

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 14, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Minister of Finance, on a point of order.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday I made some statements in Estimates that I'd like to address in the House today.

I think the most sincere way for me to do that is through a letter which I have handed to the—my critic, the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), and I think the easiest way to do this is to read the letter and then table it in the House, Mr. Speaker.

I'm writing to correct the record regarding statements that I made during the Committee of Supply meeting on Wednesday, May 9th.

I also wish to offer my unreserved apology to you for any confusion which has arisen due to these statements.

As you know, there was a great deal of discussion last week regarding the distribution of Jets tickets by Manitoba's Crown corporations. I was asked about this several times in question period by you and your colleagues and again by members of the media.

It was in this context that I replied to your questions during the Estimates process, and it was in this context that I inadvertently misled the House last Wednesday.

Contrary to the information that I provided to you last week, I want to make it clear that I have also

attended one Jets game with Red River College, two Jets games with the Manitoba Home Builders' Association, one Jets game with a ticket from a personal acquaintance.

The information that I put on the record was incorrect. For this I offer my sincere apologies.

I have since declared with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner the games that I attended with the Manitoba Home Builders' Association and the Red River College. Further, I have made arrangements to make a charitable donation to the Canadian Diabetes Association for the value of these tickets.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) has made it clear that the old way of distributing tickets is not acceptable. That is why this week we introduced new guidelines to ensure that MLAs and ministers are treated like everyone else when it comes to professional sporting events.

I've apologized to the Premier for this misunderstanding, and I will further correct the record officially in the House.

Mr. Speaker, again, I offer to the member for Tuxedo and to this House my sincere apologies for unintentionally misleading last week in Estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oh, I have a letter to table.

Mr. Speaker: No further comment on the point of order?

I'd like to thank the honourable Minister of Finance for his comments here today, and I believe that will conclude the matter.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 28—The Residential Tenancies
Amendment Act**

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 28, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rondeau: This bill makes a number of changes to the residential tenancy act. Some of the key changes include a requirement for landlords to use the prescribed forms when terminating tenancies to ensure tenants receive important information about their rights, authority for the development of regulations regarding the waiver of filing fees in certain circumstances, the provision regarding changes to tenants' services charges when the number of people occupying a rental unit increases or decreases.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Bill 30—The Regulated Health Professions
Amendment and Personal Health Information
Amendment Act**

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Labour (Ms. Howard), that Bill 30, The Regulated Health Professions Amendment and Personal Health Information Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les professions de la santé réglementées et la Loi sur les renseignements médicaux personnels, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Oswald: These changes will improve protection of patients' health-care records by requiring health professionals and their regulatory bodies to ensure that health records are not abandoned or at risk of being abandoned if a health professional ceases to practise in Manitoba, and it broadens what will be included on the physician profiles.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PETITIONS

Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

During early October 2011, parts of southeastern Manitoba were hard hit by wildfires. Thanks to the swift action of provincial and municipal officials, including 27 different fire departments and countless

volunteers, no lives were lost and property damage was limited.

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

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

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

* (13:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by S. Peloquin, A. Letendre and I. Kirby and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

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

These are the reasons for the petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by W. Lepp, P. Wiebe, S. Hein and thousands of other Manitobans.

PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about safety levels at this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by K. Jasienczyk, K. Jakubowski, K. Jakubowski and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Access to Clean Water for Manitoba First Nations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Many Manitobans living in First Nations communities do not have the same access to clean water as the majority of Manitobans.

Manitobans living in First Nation communities with poor sanitation experience poor health.

Lack of access to clean tap water will continue to increase health risks for Manitobans in First Nation communities.

Too little has been done in the last 12 years by the provincial government to ensure all First Nation communities in Manitoba have adequate water infrastructure.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier consider advocating and partnering with the federal government to ensure all First Nations communities have access to clean, running water for all their homes.

To request the Premier to consider working closely with the federal government and First Nations communities to address and erase the massive water infrastructure gap that exists on many First Nations communities in Manitoba.

Signed by T. Hayward, E.T. Nosalia, C. Bishop and many, many others.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Southeastern Wildfires Update

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I have a ministerial statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship and the Office of the Fire Commissioner continue to respond to wildfires in southeastern Manitoba and support municipalities and fire departments.

The main fire of concern is approximately 4,500 hectare, which is threatening the community of Badger. The RM of Piney ordered the evacuation of Badger last night to ensure the safety of area residents. Sixteen individuals remain evacuated until further notice.

Municipal fire crews continue to be supported by more than 60 forest firefighters from Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, along with bulldozers to cut fire lines. Substantial air resources are also in place, including six water bombers and three helicopters. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre has assisted the province in getting two additional CL-415 water bombers from the province of Québec to assist our firefighting efforts.

The fire danger continues to be high in the southeast region due to relatively high humidity—low humidity—low relative humidity, high temperatures and high winds. To help reduce the chances of new fires, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship is introducing backcountry travel restrictions in the eastern region effective immediately.

I'll just add, on behalf of, I'm sure, all members of this House, we thank all those firefighters who are out there on the front line. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, in response to the minister's statement, I look forward to this afternoon's tour with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Minister of Conservation to see first-handed what is happening with the fires in southeastern Manitoba. I toured the southeast yesterday by truck and spoke to several constituents who are greatly concerned about the fires in the southeast. My heart goes out to anybody who has lost property to these fires. The dry conditions and wind have not helped.

I want to thank and commend all the firefighters that are working on these fires, and may Mother Nature help us fight these fires. Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I wish to join others in extending—or in expressing our concern for those who are in the community of Badger and nearby areas which are threatened, their homes, their farms. And, indeed, it is a time when we need to be very cognizant of the risks involved in southeast Manitoba and of the need to help those who are so badly affected and threatened there.

I'd like to extend appreciation to the Premier for arranging a visit to the area this afternoon to see the conditions first-hand and to be able to talk to people on the ground. And I'm looking forward to participating in that and doing what I can to help those in southeastern Manitoba.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Jennifer, Rachel and James McFadyen, who are the wife and

children of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

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

And also, in the public gallery we have from River West Park School 11 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Todd Johnson. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Performance Premier's Accountability

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, over the past month or so, since the 17th of April and the budget brought down by this government, we've seen, really, an incredible series of ethical lapses on the part of the government.

We saw, with the budget, the member for St. Boniface introducing a budget that explicitly broke the promise that he made to the people of Manitoba not to raise taxes. That member also broke his promise to seniors and to farmers in terms of his commitment to eliminate property tax. We've seen, under this government, just over the past month, abuses of the civil service in connection with the immigration debate. And we saw the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) break the election laws in the lead-up to the last election. Finally, Mr. Speaker, over the past week, we have seen examples of the misuse of public funds by members of this government. It's not an isolated situation. It's not just one or two ministers who are at issue here.

I want to ask the Premier: Will he accept the fact that the real problem with this government is the member for St. Boniface?

* (13:50)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As I stated on Friday afternoon, I have taken responsibility for the problem with respect to Jets tickets, and we have put in place a new policy. We believe that it's important that everybody in the House that has received tickets declare that and state that and that on a go-forward basis we have a new policy which quite simply does not allow anybody to take tickets who is an elected

official of this House from a Crown corporation, from a business, or from a union.

