about the Edmonton regional health authority and, I mean, we read the same documents so we know about their reputation in the past of being a very strong regional health authority. You know, ironically, they got blown up. They were so good they were obliterated. I think it's also fair to note that the CEO for that regional health authority, I'm informed, made somewhere between 800 and 900 thousand dollars. And I know that it's not necessarily this member—other members tend to perseverate on CEO salaries—but it's interesting to note that that is the range for what that CEO was being paid, which is an astronomical leap from what's happening here in Manitoba. So I know that the member likes these newsy little tidbits as much as I do. So I thought I would put them on the record.

Moving on to the issue that she raised this morning, concerning the organization of Manitoba Health, I just wanted to let the member know we had a brief discussion about this last year. We know that there have been a number of programs that have been added under the umbrella of Manitoba Health. We know that it certainly does take people in positions of leadership to drive important things like primary care renewal, to oversee massive and important programs in regional health authorities. And in scanning, you know, where ADMs across the nation sit, you know, Manitoba is quite squarely placed about the middle of the pack. British Columbia comes in at nine, Ontario at 10, New Brunswick, I think, smaller than us, at five, Alberta at six. So, you know, we—I don't think we're out of line in terms of the size of our department with what's going on across the country.

And I, you know, really want to say, in the few seconds that I have left in this answer, that the people that we have working in these roles right now work harder than most people that I know, and I really, really want to commend them for their commitment to Manitobans, their commitment to improving the system, and I feel very lucky to have them to advise me, to work every day to improve the system.

Mrs. Driedger: I just want to indicate to the minister that in my asking the questions about the NDP

doubling the size of the number of ADMs has nothing to do with the capabilities of the staff within those positions. I respect very much the role that they do. I worked closely with, you know, a number of ADMs when we were in government, and I saw the work effort that they put into it. So I just want to acknowledge right now that I greatly respect that. So my questions have absolutely nothing to do with the capabilities of any of the people in those positions.

And I neglected yesterday to welcome Ms. Herd to the table. I had acknowledged Mr. Sussman earlier in welcoming him to his new job, and I just want to acknowledge Ms. Herd today. I know she's probably got a very, very tough position within Health, with all the dollars that flow, and just want to welcome her here and thank her for her good work.

My question really, though, goes right back to the promise that Gary Doer made in 1999. And he made a lot of hay out of the fact that executive support for the, you know, minister of Health at the time was something that he was absolutely, totally against. And he had a field day with this in the 1999 election, that absolutely there was going to be no increase to, you know, to spending in that area, that he was totally against increasing health bureaucracy. And yet—and we managed through some tough times.

The minister was talking about, well, there were new programs added. Well, I don't see that there are new programs added. I mean, we were working really hard in the '90s, probably just as hard as anybody now, to bring forward primary health-care reform. And there were a lot of initiatives going on.

And the fact of it was, when regionalization was set up, the intent was that Manitoba Health should be able to be downsized, that instead of having two big bureaucracies, one with RHAs and one with Manitoba Health, the original intent of regionalization was to decrease Manitoba's health bureaucracy. And in fact it's grown, you know, quite significantly under the NDP, with a doubling of ADMs. And, you know, there's one deputy minister, six ADMs, and that was something that the NDP were absolutely opposed to.

So I need to ask the Minister of Health: What did that promise mean in 1999 when it was made—like, did it mean anything? Was it just rhetoric of the day to try to win an election? Was it—you know, did it have any meaning? It just—it's such a hypocritical position that they took then, when you look at where the numbers have ended up right now. So I'd like to

ask the minister, you know: What did that mean when they basically doubled the number of ADMs?

* (10:20)

Ms. Oswald: Again, you know, we are working very hard on initiatives to improve the health-care system, but the commitment to transferring investment to the front line is very real. You know, the member is focussing on assistant deputy ministers, and, certainly, that is her purview.

In the organizational chart we see ADM and Chief Financial Officer, Karen Herd, Health Work Force Assistant Deputy Minister, Terry Goertzen, who, of course, has been leading the charge in massive hiring of front-line workers.

You know, we know we have 2,500 more nurses today. We've got a net increase of 345 more doctors, and numerous other increases across the—so this is a significant leadership role that this position places.

We know we have an ADM in charge of regional programs and services, chiefly in charge of overseeing what's happening in our regional health authorities. Associate Deputy Minister Marie O'Neill, Public Health and Primary Care. You know, we certainly wouldn't have any difficulty discussing the fact that there was no more important role going on than considering public health with pandemic H1N1 last year.

We have ADM Kim Sharman, in charge of Provincial Programs and Services—very heavily involved in capital planning which, again, has been a very significant area of responsibility as we've seen renovations or rebuilds or new builds of over 100 facilities over the time that we've been in office.

So very, you know, huge roles of responsibility at that level, but I think it's worthwhile to note, in—overall, looking at FTEs spanning the decade, we've actually seen a net decrease. In '99, full-time equivalence in, you know, what would be considered a bureaucracy, I suppose—but, again, we had a pretty healthy debate about that yesterday, about the important role that people can play in patient safety and infection control. In '98-99, full-time equivalence, 1,787; and today, 1,192.

So, indeed, we have seen a pretty substantial decrease in full-time equivalence in the department in what may or may not be fairly painted as administrative roles. So there has been pretty aggressive action taken in decreasing the bureaucracy.

If we focus on ADMs, we see one, two, three, four, five. Note that the office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer has been restructured. He doesn't hold an ADM role now. We learned, I think, some important lessons during pandemic H1N1 and, in fact, his responsibilities have been assumed, you know, in terms of administrative role, under other areas. And he is holding the role of Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, but not specifically an ADM role.

So, again, you know, we have seen a decrease in FTEs. We've seen an increase in number of ADMs and, as I've stated earlier, when you do cross-jurisdictional analysis, we're pretty middle of the pack, once again.

Mrs. Driedger: The programs that the minister referred to, the, you know, various responsibilities of Manitoba Health, were also there in the 1990s and, in fact, were incredibly challenging because of the decrease of federal dollars that were coming to Manitoba—or that were not coming to Manitoba from the federal government at the time. And there was a period of about four years that almost a billion dollars was kept back from Manitoba.

So our ADMs had a significant role to play in the '90s, and we did it with three ADMs. We were able to manage the health-care system with far less high-level positions than what the NDP seem to like, and we've seen it with this government that they tend to like big government. And I have to say that our ADMs were incredibly talented in the '90s. They were—I was just so impressed with watching them in action, and, you know, the three of them and our deputy minister at the time were very, very, you know, focussed and capable of doing what they were doing.

So I don't know how the minister—and I don't think she has adequately justified why she needs six ADMs currently in health care, especially when we see that with regionalization the intent was to decrease the size of Manitoba Health.

I'd like to ask the minister why that hasn't seemed to have changed a whole lot. I know she was talking about FTEs. Now, from the 2000 Estimates book, I'm looking here at 1,094 FTEs, and I know that she's just referenced that there's 1,192 FTEs at this point. So from 2000 until now, it looks like there's approximately 98 more FTEs in the last 10 years, although I notice that one of the newspapers last year made a reference that there were 130 more.

I'm not sure where that happened, but I have to ask, considering regionalization was intended to see a decrease in the size of the bureaucracy under Manitoba Health, I wonder if the minister could tell us why that hasn't happened. And maybe there's justifiable reasons. I don't know that. All I know is that with regionalization those numbers were to decrease and, in fact, they've gone up.

So can the minister indicate why we aren't seeing what was originally predicted at the time regionalization was brought in?

Ms. Oswald: On a couple of points, to begin. The member suggested—you know, perhaps I didn't hear correctly—that, you know, there really isn't anything new going on to account for why there would be more people. And, you know, I just—I need to suggest that there are a number of pretty significant new initiatives going on and I—you know, I don't—I won't list every single one of them, but of, you know, of the ones that I will take the time to list, the wait times initiatives that have been in place, wait times task force and the assigning of individuals to carry out, not only what was asked of us by our first minister some years ago on the wait time initiative, but also Manitoba's own priorities for wait times. I mean, that would be an increase.

The introduction of and the development of the advanced access model in primary care, the Physician Integrated Network which has already shown some tremendous results and transformation of the system, introduction of nurse practitioners, midwives, the physician assistant program, the protection from persons in care office, PCH standards reviews, you know, would account for personnel on the ground working on this. Also added to the process would be Selkirk redevelopment and the provincial drug program. So there would be amendments and modifications where you would see net increases of individuals in the apartment—in the department captured in the count that would not have previously been captured in the count.

*(10:30)

I also want to make a correction. I misread some information that I got from the deputy, my fault, not his. Earlier I said 1,700. The correct number for 1998-1999—the correct number is 1,400-1,416. So I do want to make that clarification because that does represent a gap. It went down to under—about 1,089 in the early 2000s, and we have added important initiatives, including some of the ones that I've mentioned, the PPCO, patient safety, PCH standards,

Selkirk Mental Health, Cadham lab, not small numbers that have come in under that to account for FTEs. But I was in error before when I said 17; it should have been 14. So I want to be clear about that.

So, again, I mean, we can, I think, agree on an important point that the member made earlier and that was we're not speaking about individuals. I didn't know the people that were serving as ADMs during the time that they were in power, but I can say I'm sure that as the member has suggested, they were very committed to the work that they were doing, and I'm certainly not suggesting otherwise, just as the member said earlier that she's not talking about the individual people that are working very hard.

But, again, we are seeing, as measured by CIHI, a trending down, as a percentage, of the department of people that are working in those administrative roles. The goal was to get service to the front line and to get resources to the front line, and I believe we are achieving that goal, and we're going to continue to work to drive down administration and increase front-line care, and there are a variety of ways that that can be done and we're committed to do them.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to commend the deputy minister. He's got some great briefing notes there for the Minister of Health. And it looks like they're—he appears to be, you know, really on top of some of these issues, and the briefing notes sound like they're quite thorough.

When we look at the promise, though, that was made, and that's what, I guess, I'm struggling with. Like, when the government—it was like hallway medicine, you know, going to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. We're not going to increase the size of bureaucracy in Manitoba Health. Like, what, then, was the promise made on? I mean, yes, there are always changes, but is it promises made just to win elections or was there something substantive behind, you know, a government making a promise like that in—like, surely to goodness, when they made the promise in 1999, they would have—did a forward look that, you know, yeah, we might need to make some changes.

And I know the minister wasn't—don't believe she was there at the time, so it may be putting her in a bit of an unfair position but, you know, other promises get made over the years, and I guess I'm just, you know, wondering why would they be making a promise like that and almost immediately

turn around and double the size of the bureaucracy at the highest levels in Manitoba Health.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Chair, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, you know, I will reiterate that it's my view that the goal was to ensure that resources were being spent on front-line care. And we have seen regional health authorities, in whatever form they take—you know, local health integrated networks, whatever they're called in Ontario, LHINs, and, you know, other kinds of names for the same entity—we've seen across the nation health departments in concert with regional-health-authority-type bodies take shape and adapt and, in some cases, grow, except, you know, for the one that the member talked about yesterday that was the best in the nation that did get blown up.

You know, we have seen administrations take different shapes and have different mandates across the nation. Manitoba sits about the middle of the pack, and it's not just me saying this, it's what the data says in terms of counts of assistant deputy ministers or associate deputy ministers across the nation. That's just a fact. It's also substantiated by the RHA external reviewers who said, and again I'm quoting here: All RHAs have taken actions to reduce administrative costs and that there's a constant focus on cost savings and evidence of reduced costs, and the reviewers concluded, and again I quote: that administrative costs within the RHAs are on balance at a reasonable level compared to RHAs in other provinces.

I believe the commitment, again, back in those times—and the member is right, I wasn't there—was to focus on getting more help to the front line, and that's why there have been commitments about adding net new nurses to the system and net new doctors to the system and other help professionals who I mean not to exclude in my efforts to shorten this answer.

So, again, when you do the analysis of what is being spent across the nation, Manitoba is, you know, second lowest according to CIHI on admin costs, CIHI hospital financial performance indicators released in October '09. And, when you look at—even the target recommended by the Tories in the 2000 election campaign and that was, you know, held outside of the WRHA headquarters, saying, you know, we would demand that corporate spending be held to 3 percent, and when you do that analysis today the WRHA sits at 3.1. So we haven't hit the bull's eye that the Tories said that they would hit.

We're off by 0.1 percent, but we're continuing to do more and more work every day.

So, again, I would say that, you know, the efforts that were made during the course of this administration to cut the number of RHAs and cut the number of senior management in half in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is an effort towards making this commitment to transferring resources to front-line care.

So, again, you know, some of this material I put on the record before, you know, and we can continue to talk about this. I believe the commitment is clear as measured by CIHI, as noted by RHA external reviewers and as evidenced by senior administration comparisons across the nation that, indeed, you know, we are middle of the pack running a system that has challenges in it—you know, complex chronic diseases, interesting geography—and we're going to continue to work to provide the best care that we can for people in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister, I think, is missing the point that I'm trying to make, and the fact is that the NDP broke their promise, and that is a fact. The minister could go on and make all of these explanations, but in the end the fact is they broke a promise that they made about, you know, what their beliefs were, about the size of bureaucracy and wanting to keep that down, and whether they didn't have enough information at the time or it was just, you know, let's say anything to win an election, I don't know. But the fact is it is a broken promise.

Now, the cost of—the minister did indicate that the corporate spending for the WRHA was 3.1 percent. Can the minister indicate what that is in a dollar number?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, again, to be clear, what I said was, you know, in relation to our discussion yesterday about what is administrative spending, you know, again, does this, in fact, capture patient-related items like infection control and patient safety. Is it, in fact—is the language really more to talk about corporate executive-type spending?

So, again, when I said when you peel out the patient-care-related functions—and I've said that a couple of times—that the WRHA corporate spending is actually at 3.1 percent. So I want to be clear that I'm not saying overall, but I'm saying as we attempt to define that word "administrative" that we've been talking about for a couple of days.

And in terms of what the actual number is for that, I don't have it at my fingertips, but we could, you know, endeavour to work on, you know, finding that number for the member.

* (10:40)

Mrs. Driedger: I would appreciate that, because, obviously, that is not information that readily comes our way. When we ask the WRHA for anything, we have to ask for it by FIPPA, which I find strange a lot of the time. Most of the time, we have to wait 30 days and when they want to be unco-operative, I may have to wait 60 days. And there seems to be a desire to not be very forthcoming all the time with information. So for the minister to indicate that the corporate spending, and she's able to pull it out of the big numbers, is at 3.1 percent. I would really like to see what that number is now, because that's a number they used to report on for a number of years, until 2004, and then they buried it within their audited statements. So that is a number that I think would be important to have out there.