And we think that policy will serve us well and can be further refined through the Legislative Assembly management committee with any advice that the ethics commissioner may wish to provide.

Mr. McFadyen: In addition to the five issues which have arisen over the past month, we have a history with this member going all the way back to the Crocus scandal, where he came into the House and provided misleading statements to the House.

He put misleading statements in his own budget. He then went on, Mr. Speaker, and was a participant in the NDP's two-for-one tax credit scheme. He's never, ever accounted for that scheme as well, in which he was a participant. We also know that this member has misled the House in connection with issues related to Hydro. He's misled the Manitobans and this House in connection with matters related to the finance of the Province, including his commitments with respect to the stadium project.

So we have five issues just in the past four weeks on top of a series of other misleading statements and broken promises by the member for St. Boniface.

Will he acknowledge today, as he attempts to spread blame all over the place, the real problem with this NDP government is its unethical leader?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the long preamble, unfortunately, is filled with inaccuracies, which is nothing unusual for the member from Fort Whyte.

We have simply acknowledged that there is an issue here with respect to tickets from the Winnipeg Jets and elected officials. People on this side of the House have made their declarations. They have agreed to pay them back and/or make a charitable contribution equivalent. We simply ask that all members of the House that are in receipt of any tickets from a Crown corporation, from a business, or from a union, do the declaration and pay them back as well. Then we can move forward with the new policy.

We have put a new policy on behalf of this side of the House out there. We believe the new policy will open up a new era in how business is done in this province. We know that historically there had been a practice of elected officials receiving tickets to professional sporting events. We think that era is over.

We hope the members opposite will join us in supporting that policy, and then we can move forward into the future.

Mr. McFadyen: The trouble is that the issue of the misuse of public money for Jets tickets is only the latest in a series of lapses on the part of the member for St. Boniface.

This is the member who, when he was Finance Minister, came into the House and misled Manitobans and the media about what was happening at Crocus. This is the member who misled the public and the House about what was happening with respect to Hydro and, in particular, the bipole issue. This is the member who was a participant in a two-for-one tax credit scheme where they issued federal tax credits for provincial donations. This is the same member, Mr. Speaker, whose own election return was falsified and who sat on that information for years, even as the issue went without investigation. This is the same member who said to the people of Manitoba back in September: There'll be no tax increases if you just give me your vote.

Will the member acknowledge, even as he throws the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and others under the bus, that the real problem in his government is in the centre of the front row?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member from Fort Whyte in his preamble has made a number of unfortunately inaccurate statements, but we know that this is his common practice.

Just to give one example, we know that the member, with respect to the Crocus fund, made an accusation that certain information hadn't been provided, when I was Minister of Finance, to the Auditor General. The Auditor General then had to go public and say that the member from Fort Whyte was wrong. The member knows that. He skips over that very relevant piece of history. In fact, the only inaccurate statements put in front of the public with respect to that matter were from the member from Fort Whyte, and he never yet has apologized for that.

The reality is when an error is made by any member of this side of the House, we take responsibility for it, and then we move towards corrective measures. That is the approach we have taken with respect to any Jets tickets. We have acknowledged responsibility. I've taken responsibility on behalf of the government.

We look for the Leader of the Opposition to acknowledge responsibility for any tickets that may

have been taken on behalf of members of the opposition, do the declarations, and then work through the Legislative Assembly management committee on a new policy that will apply to all of us.

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

**Finance Minister
Apology for Misinformation**

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, on May the 9th, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stood in this House and said, and I quote: ". . . the facts of the matter are that nobody from this side of the government benefited through Jets tickets at the expense of the Manitoba taxpayer. That's clear; that's obvious." End quote.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing inadvertent in this statement. Today the minister stood up and admitted he took a free Jets ticket from Red River community college.

Can the minister explain why he thought it was okay to mislead the Manitoba Legislature in this fashion?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance tabled a letter in the House today as part of an apology that explained the events that happened. And he has apologized to the House for any inadvertent misleading of members of the House.

The member knows that, and the member has full access to the letter. He can read the letter, and in the letter: "I inadvertently misled the House last Wednesday." And, Mr. Speaker, he indicates that he has apologized, and he's apologized to the members of the House today.

That is the point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker. If an error is made, the members are willing to make their apologies as required. And then they are prepared to put in place new policies which will change a long-standing set of practices with respect to elected officials of this province.

We still have seen no declaration from the members of the opposition. We have seen no policy position from the members of the opposition. We have seen no indication that the members of the opposition are willing to set a standard for all elected officials in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, with this Minister of Finance, it's not 'inverdent,' it's a pattern, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, on May the 9th, the same day the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) sat in Estimates and he said, and I quote: "Very directly, I went to three games. I went to three games because I'm a, I guess, a small player in a consortium of season ticket holders. So I managed to get drawn for three games . . . and I want to make it very clear that each of those three games I paid for."

There is nothing inadvertent in this statement. He makes no mention of the Jets tickets that he got for free from the public-paid-for Jets tickets. Today the minister stood up and admitted he took free Jets tickets.

Can the minister explain why he thought it was okay to mislead the Manitoba Legislature in this fashion? Why did he do it?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has given a statement in the House. He's provided it in writing to the critic of the opposition. At the—he fully understood the context of any questions were related to Crown corporations. That was the context he answered in. As he realized today, when he put the statement in front of the House, that there was a broader context that was being addressed, he has put forward his apologies for inadvertently misleading the House.

At the time we were doing the discussion, the member from—the member that was just raising the question made it very clear that he was doing it in the context of Crown corporations. I think it's important for him to acknowledge that.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance misled the Manitoba Legislature on two separate occasions on the same day. Not just has he lost the confidence of the Manitoba Legislature, but he has diminished how Manitobans view his performance as the individual who controls their tax dollars as Minister of Finance.

The question then becomes: What are the ramifications of his actions? He has admitted his guilt. What's the restitution going to be? If you do the crime, you do the time. It applies to everybody else. What's his time going to be, Mr. Speaker? What's the restitution for this minister?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member of St. Paul asked the question. The member in question, the Minister of Finance, has declared all the information, given the broader context that's under discussion now.

At the time that he inadvertently misled the House, it was in the context of Crown corporations. That was the focus. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) has said that he doesn't think it should apply to private businesses. In the case of Red River community college, when he realized that that was part of the broader discussion, he has put forward a statement and he has apologized for inadvertently misleading the House.

The member opposite knows that when he was posing the questions—the member opposite knows when he was posing the questions, he was doing it in the context of Crown corporations. I think he should be honourable and identify and admit that was the context he was asking the questions in.

*(14:00)

Cabinet Ministers Misinformation on Use of Jets Tickets

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): As members of this House, we rely on information that's brought to this House that is accurate and truthful, Mr. Speaker. And yet, we know recently in regard to who got the Jets tickets on the public dime, there have been several occasions where this has not been accurate information. It's not been truthful, it's not been accurate, even after repeated questions.

Mr. Speaker, why did this arrogant NDP government continue to mislead this House even after they got caught?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Well, I think we were all here at the beginning of the day today when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stood up and explained that he had inadvertently put incomplete information on the record. He has written a letter to the critic in question explaining that, that the context in which the questions were asked was not—was in context to which he was answering. But in looking at it, he should have put more complete information on the record and he has apologized for that, Mr. Speaker.

And, I think, frankly, given that and given your response to that, that that is what we would expect of members in this House. We do expect members of

this House to bring forward complete and accurate information, and when that isn't the case to take the first opportunity to correct the record and that's what the Minister of Finance has done.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need accurate and truthful information to perform our duties in this House, and that is just not good enough to say it was inadvertent, because it was obviously much more than that.

We know that on several occasions the ministers have misled this House, irregard to who got Jets tickets on the public dime, Mr. Speaker, when and how they got them, when and how they disclosed how they got them, and when they repaid for them. And when they got caught—when they got caught—they finally admitted some of this.

It begs the question: What other false information has been brought to this House? How can we trust anything the NDP say?

Ms. Howard: I would refer the honourable member opposite to the letter that the Minister of Finance tabled earlier where he very clearly offered an unreserved apology for any confusion that had arisen through those statements. That's very clear that he's offered that to this House and I think this House has accepted that apology.

I would say that we have put forward—on Friday we put forward a complete list of which tickets had been received. Members on this side of the House have clearly, now, obeying by a policy that forbids that practice. They have disclosed. Members have made charitable donations and repaid those tickets. We haven't yet seen the list from the other side of the members on the other side that may have taken tickets.

And we will be meeting at LAMC to talk about how to address this in a go-forward basis as all members of this House, and I 'm sure they will be co-operative in helping us address that issue.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

Mr. McFadyen: The member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), along with the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) have, on a couple of occasions, asked

for a list disclosing the members of the opposition who received free taxpayer-funded Jets tickets.

And, Mr. Speaker, rather than allow them to carry on with their campaign of smear, I'm quite happy to table that list right now.

Ms. Howard: I would just, on the same point of order, clarify for the member opposite, because I'm sure that he wants to provide complete information to the House, that the information that we've put on the record has included tickets received from businesses, from private individuals, from corporations, any—and any other tickets like that. And that is the information that we would expect all members in this House would want to put forward so we can come together and develop a policy that applies to everyone.

Mr. Speaker: I thank honourable members for their advice on this point of order raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

I must indicate to the House, though, that there is no point of order. I know this is a continuing matter of debate, but there is no point of order in this case.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morris, on her final supplementary question.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. I mean, this is a government that has admitted that they put false information on the record. So how could we believe anything this government says?

They broke their election promises, Mr. Speaker. They allow Cabinet ministers to break the law. They allow other Cabinet ministers to politicize the civil service. They stack Crown corporations with NDP donors, and now they put themselves at the front of the line to get tickets paid for on the public dime, until they got caught.

The question is: Who has not been caught, Mr. Speaker, and who is still misleading this House?

Ms. Howard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morris asked a question and I'm sure she's entitled to hear the answer, and I ask for the co-operation of all honourable members to allow the minister to provide an answer.

Ms. Howard: I would say again, for the members opposite, that we all heard attentively the Minister of

Finance (Mr. Struthers) correct the record and we thank him for that statement.

I think that is how we would expect members of this House to respond when they have put incomplete information on the record.

I do now have the list that was tabled by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) and I look forward to him—and I look forward to—he's got lots of time in the next 23 minutes to write out the list of his members that received any free tickets to a Jets games. And I'm sure in the next 23 minutes he can write out that list for me.

Job Loss Government Response

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada released the provincial labour numbers this past Friday. The report shows Manitoba lost 1,400 full-time and another 500 part-time jobs in April alone.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very disturbing trend. Red tape, taxation and regulations and bureaucracy are killing jobs in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What is the minister going to do to stop the bleeding of jobs in Manitoba?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): And, first of all, we stood up for the Wheat Board when members opposite were clearly silent. So I would hope—I would have hoped, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite would have stood up for Manitoba instead of stood down on that particular issue.

And, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has consistently had the second and third lowest unemployment rate in Canada and we are working to build an economy, and we had some choices to make for Budget 2012 and Budget 2012 is a budget that will continue to build the economy.

Mr. Cullen: I hope the minister's having a look at what's happening around the rest of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Stats Canada indicated Manitoba lost—and I repeat this—1,800 jobs last month alone. Meanwhile, our neighbours in Saskatchewan added 6,800 jobs last month alone.

Mr. Speaker, clearly NDP policies are not working for Manitobans. Manitoba is becoming even more uncompetitive and facing some of the highest taxes in Canada.

When will the government take steps to make us more competitive and put Manitobans back to work?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the members opposite to look at the bigger picture. I know that's a little difficult for them to do sometimes, but if you look at the bigger picture over the last five years, our labour force has increased by 40,300, which is above Canada's 5.9 per cent; that's 6.5 per cent increase in labour force.

Our total employment has increased by 35,100 jobs, 5.9 per cent; this is above Canada's 4.7 per cent. Private sector jobs increased by 23,700 positions, 5.4 per cent, third place provincially, and our private sector job growth was above the national average, 3.3 per cent.

Over five years, Mr. Speaker, our economy has grown. It continues to outperform national averages and Manitoba is going forward.

If members opposite would stand up and vote in favour of budgets that build and invest in Manitoba, they'd be doing a favour to stand up—

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

*(14:10)

Labour Force Decrease Government Response

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll send a copy of the Stats Canada report to the minister, because there's more disturbing news in that report. It shows Manitoba's labour force—that those that can work—shrunk by 2,000 people last month alone. Meanwhile, Saskatchewan added 7,600 people to the labour force in one month alone. Clearly, these NDP policies are driving people out of work and out of the province.

How and when will this government fix the problem?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been growing our province's economy by growing the population of this province. Over 100,000 people have called Manitoba home in the last 10 years, seeing unprecedented growth in the last four years. Of course, on this side of the House, we're standing up for those immigrants that are coming to Manitoba; members opposite choose to stand down.

But, Mr. Speaker, private sector employees has risen by 23,800; that's 6.7 per cent, second best

among provinces and above the national increase of 3.5 per cent. We'll continue to invest in things that are important to Manitoba, in public sector infrastructure, in highways, which they voted against—record investment in highways and bridge construction. We continue to invest in public sector infrastructure in hospitals and schools. They'll continue to vote against it. But the private sector continues to fuel our economy because of policies we put in place.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time expired.

Provincial Income Tax Rate Increase

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): April 30th was the deadline for everyone to file their income tax returns. Mr. Speaker, in 1999, an average Manitoban made—making \$40,000 per year paid \$7,736 in federal income taxes and \$3,752 in provincial income taxes. Over the course of 12 years of NDP rule, the same Manitoban in 2011 paid \$6,000 in federal income taxes and \$4,495 in provincial income taxes. Federal taxes are going down while provincial taxes are going up.

Will this Finance Minister acknowledge that Manitobans simply pay more in income taxes now than they did in 1999?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's see what Saskatchewan really has said. In their budget paper, Saskatchewan—in Saskatchewan, they say that we've got the most affordable province to live in in this country.

We brought forward legislation that I'm hoping members opposite will buy into in terms of bundling up a number of utilities and natural gas to make sure that we guarantee we have the most affordable province to live in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to refer the member opposite to page C20 of the budget where we do provide some actual, factual information for members. In terms of the impacts of our budget on everyday Manitobans and Manitoba families, the one he can look at—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Minister's time is expired.