The minister also indicated that Alberta blew up their RHAs. And I think what was happening there, and I know other provinces have wondered about whether or not they should be doing the same thing, that there's concerns across the country as to whether regionalization is the right model or the wrong model or, you know, what we could be doing better. And, you know, I think the Alberta government looked at what was happening in Alberta and they did not feel they were getting the good patient outcomes that they had thought they were going to get with all of the spending that was going into the RHAs. And I think they saw that as a, you know, a signal to them that they needed to do something. And that's certainly my understanding of why they blew up their RHAs. It's either fix them or blow them up.

And I know a number of the provinces are, you know, struggling and trying to address that same issue because it seems that, although there were a lot of thoughts in the early days that RHAs were going to do many things, I think a lot of people have felt that they haven't quite got to where they expected them to be and that there's a lot of money being spent on RHAs, and especially on RHA administration. And I think that Alberta felt, if they were going to be putting all that money in and losing a say in what they wanted in the health-care system, then I think they felt that that was the better way to go.

Can the minister indicate if that was her understanding of why Alberta did what they did?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Chair, and I'd agree with the member that it's a national conversation that's going on about what kind of model is best to have, you know, the best possible delivery of health care to its citizens. And I know I wasn't privy, of course, to the discussions that were going on in Ontario—or in Alberta. We know that, you know, the two big, Edmonton and Calgary, regional health authorities were running, you know, over a billion dollars in deficit, and there were lots of discussions about why they should be merged.

I'm informed that they still actually have a regional model of delivery there. You know, it hasn't all been brought in under the department. There's an arm's-length board, essentially, that's delivering regional care. And this really speaks to, you know, one of the central issues as, in my view, of the benefits or the downsides to a regional health authority.

My experience in talking to different communities, of course, has been a real desire to have a local voice, a community voice in what's happening in health care. And the idea of going to one regional health authority or no regional health authorities or, you know, a few larger regional health authorities does concern some people in terms of losing their local voice and their local control.

And I think that that's a question that all jurisdictions in Canada struggle with—about giving people in local communities a strong voice in how their health care is delivered. And, I know, within the regions now there are district health action committees that, I think, were originally designed to address this issue of having a local voice. And I think they work well in some regions, not so well in others. And I think there are community groups that have grown out of a desire to have more of that voice.

So, on the one hand, jurisdictions across the land, I think, would really struggle against doing away with that regional approach, because they wouldn't want to take the opportunity for people to have a voice potentially even further away.

Also, on that issue, we know that in the aftermath of SARS one of the recommendations that came out of the numerous overviews of what happened during SARS was about how the absence of a regional approach was a real downfall, in terms of being able to communicate effectively, and the lack of interconnectivity among facilities and among professionals was a real problem. And, while I don't

want to speak for Ontario, there is a, I think, commonly held view that the creation of their LHINs—L-H-I-N—really came out of SARS and needing to have that kind of networked approach. So there is a patient safety kind of proregionalization attitude out there.

I think laying over all of that is the ongoing discussion, certainly in these economic times and what we've been journeying through, of the sustainability of health care and funding for health care. And so having an overlay of a financial argument over an organizational argument, that I would agree with the member, that every jurisdiction in the land is reviewing what is the best possible way to approach the organization of health in a given jurisdiction.

I know that the independent reviewers, the RHA external review, did not recommend ending regionalization. They didn't make that point. And what we think that we need to do is continue to work to find what are the best possible qualities in a regional approach. And I would point to how the regions were able to work together so effectively during H1N1 on these same issues that would have been born out of SARS in many respects, and what isn't working so well, and that is the feeling in communities that they're not having the kind of voice that they want to have in some communities.

And so we're going to continue to work with our RHA CEOs, our board chairs and all the people in regions that have advice to give about what shape health care should take today and into the future.

So, you know, we made that initial step early on in the mandate to reduce the number of RHAs, and I can say that it's an ongoing dialogue about what we can learn from other jurisdictions and what is best for Manitoba as we go forward in terms of structure and sustainability.

Mrs. Driedger: On page 15 of the Estimates book, it indicates that the spending on Manitoba Health itself is 85 point—well, pretty much 5—so 85.5 million. Is that accurate? Is my interpretation of that accurate?

* (10:50)

Ms. Oswald: That number 85 is the forecast.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister then confirm, though, that that is the forecast for the spending of what it takes to fund Manitoba Health, 85 and a half million?

Ms. Oswald: This room just got a lot more interesting, didn't it? And for those of you who aren't in the room, there are a bunch of fabulous-looking students that just entered the room. They must be from the really good-looking part of Manitoba, I've noticed. They're from Charleswood, I'm informed. I should have known. Just when they came in, everybody's just, you know, a little bit 'smilier'. Well, they get to witness their member of the Legislature doing what she does best, and that's setting the feet on fire of the Minister of Health. Well, it's what she does second best because she represents your community beautifully.

So, in answer to the question, yes, that's the forecast for '10-11.

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister doesn't mind, I'd just like to take a moment to welcome everybody here from Charleswood, and it's a pleasure to have you here. I'm sorry I couldn't come and talk to you all personally, but my colleague most graciously agreed to do that. But you're now seeing your MLA in action here in a process called Estimates, where I get to sit with the Minister of Health for 10 hours and ask questions about what's happening in health care in Manitoba. So you're actually getting to see something that most of your fellow students have probably not had a chance to witness, is to come into a committee room and you—you're looking at politics in action. So I hope you enjoy the Legislature and thanks for being here in your building.

Also on page 25 of the Estimates book, it indicates that 1.2 million is used to run the minister's office, that that is the Executive Support to the Minister of Health, \$1.2 million. Is that an accurate interpretation?

Ms. Oswald: That is the forecast and that is accurate. That does capture minister's office and deputy minister's office under Executive Support. That's correct.

Mrs. Driedger: So to sum it up, then, we're looking at \$1.2 million for Executive Support to the Minister of Health and I would indicate that's almost half a million more than in 1999. So that's increased quite substantially in terms of staffing support, half a million more in staffing support, 85.5 million to run Manitoba Health and 153 million to run the RHAs' administrative costs.

So, in adding all of that up, I am seeing 240 million, almost a quarter billion dollars, on

administration in health care. Is that an accurate interpretation?

Ms. Oswald: Just to clarify there, within the context of those numbers, we are talking about direct service, that it captures Cadham Lab; it captures Selkirk; it captures northern nursing stations as well. So I think it's important to make that observation.

Again, when we paint that image of administrative costs, sometimes you get the idea of somebody sitting at a desk looking at a computer screen all days. It's not that. There's a lot captured in that number that has a lot to do with people getting the health services that they need.

Mrs. Driedger: In the 1999 election, besides Gary Doer railing against the increase in size of ADMs, he also railed against the amount of money spent in Executive Support. And I find it interesting now that, you know, the government that came to power on saying they were going to decrease that has, in fact, ramped up spending in Executive Support.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health—if we look at page 25, I would assume that the one position there for managerial is the deputy minister. I would ask the minister to indicate the—who are the positions, or what are the positions for the professional/technical—and I note there's five there—and the administrative support—I note there is nine there. And wonder if the Minister of Health could tell us what those positions are and who is in those positions.

Ms. Oswald: Again, going back to the previous statement, wanting to indicate that in that number, you know, roughly 32 million alone—*[interjection]* \$32 million alone is Selkirk Mental Health Centre. Captured under there, roughly 14 million would be Cadham labs, you know, pathology tests, critically important to people's health. So, again, we need to be pretty careful about, you know—and, of course, there are other things under there, but pretty careful about how we're characterizing numbers as being administrative in nature. The debate that we've had—or the clarification exercise, I should say—that we've had in the last day and a half about what exactly that word means and what it doesn't mean.

So the departmental expenditure estimate shows minister's and DM's offices have staff in them. I can articulate for the member that staff in my office include Breigh Kusmack, who is the SA in Health; Keir Johnson works as a project manager; Katie Findlater, formerly Strachan, works as project

manager; Ben Wickstrom, project manager; Katarina Cvitko is the intake co-ordinator in Health; I believe under that is also captured my executive assistant, Colleen Siles. There are admin staff in the front office: Linda Freed; Chris Dewar, Vivian Jack and there's a—currently a temp in our office, Alice Steinbart. That's a total of 10 FTEs. The other five sit within the deputy minister's office.

Mrs. Driedger: So can the minister indicate the—and just clarify for me, then, that she has six political staff.

Ms. Oswald: That's correct.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate when the project managers were put into place?

Ms. Oswald: Keir Johnson started his work in September of 2007; Katie Findlater, July '08; Ben Wickstrom, March '08. Ben was formerly the intake co-ordinator in Health.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why she felt she needed three project managers within her—or within her office?

* (11:00)

Ms. Oswald: There's a lot of work to do. That would be the short answer.

There are initiatives taking place in terms of primary care reform, major initiatives being undertaken to work through addressing the gap in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, major initiatives on patient safety, recruitment of health personnel, the capital projects and, certainly, work that goes on in dealing with cases that are brought to our attention would be—would fall not only under the purview of the intake co-ordinator who has the majority but not all of contact with citizens that present with challenges, but individuals that work in my office on projects also have direct contact with citizens as well, and we just want to make sure that people can get responses as quickly as possible.

So I guess I should go back to the beginning of my answer: There's lots of work.

Mrs. Driedger: And I do agree with the minister there's lots of work. But that work that she has just outlined would seem to me to be work that would normally be done by people within the department. Why does she need political staff to do that? Is it to keep an eye on all of the other people within the department that are doing the jobs?

Ms. Oswald: Well, the people that I work with, sitting here at this table, I can assure you, require very little eye being kept on them, just as a point of clarification.

I would just say to the member that there are many advocacy groups, rural municipalities, First Nations group, professional associations that have excellent ideas that they want to bring forward, and, yes, people in our regional office do lots of this work, but there's plenty to go around.

And so these individuals are very dedicated. They work very hard with communities and groups that want to see their ideas come forward, want to see their dreams come true. And so they're a very hardworking crew and very, very committed to improving the health status of Manitobans and improving the system.

Mrs. Driedger: Did the minister feel she needed more political staff to do damage control in terms of some of the challenges that keep coming up in health care and the number of issues that we're able to bring forward publicly? Is that why she needs so many political staff, to run interference?

Ms. Oswald: No.

Mrs. Driedger: I go back to the 2000 Estimates and I note that executive support—there were only 11 positions then, and it looks like a Tory government was able to manage with far less political staff than what this minister feels she needs.

It certainly does perhaps speak to the challenges in health care that, really, despite coming into government on a promise to fix health care, nothing has, you know, dramatically happened that they've fixed it. In fact, a lot of the problems are still there, and a lot of people would say that things aren't better.

So to see her load up her office with political staff makes me think that there's a lot of damage control that needs to be done. And I note also that the RHAs, whether it was through an auditor's report or whether it was through the review of the RHAs, a number of the RHAs have indicated there's a lot of political interference that's going on so that they feel that they aren't able to adequately do their jobs.

So we can maybe see where all of it's coming. It seems that when we're in a deficit position in Manitoba and health spending is going up and the minister herself has correctly said that there's a lot of discussion right now about whether or not that spending can be sustained, I am absolutely

flabbergasted that she has cranked up the positions in her office—of political positions.

You know, if we were going to look at cutting back instead of running these deficits and debt, why didn't she cut back on some of her political staff in her office then?

Ms. Oswald: I mean, clearly there are different approaches that are taken to how to connect with community groups and how to hear the concerns and take the time with individuals that bring their cases forward, and you know that—I don't think it's any great mystery that different political parties have different approaches to how they handle people.

I mean, the member says we managed just fine with 11. Actually, I think you got defeated—as a small point. But there were decisions that your government, when it was in power, made about how to manage in health care, what to do with nurses, you know, how long people needed to wait for radiation therapy, you know, what to do with medical school spaces that were different from decisions that we're making.

And again, these people that work in my office are highly committed to improving the situation in Manitoba. They work with people in the department, they work with me in meeting with community groups, and I'm very proud of the work that they do to make things better in health care. They're very, very dedicated individuals and we're going to continue to work with our relationships with rural municipalities, with First Nations, with professional groups, advocacy groups, and we're just going to continue to move forward, you know, as we work on the many projects that we know are important to Manitobans.

We know that the department, you know, is taking a cut in executive support of about 3 percent, which, you know, is painful. I'm not going to deny that in that these people are doing critically important work on recruitment, on issues of infection control, on primary care, but we are working to ensure that we give people the best care that we can.

Mrs. Driedger: I would just like to indicate that I'm sure her staff are—her political staff are all highly committed. I've met a number of them and I don't doubt their commitment and their talent, but that's beside the point. And I think the minister is missing the point again.

Basically, she's added, you know, a number of positions to executive support. There were only 11,

years ago. She has cranked it up to 15, she's got six political staff; that is probably an all-time high, even in the last 10 years. And I think she's missing the point.

Why would you be hiring political staff when, in fact, we are seeing a government that has got into a big financial mess by running a deficit this year, running deficits for the next four years? I don't think she can justify this kind of spending on political staff when that kind of money should be going to the front lines of health care.

How could she even try here to be justifying, you know, adding that number of positions to her office?

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, I'll say to the member that we think that it's important to talk to Manitobans and listen to them and get their ideas about their No. 1 priority which is health care.

Your party has decided, according to my new favourite paper, the *Carman Valley Leader*, that health care is not going to be at the top of your list. Your own party recognizes that you don't have credibility in the electorate on health care, so you have to go on other things.

We think that it's important to listen to people and to hear their ideas and yes, we do get phone calls and letters in our office. They're not all, by the way, letters of complaint. Sometimes we get great suggestions, sometimes we get, brace yourself, compliments, and we think it's important to listen to people.

The minister's office, the budget is taking a cut this year. You may have heard a little something about me taking a cut in the ministerial salary this year. That's what this economy is about.

*(11:10)

But, when I see that people in the office are waiting to hear a response to a question that they have, and that we have the ability to provide more people that can talk to them and hear their concerns, that is a decision that I have made. I admit that fully, that I don't want people to wait unnecessarily long to get a response on questions that they're asking.

And the department—again, second to none in the nation, I believe, and I've had a chance to hang around a bit and look at what's going on in other jurisdictions—is terrific, but they don't always get to answer all the questions that, you know, may be more partisan in nature to my office. And, you know,

that's not their job to deal with people that are railing about politics. And I—you know these are important concerns and these individuals are working really hard every single day.

So I want people of Manitoba to get answers as quickly as possible. I still don't think that sometimes people are getting responses to letters that they write as quickly as I would like, and so we're going to continue to work on that. I think the responsiveness has improved over time and we're continuing to work on the best possible way to do that.

Certainly, you know, I'm hearing the member say that there should be fewer people. I'm hearing the member say that there should be less opportunity for people to be communicating with the minister's office. And I respect the fact that's her point of view. She's allowed to have it. But I, at this time, I really do believe that we need to work to be as responsive as possible and that's the choice that I've made.

Mrs. Driedger: I think the minister continues to miss the point, and the point with all of this is that there are a lot of people within her own bureaucracy that have the talent and ability to deal with a lot of these issues. Why she felt she had to ramp up the political staff because what she's basically done, and we see it with her answers all the time, is politicized health care to a degree unlike I've seen in 10 years in working with other ministers.

And certainly this explains her—I guess, partly, how she's done it is by adding political staff to do damage control, political staff to try to spin the media, you know, political staff to deal with all of the challenges. She's saying we need more political staff because there's so much issues coming into her office. So, yeah, there are a lot of issues coming into her office because there are a lot of challenges out there and there's a lot of messes out there. And I can see that, you know, she feels she has to have more political staff in order to deal with the challenges that, you know, continue to fester under her watch.

And, you know, I would indicate, I think this is so typical of what we see with the NDP is taking a lot of, you know, good supporters, putting them into good positions. We're seeing now six political staff being given jobs in her office, have to wonder what it's like through the rest of government. When we talk to different departments, I'm sure we're going to find similarities there, but, you know, it's well known that the NDP take care of their own really well, and we hear that all the time.

And we hear it from people within all—within government as well. The minister, feeling that she needs to ramp this up so much is just, you know, I guess what we would expect from the NDP. But when we see that health care is not sustainable, when we see that the dollars could be better spent on patient care, that's when this looks so egregious, that they're taking those dollars and putting it towards political staff rather than putting it towards front-line health care.

So that's what I feel really troubled by because, you know, we're seeing money, whether it's in administration or whether it's in political staff that, you know, is money that's being siphoned away from health care and the minister doesn't seem to have any problem justifying, in her own mind, that that's an okay thing to do. And I don't think it is okay. I think, you know, she's admitting herself that health-care dollars are questionably unsustainable, and yet I don't see her making much of an effort to try to find ways to manage those finances better. And we're seeing it all throughout 10 years of NDP government in health care.

You haven't fixed the problems. You know, you came into government on a big promise to fix health care. And, in fact, the minister might be interested to know that there's a very, very strong movement afoot within the health-care system to bring forward a lot more concerns about is—what is happening in health care, because they think the minister is not listening. They think the minister is not on top of her game and knowing what is going—really going on in health care, and there is a big movement that has started. And there will be more and more information about that coming out over time. So, maybe, we're going to start to see political staff numbers in her office go up even more over time, I guess, to try to bring all of this under control. But I think that big movement that is starting within health care is not going to be very impressed to know that there are so many political staff within her office, when that money should be spent on a number of challenges that they're seeing on the front lines of health care, that should be going to front-line health care and to patient care. I don't know if the minister wants to comment on that before I move on to something else.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I do appreciate the opportunity to comment and, again, I believe it comes back to decisions and choices that people make. And the member, of course, is saying that she doesn't like mine. And that's her right and, indeed, as she put on

the record last year, her role, just to oppose, and so be it.

You know, I find it interesting to suggest that, you know, she thinks that I am a horrendously political individual when it comes to issues in health care. You know, she's infamous herself in terms of how, you know, she takes issues into the newspaper with, shall we say, not all the facts on the record and making issues political and it's, you know, it's common knowledge, of course. But, still, for the words to escape her lips that I'm horrendously political is ironic at minimum. And, you know, we'll just agree to disagree on individual style and that's, I guess, what makes the world interesting.

As far as her statements about, you know, needing more political staff in order to provide more political spin so that life can be so easy for me, I don't think there's any chance any time soon that I'm going to be accused of being given a free ride by the *Winnipeg Sun* or the *Winnipeg Free Press* because of all this terrific staff that I have. I think that someone who sits in the role of minister of health in any jurisdiction and of any political stripe is going to have to face a variety of issues in different ways, and different oppositions will handle some things in similar ways and will handle other things in different ways. And, you know, I'm thinking about how political health care can be and, you know, indeed, how political the member opposite can be.

I think back to the election and some of the stories that came out of that. And, you know, pre-election, I think perhaps the worst was the accusation that the Grace ER was going to close and Grace Hospital was going to close, I think it came to at one point.

* (11:20)

And, you know, while one can understand that, you know, people in certain areas of the city want to create a stir, it was very troubling for seniors in that community to get information that was so far and away from any semblance of reality, but these people got frightened, and I had conversations with them afterwards, and, you know, they were really disappointed in the tactics of members opposite, and with the member from Charleswood in particular, that this kind of fear would be inspired to the seniors of the community. I mean, I know that we're always going to have our debates about how to approach things, but, you know, again, I might politely say on the subject of being political, I don't think people in

glass houses ought to throw stones. It's as simple as that.

Doctors, who she talks about a movement in the health-care system, I think everybody is going to have an idea or different ideas about how things should be run, you know, but doctors—or doctor—writing letters to the *Free Press* talking about a proclivity for fearmongering on the part of the member opposite. I mean, that was a little breathtaking in and of itself.

So, I mean, I suppose we could spend the rest of our 10 hours sitting here being mean to one another. You know, that, I think, might be general entertainment for people that are listening or reading, but I think it's important to realize that there's no question that we're going to make different choices just from the political roots from which we come.

Our choices have been to hire way more nurses, not fire them. Our choices have included raising the number of spaces in medical schools, so more people can study in Manitoba to become a doctor, not to cut the spaces. Our choices have been to hire more doctors—net new, 345—not to drive them away, like the former president of the MMA so articulately said regarding the relationship that they had with the former government.

So we are going to have different approaches on the particular subject that the member is talking about, concerning having political staff in my office that can reach out to people that have questions, that have ideas, that want to talk about direction. It's—it is my choice to have more people available to speak directly to citizens of Manitoba, you know, that don't have connections through the Manitoba Club but that just have a phone call that they want to make and they want a question answered. So that's the choice that I'm going to make.

I mean, I'm reminded by a member that—was it Jim Downey that said, who am I going to hire, my enemies? You know, that's not really my attitude, but, again, I don't think we should be overly sanctimonious about how staff gets hired into buildings.

I think that we should just talk about, you know, issues of substance, investments in the front line, concerns that the member has, choose that route, I suppose, more than being mean to each other for the remaining seven hours. It's the member's choice.

Mr. Chairperson: Are we—do we have any other questions?

Mrs. Driedger: The minister just took a shot at the Manitoba Club. Let me start there. Gary Doer got in a lot of trouble every time he opened his mouth here in the Legislature taking a shot at the Manitoba Club and the Manitoba Club became very aware of those shots that were made at them, considering that a lot of those people do a lot for Winnipeg. I'm really quite amazed that this minister would stoop so low as to go down that road.

I know Gary Doer used to talk about the puffs of smoke coming out of the Manitoba Club, and I believe he had an honorary membership, basically, by being premier. And I know that they were very upset when he did take his shots. So the minister's sitting here with a grin on her face thinking that, you know, it's okay to take a swipe at, you know, a lot of leaders in our province who may happen to belong to the Manitoba Club. I don't know a lot of people that belong there, but I would certainly suspect that many of them have a lot of vested interest in this province. So I'm—I don't know why she thinks she has to, maybe, play to the NDP on this issue, I don't know, but quite a, I think, a useless attack on her part.

I'd also indicate that I don't think the minister has all her facts straight about what was going on with the Grace Hospital, and I'd like to just advise her that, at the time, the community rose up—and I do want to tell the minister, although she likes to play her little political rhetoric with this one, that was a community-driven project. I did get involved with the community, but I did not spearhead it. I did not—I wasn't a driving force in that. That was a community-driven project by people in the community who were very afraid of what was happening. They lived in the community. They heard that Brian Postl was talking about closing the hospital. He had made—put that question on the table at a meeting with doctors there.

We know that this government had allowed the ER doctor shortage to get so bad that the Grace Hospital was short in the vicinity of half of its doctors. They were afraid that that was compromising patient care in the hospital. The community rose up. They came to me and asked for my support. And I think the minister really needs to get her facts straight on that particular issue. And you bet I got involved in that because I saw the mess that this government had made with ER doctors and the ER doctor shortage in Manitoba. In fact, I also know that—and I'm not going to put his name on record, but I know that these doctors were threatened with job loss if they ever talked to me anymore.

And I was talking to a lot of doctors, mostly from the Grace Hospital, but not all. I was talking to ER doctors from all over Winnipeg at the time. They were all scared stiff about how the ER doctor shortage had been allowed to get so bad in this city there was concern about patient safety from hospital to hospital. And this government allowed that mess to get so bad, and it wasn't until the Grace Hospital started to do—or the community around the Grace Hospital started to do what they did that this government then paid more attention and stepped in to—in this case, their solution was to offer more money.

But the minister needs to get her facts straight on this issue because that was a community-driven initiative, and if there was any fearmongering, that's the minister's word. There were a lot of people cheering that community group and cheering me on for the fact that we were getting out there and we were fighting for the hospital, and I would think that if the community hadn't done what they'd done and been as loud as they were, I wouldn't have been surprised that it might have reached the point where the Grace ER was closed because the government wouldn't have had an option because they had allowed the doctor shortage to grow so bad.

* (11:30)

So I think the minister really needs to get her facts straight on what was happening around the Grace Hospital, because she likes to allude that it was me, you know, at the front of all of this. I was a guest to the community, and there were a lot of people in the community that were very, very upset with this government and very fearful. There were a lot of doctors very upset with this government at the time, too, in how this government mismanaged the ER doctor shortage in the province.

So I would urge the minister to do her homework better and get her facts straight. She's saying that I don't have my facts straight. Well, I'd like to indicate to the minister that everything I do I can back up. I have FIPPAs. I have people in the system I talked to. So she needs to be very, very careful when she is putting on the record that I don't have my facts, because I'll guarantee her, I do my homework.

And I'm not going to be held captive to NDP spin on any of the rhetoric that she puts out there, because I can back up everything I say. And I'm, in fact, very, very careful about the facts I put forward, and I speak with—and the minister is giving me a

funny look. She may want to then come forward here and if she's got any questions about where my facts are not right, she may want to come forward because I can guarantee her, I can back up absolutely everything I've seen and heard and everything I say, and I can back it all up, whether it's through FIPPAs or research, or if she wants to hear from those third parties, I can connect her with them.

So I urge the minister, do her homework more because, again, she may want to politicize some of this, but I guarantee her that I'm very careful with the information I put forward. Unlike the former member, or the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), when he was the—when he was in opposition, and he brought forward, he'd hide the health-care victims in the NDP caucus office, and every question period he would drag out victims into the hallway for the scrum. He'd also sneak around hospital basements with TV cameras in tow looking for more victims of the health-care system.

And I want to tell the minister that I've had a lot of people at the top levels of health care come to me and say they're really appreciative of the ethics within which I do my job, and I want the minister to know that.

And I am very careful of what I put forward at all times because I don't want fearmonger. I know there's enough fear out there as it is, but I am putting forward facts. She may not like some of those facts, so she may want to, you know, take a shot at me about fearmongering, but I'll guarantee the minister that, in fact, there's a lot of things out there that are happening. And just from some of her comments here, I have a sense she doesn't know some of the things that are really going on under her watch.

So I would urge her to be careful with, you know, with some of the comments she's making, because I don't think she got all her facts straight.

Ms. Oswald: I want to begin by offering or saying to the member, thank you for pointing out my gratuitous shot to Manitoba Club, and I will absolutely put on record any offence that I might have made to any member to her. I know the Registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Dr. Pope, used to be the Grand Pooh-Bah over there and he himself, I'm sure, would be calling me immediately telling me not to make a shot at the Manitoba Club.

So, yes, I will apologize for making that reference. I'm sure there are many wonderful

members of the club. I certainly was trying to illustrate a point that we are interested in talking to any Manitoban, whether they have a fur coat or no coat doesn't matter. We want to hear from them. We want to make sure that we're hearing their concerns, talking to them about their ideas, wanting to move forward. You know for all members of society I think that that's really important.

So, no, Dr. Pope please read this loud and clear. No offence to the Manitoba Club.

You know again the member's—the member opposite and I admittedly have different styles; that—that's true; that's for sure. We not only have different political leanings and are members of different political parties, but we do have different styles. That's true.

The member knows full well that, you know, when you craft a question for question period, that you choose to include some facts and, you know, maybe it's that 45-second limit, you know, that can just be a real albatross around one's neck, I suppose. But you don't always have time to include all of the facts, and sometimes, you know, there have been occasions where material has been brought forward that, on digging deeper, turns out, you know, not to be a fulsome representation of the facts, shall we say.

And I think the member has learned, you know, quite well the really interesting position that a minister of Health would be in. On the case, let's say, of casework, where a member can stand and raise portions of a case, and—but not all of the case—you know, could say, you know, this patient can't get in to see a specialist. And, you know, with an hour's review, one can discover that, in fact, that patient has seen five specialists. But, as the Minister of Health, I cannot stand up and say, and so for X individual in Manitoba, here are the five doctors, the specialists, that this person has actually seen for the five following physical ailments.

I can't do that because of personal health information and, frankly, because of my own beliefs.

So the member can get up and ask a question that may not be fulsome in nature. And there is little that I can do within the context of personal health information and, well, morally, about sharing personal health information in response.

So the member's cautioning me about facts on the record. I think omitted facts ought to be part of this dialogue, as well, and so, again, we could go on at some length about that.

One of the member's favourite topics is doctor migration; X number of doctors left Manitoba. X number of doctors, you know, leave every province every year, but the member traditionally, exclusively—I'd have to go back and check but I might be prepared to go there—neglects to mention doctors that come to Manitoba, for the net score.

So, again, I appreciate what the member is trying to say about how hard she works on her homework, and, you know, I believe, on day one, I complimented her on how much harder she has to work than the rest of her colleagues. It's painfully obvious, in fact, that I know that she works hard. And I know that her intent—I believe was her word the other day, from my work—her intent is likely very good in trying to lift an issue in question period. But I think that the member would have to acknowledge that whether it's within the context of three times 45 seconds, or other context that, you know, I'm not going to, you know, impugn motives here, that sometimes all of the facts about a particular case or a particular issue don't necessarily get framed when the member raises them.

I don't want the member to hear me say that I'm sitting here accusing her of lying. I'm not doing that. I am saying that within the context of how issues get raised in news releases—although I think you have 45 seconds more to write than—more than 45 seconds to write those—but within the context of news releases or questions in question period, that a fulsome accounting of a case or of an issue doesn't always come forward from the member opposite.

I guess I would also say that I would acknowledge that there are people within the health-care system and within Manitoba that might not agree with the direction that our government is taking in, you know, certain areas, and there are others that are extremely enthusiastic about the direction that we're taking.

* (11:40)

The member made mention to, you know, a movement that was growing within health care. You know, I want to put on the record that, you know, my door is always open to people that are having concerns, or that have new ideas that they want to share. It's part and parcel to why we are going to be creating our health innovation network to talk about the sustainability of our system, the sustainability of the great gains that we've made over 10 years.