Mr. Ewasko: It's as if the member across the way and myself have practised and rehearsed these questions and answers, because these, Mr. Speaker, are examples of the good attempt for this government to hide the fact that we are the highest taxed province this side of Québec.

The fact of the matter is that under this Finance Minister and the premier before him, income taxes for Manitobans making \$40,000 have increased by 19.7 per cent. That is \$743 more than 12 years ago. At the same time, federal income taxes are down by 22.5 per cent. Simply put, Manitoban income tax rates are going in the wrong direction.

Will this government simply acknowledge that basic income taxes are increasing the tax burden on regular Manitobans?

Mr. Struthers: Which is exactly why this government put in place the basic personal exemption at \$250 earlier this year, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why members opposite just can't bring themselves to admitting that that is a fact, and that is a benefit for Manitobans and it's contained within Budget 2012.

I would refer my friend across the way to page C11 of the budget papers where we do provide some very specific factual information in terms of benefits. Manitoba income tax, since 1990, a one-earner family of four at \$40,000—you can see where we've—you know, the bars keep continuing to go down to a record level here in the—in this—in the graph that we have there, Mr. Speaker.

So, clearly, Manitobans have benefited over the 12 years of our—

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

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, on April 18th, the Premier acknowledged that this government is raising more revenues from taxes in 2012 than in 2011. Income taxes are taking 19.7 per cent more from regular Manitobans than they did in 1999. Instead of focusing on expanding the economy and creating jobs like the good member from La Verendrye is doing with his bill to join the New West Partnership, this NDP government simply expands the tax base.

Will this minister admit that the Budget 2012 broke his promise to not take additional money from Manitobans this year?

Mr. Struthers: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'll refer my friend opposite to page C10 of the budget papers, which very clearly indicate over the period of 13 years a single person earning \$10,000 had a cumulative savings of over \$1,580. Those are real savings for Manitobans. Ranging upwards to

\$100,000 a year that a single person makes, they have a cumulative saving of \$19,849.

So, Mr. Speaker, those kind of results are real benefits for Manitoba families. This government continues to work towards real benefits for Manitoba families, and that's what Budget 2012 does.

I want to again point out one of the members of the New West Partnership, Saskatchewan, says we have the most affordable province here in Manitoba, and we're proud of that.

Flooding Flood Damaged Assets Evaluation

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Last week, the Minister of Finance and his staff were not able to tell us the value of assets destroyed or damaged by the flood. The Department of Finance would've had to write down or write off the value of those 'assege'—assets damaged or destroyed.

Can the Minister of Finance give us a dollar value for what was written off or down last year?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, the member should be aware that one of the key areas we've been focusing in on is—been actually to restore our infrastructure and, in fact, some cases, improve it.

We have 80 bridges, for example, that are damaged, Mr. Speaker. A fair amount of that is recoverable under the disaster financial assistance program, but we're going beyond that. In the case of the Coulter bridge, we'll be building a bridge that'll be serving the needs of southwest Manitoba for many decades to come.

So I think the question is based on a bit of a false premise, because our goal with the flood of 2011-2012 has to been to restore property, whether it's public or private, and we've already paid out \$650 million in doing that.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, the question is based on generally accepted accounting practices, which this government doesn't always seem to follow. But the disclosure of that asset valuation must have been a challenging discussion with the bond rating organizations a couple of weeks ago.

We know this minister has a problem with what he chooses to disclose, although the value of these assets is much far above the cost of a couple of Jets tickets.

Did the minister disclose that asset devaluation, and what dollar number did he attach to it?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear with the member opposite. The people that I met—remember that the people that I met with having to do with our Budget 2012 were very impressed with the kinds of steady, prudent decisions that this government has been making in terms of economic decision making and financial situations. They said that they were very impressed with the way that we've handled in a multi-year way the kind of challenges that this government and any other government has faced over the last little while.

And what I did make sure I told the member opposite was that when we do the accounting on all of our decisions, they are governed by the generally accounting—generally accepted accounting practices that we've taken—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time has expired.

Mr. Helwer: Well, obviously, we have a bit of mistrust with what the Minister of Finance chooses to disclose or not disclose.

What number did the minister disclose to the bond rating agencies for asset writeoff, if anything? Five hundred million dollars? Pick a number. What should this be? There are accounting practices in place for this. Is that too low for you? Consider what roads has been done to the roads—that had damages been done to the roads and 'brisges.' We've just heard about that.

Mr. Speaker, what is the number that we've written off?

* (14:20)

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work being done right now assessing the damage of roads and bridges and other public assets that we're—that are assets of the people of Manitoba. We will be doing that according to the generally accepted accounting principles that have been accepted by this side of the House.

We will—we'll continue to work on that on behalf of and with the people of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. So he can be assured on the other side of the House that proper procedures will be followed when we deal with writing down assets here in the province of Manitoba.

St. Theresa Point Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Friday, I visited St. Theresa Point with Grand Chief David Harper and federal Liberal leader Bob Rae. We talked with Chief Eugene Wood, members of his council, and we visited a number of the homes in the community, as well as the school and as well as talking with a number of elders.

Mr. Speaker, at St. Theresa Point, there are just under 500 homes and, at present, less than half of these homes have clean, running water. Access to clean, running water is a basic human right, and yet in more than 12 years this government has not delivered.

Why does the Premier consistently refuse to go to the federal government to get a partnership agreement, as Bob Rae did in the 1990s, to make sure these homes have clean, running water as fast as possible?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't want the member opposite to misinform the House. The reality is this: We have offered to the federal government a willingness to partnership with them on addressing the issues of running water and sewage treatment in St. Theresa Point, a First Nations reserve in Manitoba.

We've also put in place resources for training of First Nations people so they can do the work. We've continued to develop the road on the east side, so that they can have access to goods and services at a lower cost all year round. And we remain willing to work.

The Deputy Premier has had many occasion to talk to the federal minister responsible for First Nations across the country and has offered on many occasions a full willingness to participate with them in advancing this project.

We agree with the member from River Heights; people should get access to clean water and sewage, and we're willing to do our part.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, but the Premier hasn't got the job done.

St. Theresa Point has an adequate water treatment plant, and for many homes in St. Theresa Point the main water pipeline is just about 50 metres or so from their home. But the connection to the home has not occurred because of lack of support for retrofitting the homes and connecting them up.

In Ontario, in the early '90s, Bob Rae recognized this problem, formed a partnership with the federal government, to ensure the retrofitting needed to take the water the last 50 metres happened and that homes got connected.

I ask the Premier, when he will end the jurisdictional wranglings and get on and make sure these homes are connected to clean, running water?

Mr. Selinger: We can assure the member from River Heights that we are willing to participate in a solution in this problem, and we're not waiting for the federal government. We've put training programs in place. There is the Frontiers Foundation up there that has methodologies for doing improvements to homes, including sewage, water and treatment as well. And we're proceeding with the road.

The road is something we'd had very little federal participation in. Just recently, they've offered some participation to hook up one community. We are prepared to train the people in the communities to do the infrastructure work necessary. The federal government has a responsibility to put forward the resources for the actual pipes, the actual infrastructure needed to retrofit the homes. But we can train the people so the people in the community can have the skills development that they need to provide these services in an ongoing way.