We know that the former president of the Manitoba Medical Association, now Doctors Manitoba, reminisced in the *Medical Post* last year. She said, it's Dr. Olson: In the late '90s things were more difficult for Manitoba physicians. We were losing a lot, lots of colleagues, to other jurisdictions and falling behind in remuneration and morale. And that's just—and that's a fact. It's on the record.

And we know that we have seen net increases in emergency room doctors. We've seen net increases in doctors across the board. We know that we saw yesterday a record-breaking net gain for Manitoba in one year of nurses at 498 net new. And so we are trying to get help at the bedside. The nurses in Manitoba work very, very hard. And they tell us the single most important thing that they need is more help. And that's why we committed to get them more help and that's why we're working to fulfil that promise.

So, again, there are some people that would love to see all the politics taken out of health care. You know, maybe it's moments like these that we can all profoundly agree. But what I can say is that I acknowledge that the member and I have different attitudes and different approaches to health and to health care. It's healthy that we have these debates, and that we are going to, on this side of the House, continue to work towards improving the system every single day into maintaining the health-care system that we've worked so hard to build back after the decade of neglect. And we're going to make that commitment to Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd just like to point out one thing to the minister, because I think this is all starting maybe to get off track from where we really need to be. But she's saying that we don't mention doctors that come to Manitoba. I'd point out to her that she doesn't mention doctors that leave Manitoba when she puts her information out there. So she's doing the same thing that we do, and that's the nature of government and opposition. And, like, welcome to politics, Madam Minister.

You know, in 45 seconds, you know, we do our best to paint a picture of—the best we can. And, you know, I try hard. When the media asks me for clarification, I can give it to them. If the minister feels she needs more clarification from me, I don't mind if her staff pick up the phone and call me and, you know, want more detail. I'm okay with that. The intent in opposition is to try to make health care better. And, you know, if she's ever stuck with, you

know, not being clear, feel free to pick up the phone. But, you know, if she wants to go down the road that's saying, well, you know, I'm only using selective questions, she's only using selective answers too. And she doesn't mention how many doctors leave when she talks about, many times, how many doctors that are coming to Manitoba.

So on another topic, I'd like to ask the minister for a bit of information about Miss Wilgosh moving over to the WRHA. And I understand that there was, according to the board of directors there, an exhaustive search, and we had actually sent a FIPPA over to the WRHA to ask how many people had applied to the job. And we weren't asking for names, but were just asking how many people had actually applied for the job of CEO at the WRHA. And we were denied that information. Now, we weren't going to, I mean no—you know, no private names were going to be used.

I would ask the minister why we weren't given some pretty basic information as to how many people actually applied for the CEO job at the WHRA.

Ms. Oswald: I've asked the member to allow me to double-check on this. I think, when information is held by another body, like a recruiting firm or something like that, it's not the WRHA's role to respond to that issue. I need to double-check the details on that but that might have been the reason for the denial of the FIPPA, that it was information that was held by an outside firm. But let me get back to the member on that.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister could be very accurate with her answer on that, but I'm sure she must know, because I'm sure it was a question that she must have asked. So is she prepared today to tell us how many people actually applied for that job?

Ms. Oswald: I'd have to investigate and look to find out the answer to that. I know there were a number. I know there were a number outside the province that were, you know, very interested, but the compensation was too low so they didn't bother to fulfil the application. So—but I'd have to check. I couldn't tell you the total, sitting here today—have to look.

Mrs. Driedger: I would certainly be interested to know how many actually did apply because I had—and, again, this is how rumours can get you in trouble, that's why I always like to clarify and make a point of it. I had heard that there were only three in

total that ended up actually applying. I'm not even sure if Ms. Wilgosh applied or whether she was asked to take the job, but that's not clear.

But if the minister is prepared to find out, that would be fine, and if she could bring that information back, we'd certainly appreciate that.

Based on that, the next question then would be—and again, this—I'm always uncomfortable asking these questions when the same people are in the room, but—and I hope Mr. Sussman doesn't take any offence to this, but I have to ask the question.

Was there a competition for the job of deputy minister?

Ms. Oswald: Yes. Again, I'll endeavour to get the best information that I can. People did not send their applications for WRHA CEO to me, so I'll endeavour to do that. It was a competitive process.

I do think that we should be careful about rumour mongering for sure. And so I appreciate the member saying that, you know, she'd like to get clarification on that.

I know, because Ms. Wilgosh told me, that she did apply for that job so—and I have spoken to her in anticipation of some questions on that, her comfort level with me sharing what she shared with me—and she was absolutely fine with that. The deputy appointment was that: it was an appointment.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate if Mr. Sussman is on secondment from the WRHA, or has he severed his ties with the WRHA?

Ms. Oswald: It is a secondment.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate who else is on secondment within her department from the WRHA?

Ms. Oswald: Yes. Just a point—a question of clarification. Does the member mean anybody across the whole department? Are you talking about senior positions or just, do you mean, anyone that's in the Department of Health that's on secondment?

Mrs. Driedger: I'd be interested to know all of them. I'm particularly interested in the senior positions but if there are others within the department, I think it would be important to know that as well.

Ms. Oswald: Within the department, Terry Goertzen is a secondment ADM, Health Work Force; Betsi Dolin, full time, 0.7 for Midwifery and .03 for maternal child task force; we pay the WRHA for

Barbara Kraft, Susan Turnbull and Melissa Choptuik, who perform work in blood programs in the office of Manitoba Health; and Chris Hoeschen was seconded from the WRHA to Mental Health as a policy analyst. I think that's it.

* (11:50)

Mrs. Driedger: Now, the minister shouldn't be surprised, but I have a—because I'm on record year after year about secondments from the WRHA, especially in such high positions as deputy minister and assistant deputy minister, because then I don't think there's clear lines of accountability and I think there's a lot of room for perception of conflict of interest, and while perception may not necessarily be accurate, that perception is damaging, and it sends a really wrong message to people on the front lines of health care and at many different levels.

I just—I think it's absolutely unacceptable to have people at high levels in Manitoba Health, who are supposed to be there doing that job specifically, being on secondment from the WRHA because then who are their masters? If they're only on secondment they can—know they can fall back into a WRHA position, and so who are their masters? They need to be strongly holding the WRHA accountable. But, in this case, if they're a secondment, you know, does the WRHA get a soft landing on some issues that they shouldn't get a soft landing on?

And I am very, very, troubled that this government keeps on doing that and allowing these secondments to be in place. If it's a pension issue or, you know, some kind of a benefits issue, they need to find a clean way to make that break in order to protect a pension or something like that, but I think it's absolutely unacceptable to have people in high positions like this being seconded from the WRHA, and I'd like to ask the Minister of Health why she allows that to happen.

Ms. Oswald: We have had this conversation before. I do acknowledge that, and I think we've had a lengthy one. I know that, in the past, we've talked about potential benefits of having people moving back and forth. I understand the member's issue that she raised about, you know, a perception of favouritism and I suppose one always has to keep an eye on that and make sure that people that are being chosen for secondment situations are those that, you know, are implicitly trusted, as I do Mr. Sussman. So, sure, there is a potential for that kind of perception and I do believe that one would need to be careful about having a widespread practice of that.

But having people moving back and forth, you know, benefiting from experience of understanding government, understanding work within the WRHA, or any regional health authority actually, and bringing a breadth of experience about, you know, how things work on the ground I think can actually be very helpful. It certainly can foster professional growth, and while, you know, it need not be something that's commonplace, it's been my view that having an ardent hard-and-fast rule about it would be to the detriment of the people of Manitoba. We want to have people with a breadth of experiences in these roles and we want to be able to attract the best possible people and sometimes a secondment arrangement is the way to achieve that.

I'm not going to disagree with the member that you wouldn't want it to be an overarching pervasive arrangement, but occasional arrangements, I think, you know, can be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Certainly, in the case of our current deputy, I have every confidence that he understands his role as deputy and what his responsibilities are, and I feel very confident about that.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairperson, this has—my questions have absolutely nothing to do with whether people are competent or not. I am sure they're very, very, competent and it has absolutely nothing to do with that. I just think the minister is missing the point.

The fact that we have two people at very, very high positions in Manitoba Health that are on secondment from the WRHA—and I don't think I'm going to be only one that feels this same way—are going to feel that this is extremely inappropriate.

Whether it's perception or not, I think it just—you're sending the wrong message to everybody on the front lines. And you know, the front lines want to know that, you know, people within Manitoba Health are doing their job and sticking up for who they need to be sticking up for and people in, you know, WRHA or any other RHA, you know, are doing the same. And the problem right now amongst a lot of front-line workers is they feel nobody is speaking up for them.

This government has entangled so many positions out there, because they have intertwined, for instance—and again, this is no discredit to Ms. Wilgosh at all. I imagine she is extremely talented and that's why she's been given a lot of, you know, roles to play. And I've, you know, said it before and I greatly admire her capability, so I'm not talking

about individuals here, as I'm talking more about what the government has done with positions.

You know, they've taken the deputy minister before, Ms. Wilgosh, and they've made her wear lots of different hats within the system. You know, I think she was—or she is the chair of DSM, I don't know if that's changed. She was made the chair of the board of Magnus Centre, she's the deputy minister, she's on secondment from the WRHA, had something to do with eHealth, and so you've got—and that's just one position.

When we look at all of the other people being put almost in charge of themselves, you know, being put on certain committees, the government actually has probably quite brilliantly co-opted a lot of people so that they then shut down dissension in the system. But what it's done is they've taken the voice away from front—from the people that should be speaking up for the front lines. They've co-opted a lot of these people at the tops of RHAs, and instead of those people fighting for the front lines, what they've basically done as a government—and you know, probably a brilliant move—they cut dissension by co-opting everybody.

And they've done it with certain unions, too, by giving a union leader a really good position on a board, and then you find that that union leader doesn't want to speak up about the horrible behaviours happening in a certain program within government.

And probably a brilliant move on part of the NDP, but what you've done is really clouded a lot of issues. And we may end up, I guess, agreeing to disagree, but I just think this is absolutely unacceptable, to have secondments at this level in place. And I guess we will continue to disagree on that.

A final question is, before I turn this over to my colleague here: Can the minister tell us what the government policy vacancy rate is at the time?

* (12:00)

Ms. Oswald: In reference to the last question by the member, the average 6.15 for Health.

In reference to some of the other comments that the member made, again when I was speaking earlier I did acknowledge that, you know, having a widespread use of secondment, you know, as a policy piece, I would agree it would not be ideal for some of the reasons that the member mentioned, you

know, the perception of favouritism. Whether or not that would really even happen is another matter, but perception, you know, I understand.

So to have that as a widely adopted government policy I think would indeed present some challenges and I said that in the last question. But on the issue of recruiting and accommodating, you know, the very best possible people for the situation, you know, on some levels I think the member sort of made my point. In the case of Arlene Wilgosh, for example, when we saw the numerous roles that she has taken on over her tenure as deputy, whether it's, you know, being involved with pathology issues or being actively engaged in eHealth or the tremendous role that she played, not only here in Manitoba in working with partners but leading us through pandemic H1N1 and indeed leading the nation when it came time for Manitoba to hand over the baton to the next province because we were finished our time as chair of the PTs. Collectively, the provinces and territories got together and said, please, Arlene, would you hold on to the reins and continue to be the leader of our deputies for H1N1. And she graciously agreed to do that.

So when you talk about somebody that has a role and has a variety of experiences it nurtures them and enables them to be ready to take on a new challenge such as the one Ms. Wilgosh applied for. And I'm not going to sugar coat it, I really didn't want her to go. She's terrific and such an incredible role model for women in positions of leadership.

And I know that, you know, all of us—I'm talking to the ladies now, you know, have seen different styles that people have—women have in roles of leadership. You know, sometimes they're emasculating in nature. Sometimes they're, you know, very quiet in nature but Arlene had a way of finding the road to yes without diminishing anybody else and without taking away from anybody else.

And every minute that I got to spend at her elbow made me a better person. I know that to be true. So, you know, did I consider sabotage? Momentarily. No, I'm joking about that, of course, but yeah I didn't want her to go but she's great.

What enabled me, of course, to get my head up off the pillow was knowing that Milton would be—you know, be coming back to Manitoba Health. And again I think the point is made there that when we look at the breadth of experience that Milton has had in dealing with disadvantaged people earlier in his career in just a, you know, an excellent way working

in government, working through the regional health authority, and again I have to go back to pandemic H1N1 where if there was a question to be asked about what was going on in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, indeed anywhere in the province, there was nobody else that you had to ask. You could ask Milton this question and he would have the answer in a nanosecond because of how much he's learned and how incredible his leadership is.

So I couldn't be happier that an arrangement could be made so that he could come back to be deputy minister of Health because that is going to make life for all Manitobans even better because of his remarkable skill, his charm—don't mind saying, and his incredible breadth of knowledge and class and dignity that he brings to the job, so again—*[interjection]* I wasn't talking about you but I'll get on to you in a moment, member from Inkster.

So again, about Mr. Sussman, the arrangement that we were able to reach to ensure that he was able to take on this role of leadership and viewing it on a case-by-case basis, I think it's okay from time to time to find arrangements that can work best, to have the best possible person into a job, and I think that the member makes reference to sticking up for the front line and, again, I want to assure her that that's what I'm working on every single day, working on ensuring that when nurses need more help, they get more help because there are more nurses there, and when doctors need more help, they get more help because there are more doctors there, and when patients have questions or queries, that we have people in place to address them through roles of navigation or through roles of patient safety or infection control. We want to make sure that those people are directly contacting the front line and indeed sticking up for them.

So I think that it's really important to know that we have good leaders and that we listen to the front line and we respond to the issues that are raised. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chairperson, I do have a series of questions I'm hoping to get off this afternoon and the first one is in regards to an actual e-mail and I've provided the staff at the table a copy of the e-mail, and it's a very interesting issue, and what happened was is every Thursday night I'm at a local McDonalds restaurant and this particular individual showed up and talked about a situation that had come at a local hospital, something that was actually fairly traumatic for him and his family, and

having talked to the person not once but twice now, I thought it was important enough to bring to the attention of the Minister of Health direct.

It's an issue in which here you have a family in a room and they're, in essence, given the terrible news that there's nothing that really can be done, that their loved one is going to be passing away type of thing, and then by chance another doctor comes in and there's further discussion that takes place, and the person in care ultimately was put into ICU and today, fortunately, she's outside of the hospital and is doing quite well.

I wanted to just get on the record of noting that I'm bringing it to the attention of the minister and would request that the minister do look into it. At the bottom of the e-mail there's a contact number, and I just wanted to make sure she was aware of it personally, and if she wanted to add comment to it, she can. Otherwise, I'll go right into the question.

Ms. Oswald: I'll just note for the record that I did receive it. To the best of our knowledge, I think this is the first time we're getting anything about it and will commit to the member to look at the situation so thank you.

Mr. Lamoureux: An issue that we've talked about in the past, I've actually raised it over the last couple of years was the issue of Nor'West Health and the access centre. I was pleased with the response that the minister most recently had given in terms of that it does seem to be moving forward. I wonder if she could just give a clearer indication or an update as to what is, what's up with Nor'West Health and the possibility of the access centre.

* (12:10)

Ms. Oswald: We have had this conversation recently, and I did inform the member, I believe, that we are at a tendering stage right at this moment which is showing, of course, that we are moving forward. I even think I have a date about that. I'm just not able to locate it right at this time, but in our conversation I—you know—I'm suspecting that I will, and I will let him know.

But we are going forward with the planning with our partners at the Nor'West Co-op and, of course, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. And we hope to be able to see shovels in the ground—we hope to get going with a shovel in the ground imminently and we—our hope is to have—our estimated completion date at this point is October of 2011. But there is some rumour that it may go a little bit faster.

You know, that depends a lot on construction, environments and so forth, but, again, it is pushing forward, so the member can feel confident about that.

Mr. Lamoureux: I do appreciate the minister's candidness on that particular issue. I know she, both on the record and outside—well, I shouldn't say off the record, but when I say on the record, I'm talking about *Hansard*, and she has given me some assurances even outside of what's said in *Hansard*, and I do appreciate that.

An issue that I have raised in question period deals with the single-use devices, and it is an opportunity, I believe, ultimately, to be able to reuse devices that have been sterilized. Other jurisdictions have done this and, in fact, have literally saved millions of dollars. And I know—at least I am told—that, at one point, Winnipeg Regional Health actually had some sort of an agreement to use re-sterilized single-use devices.

I wonder if the minister can give me an update as to where she's at in regards to these single-use devices.

Ms. Oswald: We have had this discussion before, of course, and we know that we've also talked with our regional health authorities, and it has been a subject of considerable debate. That's absolutely true. The medical community debates whether or not reprocessing, you know, generally, is a good idea or, specifically, on single-use devices is a good idea and, of course, it's gotten some public attention over the past several decades.

And the member has pointed out that there are other jurisdictions in the nation—I think Ontario was one that he cites—that does make the decision to reprocess some single-use devices that Manitoba, to date, has not made the decision. Our direction has been clear that single-use medical devices are not to be refurbished and reused. That has been the policy, you know, erring on the side of patient safety up to now.

But I've also acknowledged to the member that we know that technology does evolve and emerge as well, not just, you know, when it comes to instruments that a doctor might use in an operation or machines that might be used for radiation therapy, for example, but in the area of sterilization actually. And we know that not just machines, but reprocessing procedures themselves do evolve and change.

So we have asked our medical experts to continue to review what different companies are offering, looking at a variety of opportunities, and we are open to amending our policy on that when we feel very confident from our medical advisers that, indeed, it would be a prudent path to go. We're not there yet. As I've said to the member before, we are open to reviewing, but it's going to be made on the best available information at the time.

I know the member before has said, well, you know, why don't you just talk to the doctors that Ontario talked to, basically, you know, and get their advice and get on with it because there is potentially a saving to be made.

And, you know, we—I want to assure the member that our people, not only in public health, but in infection control, do have discussions and, you know, sometimes debates with doctors across the nation. And so we're just going to continue to work with them and get the best advice because, you know, we are interested in saving money where we can, but we will put patient safety ahead of a cost-cutting measure every time.

Mr. Lamoureux: Would—surely to goodness, the minister would recognize, with a finite amount of financial resources, that if you do have savings in some area, you can actually put that money in another area that could ultimately provide more health-care services.

But, anyway, having said—is there anything that prevents the minister from being able to act quickly? For example, is there a regulation that would have to change or is there something in legislation that would have to change? Is this—is there that sort of a restriction that prevents her from being able to make a quick decision?

Ms. Oswald: Correct. I can let the member know that it's not a regulatory or legislative issue that can sometimes take more time. It is policy, so essentially, you know, it could be quite a nimble change, and I'm reminded that I always need to make sure that I say this so not to give the impression that there are no single-use devices that are ever used. The policy that we have concerns refurbishing critical medical devices, you know, syringes, you know, things that enter the body, but some non-critical medical devices are currently reprocessed and used here, things like tourniquets and so forth; outside-the-body kinds of stuff. So, just, as you get into a discussion, if I've made the impression, a sweeping generalization that we never reprocess single-use devices, I'm talking

about the invasive ones. But back to the question, it's not legislative, it's policy, which could be quite swiftly changed actually.

Mr. Lamoureux: Now, did Winnipeg Regional Health Authority have any sort of a previous agreement with anyone in regards to purchasing of resterilized, single-use devices that she's aware of?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I don't want to speak absolutely about the details of business arrangements between the region and an individual company, so I'll say, quite generally, it's my understanding that there was at least one businessperson with whom conversations or arrangements had been made, and then certainly there is—there was a policy decision concerning erring on the side of patient safety that led the region to not be involved in single-use medical devices.

I think that that's true. I would have to get the details on that, but there may have been relationships at some time for some refurbishing that needed to be amended, based on policy direction changes by government on refurbishing. I can do some more investigation on that for the member if he wishes.

* (12:20)

Mr. Lamoureux: Yeah, if the minister finds out that there was no agreement, I would be interested in that. My understanding was—is that there was something that was in place, which leads me to believe that Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, at some point, would have felt that some of this single-use devices that were—that there was the potential to be able to do this, and this is the reason why they entered into an agreement. And then someone from a higher authority ultimately made the decision that, no, this is not the direction that we want to go. That would be a fair assessment?

Ms. Oswald: Again, wanting to dig in further to any details of arrangements, you know, specifically on this issue, I'd need more details on that, but I can say to the member, there's no doubt that there has been national and international debate, and that opinions on refurbishing have ebbed and flowed as a result of that. So there's no question that there, undoubtedly, has been discussion between the region and Manitoba Health and other regional health authorities about, you know, what is the best scientific medical evidence and advice on reprocessing.

And today there's not agreement across the nation on what is the best course of action, and that's why you'll see different approaches in different

jurisdictions. So, without knowing this as an absolute fact, because I wasn't in the room for conversations, I would bet my bottom dollar that there were varying opinions, and that government issued a policy to say that, you know, if we have to choose between something on which we're not certain is absolutely for patients and saving money, we're choosing the patient every time.

Mr. Lamoureux: See, I guess I would look at other jurisdiction, because Ontario's not alone. There's many provinces and states that, actually—teaching facilities—that actually use these single-use devices after they've been resterilized. And my concern is that, every day that goes by, we lose the opportunity to reinvest the monies that we could be saving into other areas that could, in essence, be helping people in health care that need these valuable services.

Some, and I think the minister was one, had indicated that, you know, we're not prepared to take a chance of someone getting an infection as a result of a tool not being sterilized. And I think that there is no absolute guarantee in any situation, much like a product that has been manufactured for the very first time in its use. There is no absolute, 100 percent guarantee, that there won't be some sort of a malfunction or something of that nature.

So what I go by is what I see, and what I see is many other jurisdictions are actually doing it, and the Province of Manitoba appears to be dragging its feet on the issue, and there is a cost for dragging their feet. So I would suggest that the minister assign a higher priority in terms of resolving this issue. My gut feeling is is that she's a bit scared of public perception, if, in fact, she was to start reusing some of these single devices, and this is where one always looks for strong leadership. And so I'll wait and see how soon it takes—or how many days or months it takes—for the government to act on it.

The next area I want to ask questions on is in regards to the Seven Oaks Hospital. I know, in the past, the minister has expressed some concerns about information and I would assure the minister that public meetings and material that I circulate and so forth is 100 percent accurate. And the question I have in regards to the Seven Oaks emergency services is more so to do with surgery involving things such as bleeding ulcers and so forth.

What is the future for Seven Oaks Hospital, from her government's point of view, in dealing with those types of surgeries that used to be done at the Seven Oaks Hospital. Is there going to be an expanded

service? I was told at one point that maybe—just maybe—we might get something coming from the rural areas in regards to that. If she could provide an update on that, that would be nice.

Ms. Oswald: To begin on the subject of device reprocessing, again, as I've said to the member, we are willing to look at it and, indeed, are looking at any evolution of infection-control procedures or technology that might cause us to amend our current stance on not reprocessing devices. We know that as we have discussions about health-care funding, the sustainability of our health-care programs, and as people are always looking for opportunities to be as efficient as possible when it comes to spending money, that, you know, there really is a great temptation to take every piece of potentially low-hanging fruit, you know, snatch it quickly and, you know, save that money. And it's my view that there really needs to be a balance, and you need to step back and remember that patient safety has to be paramount.

You know, the member says that, you know, I think the minister is scared of public perception. I can be honest with you. I am scared of somebody getting hurt. And there have been a number of things over history that many people in the medical community and the scientific community have said, you know, were A-O.K. and giddy-up and let's do it. You know, Vioxx comes to mind. That this was a uniformly held great idea and so everybody jumped into it, and it has pretty catastrophic results.

And, you know, I realize that, you know, Vioxx and single-device reprocessing are apples and oranges, but it's the principle that I'm getting at: that just because everybody else is doing it, I suspect a parent or a grandma has told you, it doesn't mean that you have to do it too. And we're going to keep looking at the emerging technology and take advice. And it may very well be that someday we make that evolution into being confident about the sterile nature of devices and reprocessing. I'm just saying to the member, we're not there yet. But I want him to feel confident that we will continue to review the issue. I love saving money. But, if there's still an uncertainty out there about potential contamination of a—the second patient, then we need to keep looking at it.

On the subject of surgery consolidation, then, I can say to the member that I think he knows that the reference that I've made about materials was specific to the cardiac issue. And, you know, I don't know

that there was—I would be surprised if there were malice of intent in what the member was distributing. I just—that was a particular alarm bell that went off. You know, when the recommendations from Dr. Koshal were so clear about consolidating cardiac surgery, that that was problematic.

But I know that the member does advocate for his hospital in—at Seven Oaks, and I use the term "his hospital" because I know that that's how he feels about it, and that's not a bad thing. That's, you know, when you have a relationship with professionals and with people at a community hospital, you do have a sense of ownership. You know, I feel that way about my community hospital. It's where my mom died. It's where recently, you know, two weeks ago, another profoundly close and dear loved one died. And you get to know those nurses. They bring you tea and stuff, and they hand you Kleenex when you need it the most. And so it's okay to say, that's your hospital. And the fact that he's keenly interested in what's going on and what's building and thriving and growing at Seven Oaks hospital, I think is absolutely fair and that an advocate of the community would want to do that.

And I want to assure the member that we're going to talk more about it on Monday.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

FAMILY SERVICES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (Continued)

* (10:00)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Consumer Affairs.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

At this time, we would ask if the minister could introduce any new staff that have joined us at the table.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): In addition to the Deputy Minister, Grant Doak, who was here yesterday and introduced, the ADM for Consumer and Corporate Affairs division, Alexandra Morton; the head of the Residential Tenancies branch, Laura Gowerluk; and the head of the Consumers' Bureau, Nancy Anderson.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. Yesterday the critics indicated this section would be focussing on Consumer Affairs this morning.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I'm just—want to ask what all the Consumer and Corporate Affairs—what all they cover as far as insurance goes, as far as appeal process in insurance. Can someone kind of give me an overview, a thumbnail overview of that?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'll just break down the answer into two areas.

First of all, with regard to automobile insurance, the department does provide two services for the public in that regard. The first is the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeals Commission, and that deals with the appeals by claimants for insurance with regard to personal injuries. Those appeals would follow internal reviews by MPI of those personal injury claims.

The second office that is funded is the claimant's advisers office and that office was recently put in place in order to help claimants advance their appeals to the automobile injury insurance commission. So the two are separate and independent of each other, but you can see the nexus there.

The second area, then, is with regard to property, life and casualty insurance. The member may know that The Insurance Act is the statutory instrument for the provision of insurance services in Manitoba and the Financial Institutions Regulation branch, under the department, deals with coverage disputes under the legislation. If there are questions about compliance with the legislation, the branch can provide mediation services or there may be breaches of the act in extreme cases. Usually insurance matters, as the member knows, are dealt with through litigation—that's the most common way, but where the act comes into play, the Province has a role.

*(10:10)

If there's a complaint by an insured against the licensee, a person who is licensed to sell insurance in Manitoba under The Insurance Act, then the complaints go to a body that is arm's-length, what they call the Insurance Council and they have divisions within it that deal with different kinds of

insurance, but the Insurance Council is the body that deals with complaints where there are concerns about how services are provided by a particular insurance agent. The department also deals with any complaints against agents for hail and—well, hail, basically.

Mr. Graydon: Thanks for that answer.

Then, when we talk about a person that is a licensee for insurance, does that mean that that's a broker? Or someone that is knowledgeable in licence, or in selling insurance, or an agent? What is the definition of a licensee?

Mr. Mackintosh: A licensee is really commonly known as an adjuster or agent, and adjusters or agents, then, would comprise a brokerage, or what is commonly called a broker. The term "broker" really refers to the firm which is comprised, then, of the licensees.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that.

Can you describe to me what incidental selling of insurance, or ISI, is?

Mr. Mackintosh: The incidental selling of insurance is where insurance is purchased as a supplementary product to your main purchase. There's a number of examples where, for example, you went and bought a big fancy stereo system—right?—and you bought an extended warranty with it. Another description for the extended warranty I understand is called incidental selling of insurance. It's a warranty, but it's a form of insurance. Another example would be where you buy a mortgage, you've entered into a mortgage agreement, and you buy actual life or accident or medical insurance incidental to the mortgage.

So, in other words, it's not the main product that's being purchased, but it's being purchased in order to provide additional protections for the buyer in the event of some unforeseen circumstance. I think that's the best description that we've been able to put together for the member. So, if he has any questions as to whether certain kinds of products are incidental selling of insurance, we can deal with that.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that answer. It's quite adequate.

So, then, the selling of the incidental insurance—and let's suggest that it's on a mortgage—the person that sells that, does he have to be a licensee or an agent?

* (10:20)

Mr. Mackintosh: The vendors of incidental selling of insurance are not required to be licensed under the act. For example, if you went to an electronics store and got an extended warranty, the sale would be by the salesperson in the store, but the—for example, if you got insurance on your mortgage, it would be by your local bank manager, for example.

So there are ongoing questions across the country as to whether this is an area that should see some change or not. There's been a review launched, I'm advised, by insurance regulators in Canada, to see if there are certain classes or whether this sector needs a different approach. But, having said that, of course, the insurance product is being provided through insurers and there are regulations in place for the original provision of product. But the question is whether there should be a licensing, then, of those who are actually retailing the product at the point of sale.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for the answer.