First Nations Communities Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, there are many in St. Theresa Point who are keen to work and to be part of retrofitting the homes. But training is not enough. You actually have to fund the connection to the homes to get the water there to give people work. There need to be jobs.

By being part of a partnership agreement and supporting retrofitting to make sure homes are actually connected, the Manitoba government could actually ensure an integration of training and work opportunities, and get people the experience and get the job done. The problem is that this government has not got the job done.

I ask the Premier: When will the government get the partnership needed with the federal government to get clean, running water—homes that need it by the end of this year?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I have to—I just—there's a great deal of eagerness, Mr. Speaker—there's

a great deal of eagerness on this side of the House to answer the question from the member for River Heights, because we have made that offer to the federal government. We have said we're prepared to do the training. We are doing some training as we speak. We have said that we're prepared to continue with the road.

And the reality is, Mr. Speaker, when we visit those communities, the need is very evident. I'm glad the member has a full grasp and understanding of the issue. I only wish when he was a member of the federal Cabinet, he would have acted on it. The difference between the member for River Heights and the members on this side of the House is we've put real resources forward, we've started training, we're actually doing real things. The member opposite, only when he's in opposition, wants to get something done.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Government Initiatives

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Can the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities tell the House about the recent announcement about investments in diagnostics and support for children and families living with FASD?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I'd like to thank the member for his question.

I was very excited on Friday to make and be part of an announcement at the Rehabilitation Centre for Children about a further investment of \$485,000 in our co-ordinated provincial FASD strategy. This brings the total investment to \$13.3 million since 2007, Mr. Speaker.

This announcement further demonstrates our commitment to FAD—FASD prevention and education while focusing our attention on providing necessary supports to meet the needs of families, including more support for very popular programs, Stepping Out on Saturdays, also known as SAS, which provides respite care for families while teaching socialization to the children.

We also announced further investment in diagnostic services for rural and northern communities, putting staff and supports closer to home for those who need it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social Assistance Program Municipal Funding

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Recently, in question period, the Minister of Finance stated, and I quote, we took over the responsibility for social assistance from municipalities. End quote. What he neglected to say was that municipalities are paying the Province \$1.3 million per year for that service and will be required to pay for that service every year going forward.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister today set the record straight and admit that the municipalities are actually paying \$1.3 million per year for social assistance and that the Province is actually making money on the program?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): On this, as with so many other issues, we've committed to work with municipalities to make sure that we make good decisions on behalf of their constituents and ours.

I'm really glad the MLA for Agassiz has brought this up because when he was the president of the AMM, it was his commitment that those folks that we were trying to help would actually get hired by municipalities. That was a commitment that he made, and I'd like to know, Mr. Speaker, whatever happened to that commitment?

Mr. Briese: You know, Mr. Speaker, that agreement was brokered by myself, as the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, and the member for Brandon East, as minister of family services and housing.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister not consult with his colleagues before he misleads the people of Manitoba with faulty information? Will he apologize today and admit that municipalities are actually paying \$1.3 million per year for social assistance and that the Province is actually making money on that program?

Mr. Struthers: We've come through with our side of the bargain. I'm waiting now to see the municipalities come through with their side of the bargain, as the member for Agassiz, when he was president of the AMM, said that they would do, Mr. Speaker.

We're committed to working with municipalities, whether it be on this issue or infrastructure issues, or so many other issues that we work together with. But, Mr. Speaker, I—if the member from Agassiz has any sway with his former colleagues at the AMM, I

would suggest he sits with them and reminds them of the agreement that we came to. The Province is at the table. We would appreciate his advice on how to get the AMM to follow up with employment of these folks.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz, with a final supplementary.

Mr. Briese: The last time I looked, the government had a Minister of Local Government that should be conveying this message.

He talks about deals being made and won't admit what actually happened. We made a deal that \$1.3 million was to be paid to the Province for every year going forward, and that was when the minister for Brandon West—Brandon East was the minister of family housing.

* (14:30)

Now, why won't the minister just stand up in this House and admit that the municipalities are paying \$1.3 million every year for the social assistance programs that the Province took over?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, unlike his colleagues across the way, I was actually listening to his question that he just put across. And I want to work with—and I—and this government, whether it be this minister or the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) or the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or whoever, is totally committed to working with municipalities to make sure that we put in motion the agreement that we came to.

Which means, Mr. Speaker, that employment is an important part of that bargain. Municipalities have committed to it and we look forward to working with municipalities to make sure that we come through on the commitment that each side made on that very important arrangement.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a matter of privilege.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Speaker: Honourable member for Morris, on a matter of privilege.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before when I've brought matters of privilege before you in this House, it's a very serious matter and because, if there is a breach of privilege,

it does infringe on our rights as members to do our jobs here in this Legislature.

Now, to have a matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker, there are two things that must be met. First of all, has the issue been raised at the earliest opportunity, and second of all, is there a breach of privilege in this House which impinges on our rights and our abilities to do our jobs?

And, Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) did read a statement into the *Hansard* today in regard to things that he had said which were, he termed it, inadvertently misleading the House. But I needed to have an opportunity to see what he was responding to, what questions he was responding to in *Hansard*, and for some reason I do not have my May 9th *Hansard* in this Chamber. So I've had to take the opportunity to look at the questions that were posed to the minister and then look at the response that he has brought forward today in this House.

But, Mr. Speaker, so I would tell you that this was the earliest opportunity that I have to raise to this House what this matter of privilege is, and this matter of privilege is that this Minister of Finance deliberately misled this House. It's not an inadvertent misleading of the House. It is a deliberate misleading of the House.

Now, you know, we can look at this issue all the way through the timelines here and the issue before us is accepting tickets that were paid for by the taxpayers of Manitoba, and then not admitting that they did it, Mr. Speaker, only when they got caught. You would think that there'd be some common sense that would prevail here, but obviously there wasn't.

This goes back to a committee meeting on March 21st when the Healthy Living Minister committed to providing a list of those who used MLCC Jets tickets at Crown corporations. Then, after that we learned on April 18th that the Justice Minister admitted that he had four tickets from MPI, Mr. Speaker. Then we learned on April 23rd Infrastructure and Transportation Minister admitted that he got free Jets tickets from Manitoba Lotteries.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it was May 7th that the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) stood in the Legislature and asked questions about where this list was. And the incredulous response from the minister was that MLCC was gathering that information and I expect to send it to you very shortly, is what he had said. Now, we also learned that subsequent to that, that information was already out in the public. So,

again, the minister knew that or ought to have known that, but brought false information to this House.

But more seriously, Mr. Speaker, today the minister stood up and admitted—he admitted that he didn't tell the whole truth. He admitted today in the letter that he wrote—read into the record, that he did not tell the whole truth, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to just read what the question was that was put to him by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) in the Estimates, where she said, and I'm quoting: "I wonder if he could indicate if he went to any Jets games at all this year."

So, it was a very clear question. Did he just forget about some of those games that he went to? He remembered some of them, but he didn't remember all of them, Mr. Speaker? Because the question was very clear, about what Jets games that he went to.

And further, okay, his response to the question from the minister from Tuxedo was, I went to three games; I went to three games because I'm, I guess, a small player in a consortia of season ticket holders, so I managed to get drawn for three games. Later the member for Tuxedo said, so I take it that the minister himself wasn't one of the lucky chosen Cabinet ministers from his caucus who received any Jets tickets that we were talking about in the House today.

And, clearly, the opportunity was there, Mr. Speaker, for this minister to admit earlier on than today that he deliberately misled the House and had done so for several days after getting caught. It's very telling that once a member gets caught, that's when they kind of fess up to what they've done.

But it's clear that this minister deliberately misled this House. He admitted it today. He can choose the words he wants, but it is exactly the same thing. He didn't tell the whole truth, and that was deliberate; that was on purpose. He didn't tell the whole truth because he did not want to admit that he had other tickets. And that was deliberate. He didn't just forget about all the games he went to. He knew what games he went to. It was a deliberate misleading of this House, Mr. Speaker.

And on several occasions, Mr. Speaker, you and other Speakers before you have said that it's very difficult to prove that someone misleads the House deliberately, unless they admit it. And today, this Minister of Finance admitted—admitted—he deliberately misled this House. He can say whatever

adjective he wants, but he deliberately misled this House. He knew exactly how many games he went to. He knew where those tickets came from, Mr. Speaker, and it was very deliberately—amnesia? I don't think so. He remembered exactly where he got those tickets.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you have false information brought to this House, when the member has deliberately misled this House and, in fact, has admitted that they have deliberately misled this House, that does infringe on our abilities, as members of this House, to do our jobs because we rely on factual information. We rely on information that's brought to this House to be truthful and honest and factual. When we go out to members of the public and bring this information and people ask us questions, we need to be able to give them the proper answers.

If we are fed deliberately misleading untruths, Mr. Speaker, then that impinges—infringes on our ability to do our jobs in this Legislature. He admitted it. He admitted it today, after he finally got caught. It was a deliberate misleading of the House. In past, rulings have said that if it is hard to prove that someone misled this—deliberately misled the House unless they admit it, he's clearly admitted it. And, therefore, I believe this is a matter of privilege and I move, seconded by the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), that the matter be referred to the Legislative Affairs Committee and brought back to this House for a ruling.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing other members who may wish to speak to this matter of privilege, I'd like to remind the House that contributions at this time for honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised first, at the earliest opportunity, and whether or not the prima facie case has been established.

The honourable Government House Leader, on matter of privilege.

*(14:40)

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): On the matter of privilege raised by my honourable friend across the way, I do want to again reference the letter that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) tabled at the beginning of our session today, in which he very clearly says, as you know, there was a great deal of discussion last week

regarding the distribution of Jets tickets by Manitoba's Crown corporations. I was asked about this several times in question period by you and your colleagues and again by members of the media. It was in this context that I replied to your questions during the Estimates process, and it was in this context than I—that I inadvertently misled the House last Wednesday.

It's very clear, Mr. Speaker, that there was no deliberate attempt to put false information on the record. The Minister of Finance has recognized that he could have put more complete information on the record at the time. He has apologized to the critic who was asking those in—those questions. He has apologized to the House for that, and I think, as you said earlier, Mr. Speaker, that that should conclude the matter.

But on the other parts of the matter of privilege that the member has raised, I will, once again, for the record, state what we have done on this issue. We have brought forth a policy that very clearly states that members of the House should not be accepting free Jets tickets from the Crowns, from private corporations, from unions.

We have not yet seen a similar policy from the members opposite, but they will have an opportunity when we sit together at LAMC and we come up with a policy that will apply to all members, they will have an opportunity then—they will have an opportunity at that point to let us know which of their members have also received free tickets, perhaps from businesses, perhaps from private corporations. We haven't heard them at all deny that that has been the case yet, Mr. Speaker, and we can all move forward with a policy.

The reality is that there had been no policy in place, and I will refer to an—I will refer to the auditor's report from May, 2000 that looked at the practices in the Lotteries Corporation in the '90s, where the auditor very clearly found that in that decade, the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation had purchased season tickets for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, for the Winnipeg Goldeyes and Manitoba Moose, had distributed those tickets, and it says the auditor found there is no policy governing the distribution of these tickets to employees. So there was no policy previously. Certainly, when the members opposite were in government, there was no policy. There now is a policy on a go-forward basis and we have invited members opposite to join with us to take a look with the help of the ethics

commissioner, at what policy should cover all members of the House.

And, you know, I would also suggest to members opposite that their own member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) made some, I think, interesting comments on the record about disclosure of gifts, and I am informed, as of 1 o'clock, there are no disclosures from the members opposite of any gifts of any tickets. But the member very clearly said the regulations are very clear that you're supposed to declare gifts. So perhaps not one of them received one free ticket from any business or corporation in the province. That is possible. Certainly, they haven't disclosed any.

Now, on—for our side, Mr. Speaker, we have brought in a new policy on a go-forward basis. Members have disclosed what they have received and they have repaid or contributed in those amounts. And I think the Minister of Finance was very clear today in his statements, apologizing for incomplete information, and we are now prepared to move forward with the opposition to bring in a better policy covering all members so we can all go on and serve Manitobans the way they've entrusted us to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on the matter of privilege.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I would like to comment on this matter of privilege with some new information.

Just in focusing on the matter of privilege as raised by the MLA for Morris and the government—and the Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu), I think what is important here is the question of whether or not the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) deliberately misled this House.

The question of whether there was a policy or not a policy is irrelevant as far as I can see in terms of this question. The question is whether the Minister of Finance deliberately misled the House. It becomes a matter of privilege where there is deliberate misleading, not just accidentally misleading.

Now, I would, you know, recognize that the minister has apologized to the House, and I think that that was a smart move on the minister's part, and appreciate that apology today.

But, that being said, that when one looks very carefully at the questions and the responses, it seems

to me, Mr. Speaker, that when you do this, that what you will find is that it's really fairly clear that the Minister of Finance was deliberately not answering the question appropriately, was 'disliberately' misleading the House with a fairly simple question.

So I would ask that the—Mr. Speaker, that you look at this very carefully and then render your judgment. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank all honourable members for their advice on this matter of privilege. I'm going to take this matter under advisement and consult with the procedural authorities and bring back a ruling for the House.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Metcalfe's Garage (Treherne)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of a five-generation, family-run business that was recently honoured with two impressive awards.

To commemorate the 112 years of dedication to the Treherne and surrounding area, Metcalfe's Garage hosted their official grand reopening and customer appreciation event on Wednesday, April 11th. The large crowd that showed up was testament to the value that these customers, friends and neighbours place in Treherne's grassroot business.

Metcalfe's Garage owner, Neil Metcalfe, family and staff were presented with two prestigious awards by the Ford Motor Company. The Diamond Club is the first award and is presented to a select group of dealers who go above and beyond the President's Award and finish top in customer satisfaction.

The second award, the Golden Shovel Award, was presented in recognition of providing leading edge facilities in support of long-term customer satisfaction and owner loyalty.

In the late 19th century, Neil's great-great-grandfather, Thomas Metcalfe, started out as a pioneer in Treherne before the Ford Motor Company even existed, supporting the growing local agricultural community by offering J.I. Case threshing machines, Deering harvester machinery, Canton clipper plows and Campbell horse-drawn buggies.