If I understand it properly, then, there are three people involved in a transaction—four people, counting the borrower. There will be the credit grantor. There will be a brokerage firm some place. And there will be someone that isn't named and has no training in insurance or in what the regulations are of providing this service which they are providing. Is that true?

Mr. Mackintosh: The understanding of the provision of this product is that the incidental selling of insurance product is brought to the attention of the consumer by the seller, whether it's, say, the electronics store or at the bank, on the understanding that they're not providing advice, you know, substantive advice about the product.

So, in other words, it's the provision of the application that is the responsibility of the sellers, and once advice is being provided, then that person may be entering into the realm of the regulated scheme. And you know, if the—if there's any questions by a purchaser, those would be best be directed to the provider of the insurance product.

Mr. Graydon: And how—is there a standard procedure for the seller of the insurance—no, the agent of the broker of the insurance. Is there a standard procedure of notifying the borrower of his rights? And what is all included in the insurance and what is omitted in the insurance?

Mr. Mackintosh: The expectation is that the seller of the incidental insurance is there to provide the option for the purchaser, or for the consumer, and provide the application. And while there may be some general descriptions about what the application is about, the provision of advice should be sought and provided by the provider of the insurance product itself.

* (10:30)

Mr. Graydon: So, if I understand correctly, with the four players in the game of—and we're going to take a situation of a car dealership. You have your lender or credit grantor, you have a broker, you have an agreement with a dealership to act as a seller, probably on a commission. I would assume that they get a commission for any insurance that they sell. And the borrower—and there is no standard form that outlines to the borrower what is exactly contained in the insurance or the fact that they have the opportunity to buy this type of insurance from somewhere else, whatever that insurance may be. There is no standard form and no consumer protection at this point.

And when does, then, the borrower get notified that he has choices, or she has choices? Is there a standard form for notifying the borrower of their rights?

Mr. Mackintosh: The law in Manitoba provides that, where there is—this is under The Consumer Protection Act—that, where insurance is required to be purchased incidental to a product, that the buyer has a right to choose the provider of the insurance. Of course, in the marketplace, the seller of the main product has a right to accept or reject that as well. So there's—there could be some conflicts there.

But that's why the area is an active area of interest across the country. There is some developing interest and concerns about the provision of this product and how information is being provided to consumers. So, while our act does provide a right—and, as well, that right, it has to be set out in the credit agreement—you can see that there are a number of factors that come to bear. So, with the review in this area, we're certainly interested in how they're drilling down to discover how consumers can be better protected.

It's been very commonplace now, particularly with the purchase of larger products and not just mortgages, as was once the case, that insurance incidental to the main product is being offered. And

so it certainly leads to the next question then: When it is offered, is there full disclosure of the consumer rights that are available? So we're certainly—our department has been involved in looking at different approaches, but I can—I'm advised that there actually is a national examination of this area that, I think, as the member notes, may well attract further regulatory action. And of course, every time when you look at a sector, you have to carefully weigh the rights of the consumer and the role of regulation of industry and make a decision based on the risk to consumers that are posed by certain product offerings.

But this is certainly one that we have picked up our attention on, and I think the member is alert to some of these concerns that have been expressed from time to time by consumers. One of the areas that is of concern is, in fact, insurance that's offered through car manufacturer sales, and that's a typical example of some concerns.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for the answer, Mr. Minister. I think that whenever you have someone that is marketing, such as a car salesman who is selling a product, his main goal is to sell the car, gets overzealous selling this car, but doesn't realize the impact of any insurance that he might be offering; that's a secondary thing. I would suggest that possibly, the seller of the insurance, that that's only secondary and that he doesn't get any commission for it; that's not his main purpose. And so I think there is room for improvement in this area. It's something that I think needs to be looked at.

I'm not going to pursue that any further. I have a couple of other small questions. And it deals with—it does deal with the appeal process for MPI and catastrophically injured or any injuries with MPI, and it's come to our attention in the past that perhaps MPI has not been very responsive, timely responsive to some of the appeals that go—take place. They become more than a small problem for a number of the injured, especially if they're catastrophically injured and the expenses add up very, very quickly, and they're large expenses and appeals don't get heard for two or three or four or five months. From the consumer—corporate and consumer protection people, what type of solution can you put forward from your department to these types of situations?

* (10:40)

Mr. Mackintosh: We were just discussing here—I guess it wasn't clear if the member was talking about delays and having matters resolved at MPI or the delays were being alleged at the appeal commission

itself and whether it was just catastrophic injuries. But, of course, the internal mechanisms of MPI are best dealt with by, you know, at—with the appropriate minister there, but if that's—perhaps you can just clarify where the member was hearing concerns about delays on resolving matters of catastrophic injuries.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, there are some people in the gallery. They've been contacting—eye contact and waving—with the people down here. There's plenty of room in the gallery. I would feel more comfortable if they weren't sitting behind me. My papers are open on the table. So there's plenty of room.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much for putting forward your concerns. I think your concerns have been addressed. I notice people are moving their seats, so.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you very much for that.

And, Mr. Minister, if you could repeat your question, I was distracted—or your answer. I was distracted. I'm sorry.

Mr. Mackintosh: I was just advised—I think they were being waved that they could leave, but whatever. I think they were staff from some different divisions in the department that were here in the event of questions in their area.

I guess we just wanted to clarify the question, whether it was about appeals at MPI itself or appeals once they got to the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeals Commission. Was it about the commission or MPI? I just wasn't quite clear there.

Mr. Graydon: It's in both situations, Mr. Minister. The complaints cover quite a wide range.

Mr. Mackintosh: We certainly take concerns about delays and having matters resolved seriously, because, as the member knows, and when you hear and meet with the individuals affected, it can have some important implications for them.

And, in terms of MPI, we'll pass it on to the appropriate minister.

In terms of the two organizations under the authority of our—of this minister, the Claimant Adviser Office and the appeal commission, there have been recent additions of support staff to expedite the hearing processes in terms of the

commission, on the one hand, and the claimant office in terms of helping claimants, on the other.

So, as a result, it's my understanding that the issue of delays is being addressed and is one that is actively being pursued. It's not a matter that has gone unnoticed, perhaps, because the member himself may have been making—had been advocating accordingly.

But—so it is the expectation that, with the additional staff, that there could be a more timely resolution of these matters.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you for that, Mr. Minister.

In the recent bill that passed, Bill 36, it was a catastrophically injury bill, and clause 14 brought forward a million-dollar catastrophically injured cap apparently. This million dollars is to go towards—or could go towards quite expensive coverage for different things like attendant care or specialized transport or renovations to accommodations, and a million dollars doesn't go very far.

However, there's no appeal mechanism for a claimant in the event that MPI denies them benefits under this section. If they're denied, what—and no appeal process—what alternative does a catastrophically injured individual have then?

From a Consumer and Corporate Affairs point of view, would they say that these claimants are being properly represented with this type of a clause in a bill?

Mr. Mackintosh: The appeal commission is bound by the statutes enforced, and so that is the context within which they will hear appeals. So if the legislative scheme provides an avenue of appeal for personal injury, then they would have jurisdiction. Otherwise, the matter would have to be settled as a result of the review processes within MPI.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that.

There is—under this particular clause, one needs to secure MPI's permission before expenses can incur. And so, when we say it's been denied, the person making the decision to deny it could have made an error. That error could have a devastating impact on a person with one of these disabilities, whether they're a quadriplegic or whatever, and, yet, there's no appeal mechanism provided or an opportunity to correct the error.

So what I'm suggesting, that under the protection that should be afforded under the Consumer and Corporate Affairs for the consumers in this province who have no alternative but to buy insurance from MPI, who have no other place to go, and yet cannot appeal, is wrong.

And many people who have dealt with MPI say they feel that MPI's default strategy is to deny benefits first as a cost-saving measure. Many of the people have said that to us. So, if they don't give thorough consideration to a request for the benefit under this section, and they're denied, and they have no appeal process, I would suggest that their rights have been infringed on and would ask if the Consumer and Corporate Affairs would take this under advisement going forward.

* (10:50)

Mr. Mackintosh: The policy direction in terms of the increase for those that are catastrophically injured by automobile injury is set out in the act and, of course, the minister responsible for MPI has—is accountable for that area of law. Within that law then, the commission provides remedy. So, getting to the heart of the issue, the provision of benefits under section 14 are determined by the legislation in place—not, of course, by the commission. In other words, the commission is bound by the legislative scheme. So the mechanisms available for a claimant would be the review processes within MPI, including the fair practices offices that may have some role, but I am familiar with some of those review processes, but that can be explored with the appropriate minister as well.

Mr. Graydon: And thank you, Mr. Minister and your staff, for the timely answers today. Thank you.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Madam Chairperson, just a question I have from—emanating out of the honourable member for Emerson's questioning. Could you provide for the record the Insurance Council of Manitoba contact number for reference of this issue? *[interjection]*

Thank you very much. This is a very sprawling portfolio you've inherited, Mr. Minister. It—administers in whole or in part 59 acts of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and it is a lot of material to get through, and so I think, we not—do no more than dust off the top of the desk with this few hours we have here. But it does afford the opportunity to catch up a little bit as to the end results of various pieces of legislation that were

passed by the Consumer and Corporate Affairs former minister, now our First Minister.

I'd like to just ask about the payday loan regulatory changes whereby we, as the Legislative Assembly, agreed that the Public Utilities Board setting of service fees schedule, was perhaps not all—not satisfying all parties and your department took under—took on the task of rejigging the service fee schedule. Whereabouts are you with that?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, following the court decision and then the introduction of the legislative amendments, we undertook our—the further round of consultations with the stakeholders, leading towards the final determination of the rates, and there's—there were some consultations in my office with the sector. There was leadership in the sector that came in representing payday loan—well, there's a representative of one of the companies, but they have an organization as well.

And as well, we've had other representations back and forth with the sector. It seems quite contentious, as the member knows and, of course, there's been significant litigation in Manitoba, because we really—we were the leaders in the country in moving to the new regime. So it is our expectation that, as we conclude now, the regime that we'll have in Manitoba—which, by the way, is now in its final stages—and we will be able to publicly announce our approach in this province this spring, that, you know, we may not have—the contentions may continue.

But we had good dialogue, I can advise the member, with the sector, but we intend to have a fulsome consumer protection strategy when it comes to payday loans in Manitoba. I should say that, you know, regulatory changes are already in force in Manitoba, and what we're doing now is moving to determine the rate in the end, and we want to make sure that we have listened to all the arguments that were available and gave due consideration to them, and I can advise the member that, in fact, we have.

I have thought long and hard about the representations that were made at the Public Utilities Board, and those that have been made since, both in writing and personally to me, and—but I am very concerned about this sector and I am pleased, actually. I think it's been important, and as I become more educated in the areas of consumer protection, Manitoba is certainly looked to as a leader in payday loans. So we'll conclude that work now that we've done our discussions and our representations. I think

that it's now time that we publish the rate and we're in those final stages.

Mr. Faurschou: Madam Chair, I do appreciate the minister responding with a consultative process that is all encompassing, I would trust, because there is a great deal of variation, not only in the clientele served by the payday loan institutions, but even within the payday loan institutions themselves there is multinational franchise type of operations and then there's the mom-and-pop operations as well that provide the payday loan services here in the province of Manitoba. So I would hope that the minister is making sure that all of the interested stakeholders are, in fact, given the opportunity to participate, because there is a highly variable point of view within the spectrum of the clients' usage of them, as well within the industry itself offering the services. So thank you very much for that update.

The other major piece of legislation that was passed dealt with the funeral home and directors and embalmers. That was a major overhaul, and there has been some feedback from industry, specifically showing unease with the increase in rates because the fee schedule and licensing substantially increased, and maybe the minister could provide me with an update as to the consultative process that went on. I know it's an independent board of directors that are responsible for the setting of fee schedules, but I do believe it's incumbent upon the minister to make sure that the—a very encompassing consultation process is followed before we see such major rate increases that we provided for from this Assembly through the changes in regulation.

Mr. Mackintosh: I was very impressed in coming into the department on the work that has been done in consultation with the sector in this regard. I think it's always important when it comes to consumer protection that you provide opportunities to work with the regulated sector—or the newly regulated sector. In this case, of course, it's been regulated for some period of time, but this really ushered in a new era of consumer protection in the funeral director sector. But what I saw here was a real partnership with the funeral directors—Funeral Service Association it's called, which is represented—which is the representative body of funeral directors in Manitoba. It's not a large organization in terms of the number of directors, but, certainly, within that there are, as you can expect, differing views. But I was very pleased to see the consensus that was developed by the work of the branch and the association and its members.

* (11:00)

We did have one complaint in the—what, about three months ago or so from one of the directors in western Manitoba about the amount of consultation, but I've been assured that that individual, like others, were consulted in a most fulsome way, and I understand that that individual now has recognized the efforts that were made and is supportive of the general direction that it's going.

So some of the changes that were developed with the sector include, as the member said, some fee adjustments, and that's because they recognized and supported the fee adjustment in order to fund the protection scheme that was being ushered in so it wasn't one that we had done unilaterally whatsoever. And I understand that it's—those fees are comparable to other jurisdictions in Canada. In fact, I think we're at the low end in Manitoba even with the adjustments and we paid attention to working with the sector to ensure that there was a scalable and effective mechanism available for consumer protection measures that did not result in any amounts being spent other than a good scheme.

Yeah, the consultations were extensive but they're not over. So there was—after the legislation passed the Assembly—the development of the regulations and the code of ethics, and so the initial period of time that that has been in force has been used as a pilot period and getting feedback from the sector on the—and consumers on how accessible the new code of ethics are and the application of the regulations.

So there are further meetings. There's another meeting with the sector that is planned. So the department is presenting and having interactions with the sector next month on how this is going. We want to get the feedback and adjust any of the publications, for example, and then there's a meeting, a smaller meeting, with those that are interested at the association in fine-tuning any of the documents.

The code of ethics, I think, is key to this one because the code of ethics has to be in plain language. It has to be accessible and it has to deal with the issues that have been brought to our attention over the last number of years. It would be my view that it looks like Manitoba actually is on the leading edge now in the country in terms of consumer protection when it comes to funeral services. Having said that, though, we always have to be vigilant about making sure the regime's going to make sense.

So we'll tune that up and we'll take advice very carefully under consideration that we get from the sector or consumers as we move ahead, and I could just add to that that we've also begun with the Public Utilities Board, which is responsible for The Prepaid Funeral Services Act and The Cemeteries Act, a review of those parts of the funeral sector. Those are areas that haven't been reviewed for many, many years.

I think there's a growing recognition across North America that we have to pay more attention to this one for consumers because they're very vulnerable at that time, and, you know, grieving families have to make sure that the checks and balances are in place, and what we've found, though, is that the sector has been most receptive to this one with rare exception, and we've really seen leadership there, and I think Neil Bardal, for one, has been very helpful and been a great partner.