Originally named Central Garage, Thomas and his son started selling Model Ts in 1911, selling 100 of them in 1924. Many of their customers came to Treherne by horses to buy their new Model T. As

part of the delivery process, Metcalfe's Garage taught their customers how to drive, and this—as this was their first automobile. Records dating back to this time show customers purchasing a car or truck in the spring, leaving a partial deposit before taking it home and, at times, customers even left some grain or livestock in trade. Metcalfe's would then bankroll them until fall when the crops were harvested.

Dedication, trust, integrity, and utmost customer satisfaction is only part of the success of Metcalfe's accomplishments. Having a 'custer' base—customer base that is second to none, the support from local—the community and surrounding area is what really makes them shine.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to recognize the hard work and achievements of Metcalfe's Garage in Treherne.

Alana Robert

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend an amazing young woman named Alana Robert, who was recently awarded the Gerrie Hammond Memorial Award of Promise during the YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards Gala.

Mr. Speaker, Alana is no ordinary high school student. Although she considers herself to be a shy person, Alana decided to challenge herself and her fear of public speaking by joining the debate team at St. Mary's Academy. Alana has since represented Manitoba at debating events in Halifax, Montréal, Toronto, and at the national seminar in the Northwest Territories, where she won the Founder's Award. Currently Head Girl at St. Mary's Academy, she has also completed her silver Duke of Edinburgh award and is working towards her gold.

As a member of the school's justice team, Alana initiated the Jams4Justice project, which raises awareness of human trafficking by encouraging students in the province to write songs about the issue. The contest occurred last summer and the winner received an opportunity to professionally record their song. As a part of this project, local artists such as J.P. Hoe, Keith Macpherson, and Sheena Grobb have recorded songs that have been used internationally at workshops and conferences.

As if her leadership and involvement in the debate and justice teams were not enough, Alana is also co-leader of the St. Mary's Academy of peer—St. Mary's Academy peer support team, which sees her advising, training and mentoring the largest team of

counsellors the school has ever had. She also leads school awareness campaigns about issues such as mental health, bullying and addiction.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, high school is a time when young people learn much about themselves and their abilities, when they begin to take on leadership roles and develop a sense of interest in their futures. The future looks very bright for Alana. Her impressive willingness to lead and ability to facilitate dialogue about serious social and health matters will serve her well.

I hope all colleagues will join me in congratulating Alana Robert on her Gerrie Hammond Memorial Award of Promise and on being named a Woman of Distinction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Glen Robinson

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to celebrate the achievements of Glen Robinson, a resident of Altona. Mr. Robinson has dedicated his life to public service on both the national and local level. Mr. Robinson began his career in the Canadian Armed Forces from 1972 to 1976 and then moved to law enforcement with the Brandon city police in roles such as detective and drug investigator.

Mr. Robinson moved his family to Altona in 1991 when he became the town's chief of police, where he made immediate and effective improvements to the policing squad. By insisting on proper training, weapons and uniforms and aiding with recruitment, Mr. Robinson was able to reinvigorate the entire unit. He pioneered many programs such as block parent, drug awareness and bike safety that continue to have a positive impact on the community.

Community and serving others is something that is very important to Glen, which he has demonstrated not only through his career, but also through extensive volunteering as a hockey coach, a baseball umpire and as a Beaver leader. Indeed, Glen has been active in all aspects of community life in Altona.

Looking back at his career in law enforcement that includes 34 years in policing and four in the Armed Forces, Mr. Robinson stood out as a recipient of Altona's Citizen of the Year Award in 2010 and as a recipient of the Excellence in Law Enforcement

Award in 2011. Today, Glen is continuing to improve Altona while serving as a town councillor.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Glen on his many accomplishments and thank him for his selfishness—selflessness that he has demonstrated in serving the public of Manitoba.

Nursing Profession

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, the month of May brings with it National Nurses Week, and during this time it is appropriate to reflect upon the tireless work of Manitoba nurses to build a better province 365 days a year. Our government is proud to work together with Manitoba nurses and all health-care professionals in our province to promote healthy lifestyles, active living and a healthier society for all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in recognizing the good work that Manitoba nurses undertake in our province each and every day, it is also appropriate to celebrate the work currently under way to support a healthier province in my home community of Brandon. The graduate and undergraduate level nursing programs offered through Brandon University's faculty of health studies works to build health-care excellence in our province, just as every nursing program supported by our government throughout Manitoba does.

At Brandon University, our government has invested millions of dollars in capital projects supporting health care such as the health studies building and the Brandon University Healthy Living Centre currently under construction. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, over \$20 million is being invested in a new fitness centre which will include three full-size gymnasiums, an indoor four-lane jogging track, a cardio fitness facility, weight resistance infrastructure and a community multi-purpose area. This expansion more than doubles the capacity of BU's current athletic facility and will help ensure that Brandon University students and the Westman community can put their healthy-living plans into action. It is through investing in projects like the Brandon University Healthy Living Centre that our government makes tangible its commitment to supporting healthy living in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: No more members' statements?

Municipal Flooding Property Tax Grant

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the 2011 flood was historic in its size, but also in its

duration. A year later, the water may have subsided, but the effects on Manitobans and municipalities have not.

Mr. Speaker, we were able to offer municipalities a tax relief program last year that paid property taxes on behalf of owners whose properties were significantly damaged by flooding. This ensured that municipalities had the 2011 tax revenues to operate. This program recognized the challenges in assessing many areas of flood-damaged municipalities and individual properties to determine the impact of the damage on property values. As a result, normal assessment and tax-reduction processes for municipalities and property owners could not have occurred.

A year later, and with waters receding, this government is continuing to support municipalities as they develop their plans to move forward. As a result of significant property damage, the assessments of flood-affected properties have decreased, resulting in municipal taxes shifting to unaffected properties.

Mr. Speaker, this government announced last week that it will be providing a one-time grant to the municipalities most affected by the flood, who have limited capacity to absorb the assessment loss. The condition of the grant is that it be used to provide a property tax credit to offset tax increases attributed to flooding.

Citizens in the rural municipalities of Coldwell, Grahamdale, Siglunes and St. Laurent and others will receive help that they desperately need. This government realizes that the flood fight continues, and that it requires a co-operation with municipalities in order to ensure that people's properties and lives are restored. Any matching assistance from the federal government, over and above just standard disaster financial assistance, as was done in 1997 after the flood of the century in the form of the JERI program, would be welcomed and much appreciated by all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Government House Leader): We seek your guidance to dissolve into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

**INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION**

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order.

Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

As previously agreed, questions for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for oral questions.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): At previous sittings, a number of questions were asked, and I know there had been agreement that, with lengthier questions, that we could have them published. But I'm just thinking, with the indulgence of the critic—I could actually read, there's one page here and it might be useful information, you know, to preface some further questions today. So, with the indulgence of the committee, I was going to read in the answers that we prepared currently.

First of all, questions-answers for 2009 flood and evacuation policies.

The cost incurred by the Province in the 2009 flood, and how much has the Province recovered from the federal government on that flood?

To date, over \$67 million has been paid out under the 2009 spring flood disaster financial assistance program.

The government of Canada has agreed to cost-share the 2009 spring flood, based on the terms and conditions of the DFAA agreements, the amount to be recovered from the federal government will be determined once the DFA program has been closed and the federal audit has been completed.

How many outstanding claims from 2009, if there are any?