Mr. Faurschou: The minister is very perceptive. I was going to make mention of Mr. Neil Bardal, his participation and involvement throughout the process and—has unfortunately passed away recently, at which we had a private member's statement made here in the House by the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson). That type of leadership is—spoke volumes about the industry itself wanting to be responsible to their clientele.

The legislation always should have a consideration, though, when we pass, through legislation and regulation, the ability for self-regulation and the—a group or organization's ability to set their own fees and structure and licensing and that collection from their membership. I do believe, though, we should have some responsibility to ensure that a consultative process is required before any major increase in fees, so that the full membership is very knowledgeable of the—of what is taking place, because I do believe that a number of funeral directors throughout the province were more than shocked to receive the substantive increases to their licensing and—licensing fees this year.

Further to that, the minister did make mention of The Cemeteries Act and the prearranged funeral act. That was the promise made by the previous minister, that those two pieces of legislation would be up for amendment or full over—replacement with new legislation because that—we've seen so many changes over the years. And just as the minister said, we're dealing with persons that are grieving, under immense stress, and so we have to be very, very

diligent in our writing of our legislation and regulations to protect persons in that frame of mine or state of affairs.

So I ask the minister, specifically, where is the department in the process? When does he expect to see legislation coming to the House?

Mr. Mackintosh: The—just on the first comment about the membership of the sector, we can provide further information to the member, but I've just been advised that, aside from the ongoing partnership with the association leadership that represents the sector and the full membership, that there were direct communications as well with directors across the province, I think about—actually as much as a handful, I'm advised, but—and I'm just advised here, too, that the fees are definitely comparable to other jurisdictions, certainly at the low end. And, in fact, some jurisdictions have what are called death registration fees, and that's not an approach that was taken in Manitoba.

*(11:10)

The second question about The Cemeteries Act and the prearranged funeral act. I had a discussion with the PUB, the chair of the PUB, on what—where they were interested in—how they were interested in taking part in a review.

And so we have determined that it would be best to do a partnership deal with PUB and the department because we have expertise within the department. With the head of the area here, she is at the table, we should recognize Susan here, and what I have seen now is a listing of the main issues that have been brought to our respective areas over the last number of years and some of it, the PUB think, are important to 'prioritize.' And now, they're putting together a plan in terms of how to stage advice and any amendments.

There is some thinking that one option that may be pursued is, we can stage some amendments where there could be amendments by way of regulation and others by statute. And, of course, regulatory changes can be made more expeditiously.

What they are looking at providing to the minister that kind of a series of recommendations. So I look forward to that. I've become acutely aware of how complicated, actually, and how extensive the issues are in the area.

Just in the last—well, since I've become minister, I've had two letters, just for example, from colleagues from—of the member, on different challenges. You know, cemeteries that appear to be unkempt, for example, and who's responsible. Others about, you know, processes in terms of what consultations—family consultations and approvals are necessary when it comes to burial issues. This, as the member knows, can be very contentious.

So we're going to take a careful look at it, but we do want, on a time-limited basis, to be able to respond to this one. And, as well, we've had some dialogue with other jurisdictions in terms of what's happening. Well, you know, not just in Canada but there was a recent meeting of those responsible in Canada and the U.S. that Manitoba had a representative at. So we were also—and, you know, I've had an opportunity to look at some of the other jurisdictions' approaches.

Yeah, I think it's fair to say, it certainly is an emerging issue for consumer protection. And we want to provide a sure-footed and informed approach that is more modern. And we'll continue to look at even basic issues like, you know, should we have one statute or not, and maybe that doesn't matter to the public so much, but you know—and what should be the respective roles of the Public Utilities Board and our department.

Right now, as you can see, the area's divided up and maybe that works well for consumers but we're going to have a look at as well. It's just an outstanding question; I don't have a view at this particular time.

I know the PUB takes the issue very seriously and have tremendous insights into the area and I wouldn't want to remove that either. So I'm open to that and, if the member has any advice, sooner than later, I'm prepared to take that very seriously.

Mr. Faurchou: Madam Chair, and I'm pleased to learn that there's a very defined process under way at the present time and I support the minister's efforts on this front.

Because, currently, being around the prearranged funeral or some of the provisos for funerals, there is an undertaking by federal Minister Flaherty to look at the Canada Pension Plan.

And within the Canada Pension Plan, there is a funeral component provided for by—to Canadians. Although the amount has not been adjusted for I don't know how many decades, and sits at about

\$2,500, which we all know in this Chamber is inadequate to provide for any funeral arrangements under the current costing, is there intention by the minister to make presentation to the federal Minister of Finance regarding the pension that, perhaps, maybe, we should look at this level of coverage for Canadians and Manitobans?

Mr. Mackintosh: The—I'm advised, and I wasn't aware of this earlier, that, where a Manitoban can just not make the appropriate funeral payment—reasonable payment—under the CPP plan, that EIA has, from time to time, on an individual case consideration, provided a top up. So we'll take the question as something that would be interesting for us to consider, and it may be, then, that there'd be some relief to provincial taxpayers in our plan if the federal plan was more reflective of the current-day cost.

I can also advise that, under the employment and income assurance program, that amounts are provided—reasonable amounts are provided—for funeral costs. And it is on an individual basis, because there may be even some transportation costs, for example, that are unique in a certain circumstance. But what they're—it's not a blank-cheque program at all. It's one that is—that's got checks and balances built into it, the provincial plan. And part of that plan involves an agreement with the Funeral Service Association and the funeral directors for certain fees that attach when someone on EIA is deceased and there are funeral costs involved.

Mr. Faurshou: And I thank the minister for the response to my—I do appreciate the willingness to look further into this because I have knowledge of occasions where it has been very difficult for families to—because no arrangements had been made and the money is not really available, but, again, not qualifying for any other assistance. They're working poor families, you know, that basically give up the next day's meals to accommodate the loved one that has passed away.

* (11:20)

Before I leave this area, I just want to ask the minister whether there is any plans, being that he's new, with fresh eyes and potential opportunity, to look at the very comprehensive private members' legislation that myself introduced in the House a couple prior occasions that essentially was spurred on by the Misty Gardens fiasco.

I know that their—society today does view pets, you know, almost as family members and do, upon their—the pet's passing, want to be respectful. And there is no legislation in Manitoba or, for that matter, in Canada, that provides structure to those in the business of providing services for pets.

So I did a lot of work on this, and I would hope the minister might look favourably at it, provide a little bit of legwork for the department and—because I personally do believe that we should have in place some framework in which the industry operating in the province has some structure and safeguards for the consumers.

If the minister has any comment in that regard, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I can assure the member that I have turned my mind to this area because I recognize that families grieve over pets, as well, and it can be extremely unsettling for a family that there would be a loss of a pet that's part of a family. And then only to come across a situation as we did in Manitoba is just extremely unsettling, and it's not something I would like to see happen ever again.

So, yeah, I've asked staff to look at this area and we are prepared to look at options and we, you know, we're looking at a multiyear consumer strategy. And I can tell the member that this is one area that would be included in that. In fact, other areas that the members have—opposite have raised today are part of that strategy because I want to look further out. I want to have a plan as to terms of how we can advance the interest of consumer protection which, in my view, and I hope the member would agree, are also in the interests of good businesses in Manitoba. Businesses in Manitoba want level playing fields because one bad apple can pose a risk to the good business practices of the others. So we want to work together in that regard. So with that philosophy I'm prepared to have a look at this area.

As I said to the member's colleague, every time you look at new regulation for a sector you have to be very careful that, indeed, the sector compels regulation. And if it does, in the interest of consumer protection, if that's where the balance should be, then the next question is: Well, to what extent?

I know the member's legislation was based on a scheme in New York, and I think it's very—it's relatively unique anywhere in the world, actually, the New York scheme. There are about eight providers of pet cemetery services in Manitoba, and that leads

to the question about, you know, are there more consultative approaches. Are there more—are there other approaches, other than the legislative process?

Because I know from opposition the importance of private members' bills. They raise awareness. They're education pieces and perhaps the member and I should have further discussions as to, you know—is he also—would he also support, for example, sort of a self-regulatory scheme where the sector agreed that they would put in place a code of ethics and requirements.

I'm open to whatever would work for consumers in light of the risk posed, but, you know, would the member support that kind of approach where there could be a collegial effort with the sector? I'm open to that. I'm also—you know, I've looked at the proposals opposite. The bottom line is there has to be greater consumer protection in this area, and I pledge to pursue that.

Mr. Faurichou: Just one further item here of more of a very specific issue. I had not been aware that, in the interests of landlord-tenant's resolution of dispute, the Province has worked with the City of Winnipeg to establish the North End Landlord-Tenant Cooperation. The mandate of this particular—I should have said corporation—and it's run under the direction of the North End Community Renewal Corporation. Okay. Provincially funded, but what has—in correspondence between myself and the City of Winnipeg and the organization, basically, even though it is provincially funded, we have no ability to investigate as to whether it's operating in the best interests of either the clientele or the—on either side of the table: renter or the building owner.

And it's rather a curious type of relationship, and it's very specific, but I'm wanting to raise it at this time for perhaps the department's review that we as a provincial—as province are funding yet, seemingly, have no ability to make sure that there's checks and balances operating.

So, if the minister perhaps could agree to just look into this particular organization and to see where the checks and balances do exist for the dollars provided by the Province of Manitoba.

* (11:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: Yeah, I have a recollection of this group because there was a guy there, his name was Gord Macintyre or something, and I think he was

getting my cheques. No, just—but that's why I—but I recall it was set up under the umbrella, I believe, of the North End Community Renewal Corporation. And I—maybe I should be careful here, but my recollection was that it had funding from outside of the provincial government. I thought there was federal funding or there was a foundation funding or something, but I can just advise that there may well be some Neighbourhoods Alive! funding that flows to the renewal corporation and some earmarked for this, but it's not an area that the department funds. It's—this is a community-driven initiative, but I'm advised by the landlord—the Residential Tenancies division that we have attended—it's called the TLC—we've attended to provide information on landlord-tenant issues. So that's been our role there, in other words, providing—I think they look for—is it housing for low-income renters? With issues between landlords and tenants.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, I believe that the issue that brought my attention to this is something that perhaps we can look at it another time and place because there are some specific concerns raised within the operation of this entity that bring concern to my office and I believe to the minister's office as well. So perhaps we can look at that another time.

We only have a—one short hour here so maybe we can just look at the department as an overall and perhaps I can just ask questions of the department in general.

I see that administrative costs of the department are reduced even though the number of full-time equivalents and personnel remains the same. Do we have a large vacancies within the department or how do we reduce the bottom line in salary expenditures yet still have the same number of personnel dedicated to the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: Is the member talking about the division, the Consumer and Corporate Affairs division or the department as a whole?

Mr. Faurichou: It was Consumer and Corporate Affairs division whereby remaining at 119.78 full-time equivalents, and yet our estimated salary expenditure for this year's budget is less than last year. So the full-time equivalents remains the same, however, there is an estimated 30-some-thousand-dollar reduction in planned wage expenditures for this coming year. I was just wondering: is that emanating out of vacancies or unfilled positions?

Perhaps the minister could enlighten me as to departmental vacancies.

Madam Chairperson: Just a moment. I'm just going to recognize the honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Faurshou: I didn't know whether my microphone was open still or not. I'm referring to page 114 in the tabled book of Estimates and whereby there is a breakdown of the minister's department by division and a comparative allocation of the expenditures, and that's what I'm referring to: Consumer and Corporate Affairs, second line down.

Mr. Mackintosh: It basically is a relatively status quo budget this year for the division. There are some increases for salary costs, the usual increments that are expected to take place this year, but there was a decrease in operating. There was a one-time nonrecurring expense for the payday loan hearings at the PUB that the department was funding in the amount of about \$100,000, and that came out because that was a one-time event.

Mr. Faurshou: And the vacancy—current vacancy within the staffing of the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: There may be a vacancy that comes from time to time in this division as a result of retirements and so on, but there's really just a natural turnover. There's no significant vacancy management in this division.

Mr. Faurshou: The—as the ministers can appreciate, I'm very interested in the Claimant Adviser Office saying that we—very interested in the establishment of this particular support for persons that are going to the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission.

Could I ask the minister to provide an update as to the Claimant Adviser Office as to the number of cases that—they've been handling? What the backlog is? For lack of a better termination, the success rate of the claimant adviser in assisting those in appealing their automobile injury claims with MPI and whether or not the minister intends to try and—as I do believe he will find that there's quite a significant wait list, whether added resources or on a temporary basis, perhaps, to try and catch up, if you will.

So, if the minister would respond to that, I'd certainly appreciate it.

Mr. Mackintosh: I should just say that Susan Boulter was here and—the director of Vital Statistics,

and the individual assigned on the Funeral Services Association.

The Claimant Adviser Office has—began, of course, back in '05, with four staff. And it has now got nine positions in place and that includes three term claimant advisers hired to assist with the processing of backlog files.

There's quite a volume here. I see 861 files have been opened and 496 have been closed. Fifty-nine files were resolved without a hearing. That's where MPI rendered new and supplemental decisions on 48 files and settlements on 11. There's been 101 commission decisions provided. That's as of this month—or as of last month, mid-March. Forty-four decisions—this is what the member, I think, was getting to, at 44 of those 101 decisions were successful, five decisions were partially successful, 52 decisions were unsuccessful for the claimant.

The commission reports that 37 percent of the appellants are successful, in whole or in part, with appeals heard by the commission. So the average success rate of the Claimant Adviser Office, with appeal issues sided by the commission, is 48 percent. Six appeals are scheduled to be heard and nine hearings have been adjourned to be rescheduled at a later date, and hearing dates have been requested for 15 files. So there are 15 in the queue.

This is—since the office—this opened on May 16th of '05.

Mr. Faurshou: So there's 15 in the queue. How many are waiting to get into the process or is that all at the present time that have opened files that are coming the way of the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeals Commission?

Mr. Mackintosh: I am advised that there are 360 active files, but those are all in various stages of the commission's dealings.

Mr. Faurshou: Does that not shock the minister as to the number of waiting files? These are people behind the pieces of paper in that file, and in many cases, these are life-altering situations that Manitobans are facing and to be in such a lengthy wait to—for resolution, their lives are put on hold. They're trying to make ends meet with sometimes the only wage earner in the family is now the individual that has been injured, and I find it very alarming and I really, truly would like to encourage the minister to dive in with eyes wide open and try and get some resolution to this very—very lengthy process that we,

as legislators in the province of Manitoba, have set up.

Madam Chair, I would like to ask for about a three-minute break, if we could?

Madam Chairperson: Is there leave for a three-minute break? *[Agreed]*

So we will resume at 11:45—*[interjection]*—11:46.

Thank you.

The committee recessed at 11:43 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:48 a.m.

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. I'll call the committee back to order.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Mackintosh: So, of those matters that are under consideration, they include every—a full range of issues that are subject to appeal. Everything from supplementary benefits or approvals for treatment, all the way to, of course, a review of the, sort of, the basic decisions by MPI. So, within that range, we can also have, then, a number of different challenges that may be faced by individuals. So what happened over the last little while is in recognition of the immediate coming to the office of these files when it opened—the need to manage it more efficiently. More staff resources have been brought on, more term positions and so on to deal with the numbers and the cases.

* (11:50)

What is happening now is an action plan has been implemented that has a number of components. One of them is a prioritizing of those claims that have hardship issues. For example, where there is income replacement issues in play, those can be prioritized, but if there's any financial hardship then it's important that they be triaged, and that's what's occurring.

As well, there is a new mediation pilot that is being launched, and there's been some tests of that to provide a remedy that may, in fact, be even more satisfying than the traditional methods of resolving these complaints. As well, there have been a number of settlements with MPI, with the cases before having to go to the formalities of the hearing. But most of the cases that are awaiting final disposition

are in the process of getting additional evidence and much of that is, of course, in support of the claimant's case. A lot of that are medical reports and sometimes those do—as a former litigation lawyer, I know how that works, and there can be some significant delays sometimes when medical information is sought. And, in fact, that's very common, when we're talking about personal injuries, the decisions are made on the basis of medical evidence, mostly.

And sometimes when the medical evidence comes back and doesn't deal with some of the essential issues, there has to be further clarification and bringing in experts. And the—for example, the orthopedic physicians of Manitoba are called on disproportionately to provide the necessary medical evidence to prove or disprove a claim. So those are—the matters are all in various stages, sometimes very importantly in the interests of the claimant, him or herself.

So, with the efforts that are undertaken we are now, as a result, seeing for the first time since the office opened, some positive measures of timeliness, of timely dealings with the complaints. For example, of the—there are 150 files opened this year, about 175 closed, and this is the first year now where we've seen that turning of the corner. So we're going to continue to learn from these experiences, and I know that with the additional resources we're going to continue to address this over the course of this year, even though we have some very difficult financial circumstances. But we do not want to be in a position where next year the turning of the corner is going in another direction.

So I'm very confident that the new processes and the triaging efforts are making a difference. I'll just conclude on this, though. I have been made aware, back when I was minister responsible for MPI, of this interest in using mediation. And, as the member knows, mediation means, you know, both parties agree to the process and maybe they don't get everything they want out of it and maybe the best way to solve it is by everyone giving a little bit, but using the mediation process in this sector of complaints I think holds out great promise and is really leading edge. And we've got people that are doing this that really know mediation. And so I'm confident that, as one part of moving the claims along, that will be most interesting.

Mr. Faurschou: The minister's response is truly appreciated because I know we worked together in

other capacities when I was the MPI critic, and he—and the minister was responsible at that time for MPI, that both of us share the same concern. We seem to be co-ordinating our changes and responsibilities here. But it truly is of interest to myself and do want to always be treating others as we want to be treated ourselves. So I appreciate the minister's response.

The—once again, I'm looking at the clock, so I'm going to change from—to another department, and I might look at the Securities Commission next. The Securities Commission had been looking at a number of different areas of regulatory change, but the most fundamental one of all is the co-ordinated effort with other provinces to effectively have a passport mechanism put in place whereby an entity operating in the province of Manitoba could effectively apply for status in other provinces. Could the minister update me as to where the national scheme is of the program designated as a—passport?

Mr. Mackintosh: I didn't know whether to jump in a point of order or not, but I just wanted to hear what the issue actually was and whether it didn't have some crossover with the division. But the—there was a conscious, determined effort when the departments were realigned to have the Securities Commission remain with Finance as it was before, and there was a reason for that, and it's exactly the one the member raised. There had been ongoing and recently developing dialogue, as the member knows, on the passport approach with the federal government and that connection, though, was at the Finance Minister's area in Ottawa, Mr. Flaherty.

So it was decided that it would be best to, because of this emerging issue, to have continuity with regard to those discussions. So the Securities Commission remains with the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), and I'm sure she'd be pleased to address the issues raised by the member opposite.

Mr. Faurchou: I appreciate the minister correcting me, although I would, perhaps, like to see the correction made on the government Web site where, effectively, the designation of the Minister of Family Services responsible for the Securities Commission as it is advertised on the Manitoba government Web site—so, as Manitoba Securities Commission, he being then responsible for The Securities Act, The Commodities Futures Act, The Real Estate Brokers Act and The Mortgage Dealers Act, of which I had questions in all areas, so I will hold those in

abeyance until the Minister of Finance is before a committee of Estimates here.

Could I then ask the minister as pertains to the Landlords and Tenancy branch? The—there's been a lot of—over the established guidelines for rental increases this year.

Could the minister perhaps provide the House with the information as to how many of the landlords within—operating within the province of Manitoba were able to continue to operate within the guidelines and—versus the percentage of the landlords that have applied for above the provincially established guidelines pertaining to rent here in the province of Manitoba?

*(12:00)

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm looking at the number of applications for rent increases over the years and looking to see if there's a discernable one-liner trend to describe to the member, but that seems a bit challenging. I'll just put some numbers on the record though for the member, but I just notice that in 2001, there were 493 applications and in 2008, for which we have the final numbers, we—is that '09? For '09, it appears that the preliminary number is 328. So, anyway, I've seen other years. For example, '03 there's 364 so it looks like there's an up-and-down trend over the years. And under the rehab program, for example, that's where there's a refresh, a major renovation. There were 53 applications in '08 and then there were 50 applications in '09. So in that there's some downtrend, well, marginal there, but there seems to be some consistency.

So those were the numbers. Perhaps, you know, if the member wants further numbers, we can get them for him. I think the '09 numbers may not be all concluded. They're not finalized yet, and they'll be finalized for the annual report. I think that work is ongoing.

Mr. Faurchou: I wonder if the minister could bring sort of relevancy to the numbers by telling the committee how many renters or landlords are there in the province, and that way, then, we'd know as to a percentage as to our operating within the guidelines versus applying for above-the-guideline rental increases, say. How was the industry working with the department? I'd be very interested.

Mr. Mackintosh: In Manitoba, because there isn't a requirement for landlords to be licensed, if you will, you know, people can become a landlord sometimes for a few months and then leave. They can convert

the premises back and so on, but—so we don't require the landlord sector to report on how many units they may have or, you know, who the landlords are and go into a registry. What we do keep track of, of course, are the applications. Oh, and I am told, though, that it is the view, the advice of those that work in the area that the majority of landlords actually take guideline or less in any given year.

Mr. Faurchou: Following on that new train of thought, applications are made for above-the-guideline rental increase by the landlords. How many are approved at the application at the rate applied for versus modification by the department, because I know the department then reviews upon request of those that rent within the particular buildings? How many are granted as is and others that are modified by the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised by the branch that about half of the applications asking for rent increase have the amount requested reduced by the branch after review of the documents and, in some cases, inspections.

Mr. Faurchou: I'd like to ask the minister as it pertains to the change in legislation last year allowing for an additional monies on deposit if a renter had a pet. How is that being adopted by those with pets versus those without—that are renting premises with pet owners occupying?

Mr. Mackintosh: It's been a subject of some public discourse over the last little while and a very interesting area. The—we're looking at a package of approaches on this issue. We would like to see more landlords accommodate pets—a reasonable accommodation, of course. And so the amendments were introduced after some discussions with the landlord and tenant advisers that we rely on and looking at other jurisdictions' approaches to this issue. And the conclusion that was recommended to government was we could certainly support a more balanced approach by allowing landlords to basically double the security deposit in order to provide some comfort in allowing pets into individual units.

So, along with the proclamation of that section that is now almost ready to come on now, we're also looking at some other mechanisms to help landlords accommodate pets to a greater extent, and we're putting the finishing touches on some of those—I can say there's been some ongoing discussions after the legislation passed in terms of how to make this work better. So that's where we're at, and I think over the course of the next month or two, I think we should

be in a position to—that's the plan, to conclude those discussions and a better package.

Mr. Faurchou: I'd be interested—has the branch heard a lot of concern by pet owners not being able to find reasonable accommodations in rental units, or is the industry not providing enough accommodations to pet owners? Like, here the department is the front line on this one—could perhaps enlighten the House as to where they believe we are on the spectrum of things? Have we found the neutral or area within the—satisfying both renters and landlords on this issue?

*(12:10)

Mr. Mackintosh: The issue, because it's received some public attention in the last several weeks in particular, has generated some communications to the department from tenants wanting to see landlords better accommodate or allow pets into units, and I think part of that there is a concerted campaign actually that may in large part—it'll explain the generation of these communications.

We also have had communications from others, from tenants and, of course, from landlords, that are vociferously opposed to having a blanket law that allows—that requires landlords to admit pets, and the reason that the legislation was amended as it was was to strike that balance between the, of course, interests of the landlord in providing safe, healthy environments for their tenants, protecting their properties and their investments and, as well, though, recognizing that perhaps additional incentives could result in more landlords accommodating pets if they knew that any damages could have recompense.

There has been a lot of attention pointed at Ontario's approach, and I think there's a major misconception there. Ontario, and if you will just look at any newspapers from Ontario, you will see no pets allowed in ad after ad for apartments in Ontario. Ontario's law does not prohibit a no-pets-allowed policy for rental accommodations. It does, rather interestingly, have requirements, though, if an eviction should take place as a result of pets on the premises. So, in other words, if someone gets into an apartment and then doesn't tell the—didn't tell the landlord that there was a pet—so it's an interesting situation.

And so what we are hearing from tenants as well are very serious concerns, though, about allergies and not just when there are pets actively living in the same building or on the same floor or next, you

know, in townhouses and so on, but also pets that may have been on the premises beforehand, and we know that some of those allergies are quite serious. We also have heard concerns about, you know, about how many pets could be, you know, where this could lead and what that would do to the little neighbourhoods that have developed in these rental communities.

So strong views on each side, but we certainly do think that we'd like to see more pets and we're trying to accommodate that coming in to live with their owners, and I think there's some reasonable test that always I think can help this along. But, you know, landlords allowing pets can put in place requirements for reasonableness, and I think that we have to remind them of their ability to do that, that they have a right to guard against destructive pets or problem pets, but, yeah, it's not an easy issue. All across North America, Manitoba is one of every jurisdiction in this continent that has had this debate and at least I hear in Manitoba we've made efforts to try and balance it and move in a direction of greater accommodation of pets.

But I don't know what the member's views are on the issue, but it's one that is quite an interesting one for this new minister, and we hope that, through some of our efforts, we can move in the direction that I stated.

Mr. Faurshou: One's personal views was—one's political positioning is sometimes a little bit different. I do come from the farm where my motto was people inside, animals outside. We do recognize that we live in a society where pets have come to be, you know, well, virtually family members and do need accommodations, and a striking of that balance is very, very important and ongoing efforts to do so are appreciated.

The legislation was also changed to try and find balance between landlords and tenants as far as those tenants that are destructive and an ability for a quick eviction to preserve a landlord's property. I know that was attempted to be addressed in previous amendments.

Could the minister give me an update as to—is there—does the department feel that they have a balance now between landlords and tenants to safeguard the interests of both parties as it pertains to eviction or disagreement and parting of ways?

Mr. Mackintosh: There haven't been recent amendments in this regard, and there haven't been

representations to us to change the current balance that's in place in the law.

Mr. Faurshou: Then—can you follow that up then with the number of hearings that are taking place? Is there—are we up-to-date with the dispute mechanism that is provided for under the legislation? Are we current? Is there a backlog number of cases that have been handled by the department in the past year? Is that information available to the minister?

Mr. Mackintosh: The branch advises that there is a prioritizing of hearing matters and where there's immediate risk to safety or health, there is a fast tracking of hearings on those, and I'm advised that those are current. In other words they are within—the hearing dates are current. And, in fact, the decisions are even within days, sometimes as short as about three days.

And I understand, too, with orders of possession, that generally they're within three working days. And claims for compensation—I'm advised that those are also relatively timely, but again, with the triaging, that can take longer, and then there may be appeals from that.

So I don't know if there's any further information, and there may be some further information in the annual report. Yeah, the annual report does set out, just for the purposes of the clock, but there will be numbers in the annual report in terms of volumes.

*(12:20)

Mr. Faurshou: Could the branch provide what the current charges are to landlords for hearings? I understand that the—or perhaps the minister could outline from start to conclusion the charges that are required to be—or the fees required to be paid by the landlord for an eviction to take place. There has been concern raised that this process can end up being quite costly.

Mr. Mackintosh: The process to be launched by a landlord seeking the eviction of a tenant is by way of what's called an order of possession and the filing fee for that is \$60 to the branch. If the landlord appeals that to the commission, that's a further \$60. Both of those amounts would, in the event of a successful application, be made part of the order for repayment by the tenant. Now there could be some—those are certain costs in the event of the application and the appeal, but, of course, you have to, under law, serve that order—serve the application of the order on the tenant. And I was just saying, it's not as if the

landlord won't know where the tenant lives, but there may be challenges nonetheless if the landlord is a distance from the tenant, or, you know, where the tenant is evading service, which happens from time to time. I have some stories to tell you. But the service can be done by the landlord, him or herself, but where a process server is contracted for, and those costs can vary, but it does depend on the amount of the effort. So I don't want to speculate on what that might be but it certainly is a risk of some cost there if the landlord doesn't serve the amount—the order, the application, personally.

Then the final risk of cost is where the tenant just doesn't leave after the branch or the commission provide their order, in which case the removal of the tenant by a sheriff would be required, and they have a schedule of fees there. Once again, the amount can be added—would be added to the order, a successful order and then that gives the right of the landlord to pursue those costs with all of the mechanisms available, whether by garnishment and so on.

Mr. Faurschou: Are these costs that are incurred for eviction, can they be taken or recovered back through the deposit the renter has with the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: I thought the member was on to a good idea and I was going to steal, but somebody already did. They can make that—they can claim that amount against their damage deposit.

Mr. Faurschou: On that point, how—the department—on unclaimed security deposits, could

you maybe give an update as to recent situation. Have you turned over much monies of unclaimed status to the Province recently?

Mr. Mackintosh: We—I'll just double check on the provision of this answer because we were separating some different amounts, but the member was asking about unclaimed damage deposits, and last year the total amount was \$3,800. So then I just asked, and I'll provide this information, but—so my understanding is that efforts were made to locate the tenant, but the amount is nonetheless held for two years before, then goes into General Revenues. So I hope that's what the member was asking for. So that's—okay? Okay.

Mr. Faurschou: That's exactly what I was looking for and thank you very much for the information.

One last quick snapper here: What is the current vacancy rate on rental units here in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Mackintosh: There's not a current number—as October at 1.1.

Madam Chairperson: Order, please.

The hour being 12:30, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hour being after 12:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 16, 2010

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