Under the DFA program, a total of 1,756 private claims, including First Nations, were received, and

all have been closed with the exception of one that is in second-stage appeal. There were 94 public sector claims, including First Nations, and all have been closed with the exception of one municipal claim. An extension has been given to one municipality.

What are the current policies on evacuations? Who pays for what? What does the Province pay for? Do they pay for meals? Do they pay for hotel rooms? What are the policies in place right now?

The Province of Manitoba has a provincial evacuation program, which is co-ordinated through Family Services and Consumer Affairs, Emergency Social Services, ESS. All incremental expenses incurred as a result of an evacuation, such as meals and accommodations, are eligible under the DFA program, based on ESS rates. These rates include per diems of \$29.90 per adult, \$23.90 per child for food, as well as \$4 per adult and \$3.20 per child for incidental expenses. Hotel rooms are based—are paid based on invoices.

For long-term evacuations, Mr. Chairperson, the Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization, EMO, encourages people to find temporary accommodations in order to provide better living conditions. DFA covers the incremental costs incurred for temporary residences, such as rent, but not for ordinary daily expenses that people would incur living in their own homes and that would be covered by their normal sources of income.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Thank you for that, Mr. Minister.

I am still not clear, you know, the questioning on Friday and following along with it, on the track that the First Nations claims follow and what EMO—Manitoba EMO or the Manitoba government covers on First Nations claims, like the evacuation notices are done by the First Nation firefighters association. The—I know the Province is responsible for some of the administration, but I'm not clear on what other parts of the First Nation flood claims the Province is responsible for.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I think the key thing here to separate out is the—when it comes to evacuations, we don't evacuate. MANFF and the First Nations evacuate. Essentially, it's called First Nations; MANFF administers that.

We also obviously do have a role in overall co-ordination. We don't separate out First Nations and, on the floodfighting side, not provide assistance because it's not provincial jurisdiction. We were—we

work co-operatively—last year, for example, we worked co-operatively with Peguis to help them purchase equipment in advance of the flood season, which they were later able to recover from INAC. We do administer the program, but, again, it's in terms of per diems, other costs, et cetera, and we have been involved this flood season, obviously, in providing interim accommodation. I think the member's aware of the interim village at Gypsumville.

And, again, even though First Nations are the responsibility of the federal government—you know, the fiscal responsibility is there—we do work on the broader flood situation. So I think that's the best summary, really. You know, our key role here is administrative and overall, you know, co-ordination of floodfighting.

Mr. Briese: So am I right in thinking that, when you say administrative, that when there is a claim from the First Nations, that somebody from the Province actually writes the cheque, and then you go back to INAC on it?

*(15:10)

Mr. Ashton: It's Public Safety Canada. It's fairly complicated because you've got First Nation, you've got INAC—now AANDC—and then you have EMO, and then you have Public Safety Canada.

So Public Safety Canada, just as they do with provincial claims, is the department that pays out, you know, those claims. So in some cases you'll have, even within government, payments will go from Public Safety to INAC, now AANDC, and then to the First Nations because you also have the lost property side, like the public claims.

So it is actually Public Safety Canada that is the federal department that has the direct budget for DFA, because that's where the DFAA program comes under.

Mr. Briese: The other part of that question was, though, do we—does the Province of Manitoba actually sign the cheque on some of the individual claims on First Nations?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we do. I—you know, 2011, for example, broad situation—yes, a program and, again, if there's a, you know, provincial program where there are First Nations that are impacted as well, we do administer. So the actual administrative 'separaty' is the—in terms of the financial issuing the cheques,

processing claims. Again, though, we don't do the evacuations; we don't do the list of evacuees; and we don't—you know, we essentially are the administrative agency for the federal government.

I'll be upfront; at times, it's a challenge for EMO. I think it would be fair to say that we could use an improved system in terms of some of these elements because you'll end up with INAC and AANDC, for example, different issues back and forth between each department in terms of budgets and payments, et cetera, and, of course, we're kind of in the middle of that. There has been discussion in the past about, perhaps, a different type of system. There are different systems in other provinces. There are separate MOUs where the equivalent of EMO administers a broader range of services, but, you know, MANFF does provide a lot of the kind of services that EMO does for non-First Nations communities. So that's been the model that we've followed up until now.

And MANFF, of course, the member will know, would be certainly more familiar to people in terms of forest fires, but one of the key elements of forest fires is often an evacuation with very short notice, and they have a lot of expertise with that. They have the full support of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the AMC, so they do have a track record of working with the First Nations. So that's the current model. I'm not saying that there couldn't be an improved model. I've certainly signalled, as minister, and we, as a government, have signalled in the past our interest in looking at other models, but, as it stands, that's EMO's role. It's basically administrative and helping fight floods, as well, but, again, working with the First Nations and the federal government.

Mr. Briese: So, if a First Nation came forward with, say, a bill, we had to rent pumps and we had to buy gasoline for those pumps, or we had the cost of sand for the sandbagging machine, that type of thing, the cost of transporting that sand or buying that sand to—or to hire workers to work on that sandbag machine, for instance, those would be—those claims would be made through DFA or would they be made through—I'm speaking of the inundations over and around Lake Manitoba and around Lake St. Martin. Would they be making their claims through MASC, the same as everyone else?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the key thing is, in that particular case, that's run directly by AANDC, you know, formerly INAC, and it's then internal to the federal government. Our—the reason we have a role to play is

because of our expertise in the claim side, and that's—it's been a role we've had for a number of years, and it is in terms of the more standard DFA claims. But AANDC does provide direct funding for flood fighting costs through AANDC through to the First Nations.

Mr. Briese: So, when you made initial payments to a lot of the people in the Lake Manitoba area, there was initial payment, in a lot of cases, of \$5,000. None of that went to First Nations residents? Any claimants from First Nations?

Mr. Ashton: No.

Mr. Briese: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. Move on to something else here. On the—and I notice there's been some changes to what you're using for flood forecasting. And is flood forecasting now under MIT?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. There was a splitting of the former Water Stewardship department, and in a general sense you could say that the quality side went to Conservation and the quantity side came to MIT. So that does include forecasting. And there's a whole section of what was formerly in Water Stewardship that is now a part of MIT. That's correct.

Mr. Briese: And you're—that's being expanded to—I can't remember the right wording, but the—to local—there was an announcement made for a hundred and some thousand—\$167,000 to local weather forecasters to provide information to the government? That would be in another department, I suppose?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm not sure what that's referring to, and, of course, not having the MIT staff here right now—we've got the EMO staff—I could double check if—what role, if any, the MIT staff has in that. Yes.

Mr. Briese: I can find the announcement too, if I—and—when I have a moment here.

I know there was a lot of extra work and overtime and stuff done by MIT staff in relation to the 2011 flood. Do you have a breakdown of the hours on the extra overtime hours and extra time spent by the department? And I know it was huge.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the member is quite correct; it was very significant. Again, not having the MIT staff here, I don't have that information directly available. I do believe we've given some estimates publicly as well. But I can undertake the next sitting of the

committee when we have MIT staff here to get the specifics to the member.

Mr. Briese: Have there—and I expect there have, but have there been any specific projects or initiatives of the department that have had to be deferred because of the 2011 flood?

Mr. Ashton: Again, we're getting more on the MIT side, but I'm sure the critic for the MIT side wouldn't mind if I got into that as well. Definitely we have had a number of factors in terms of our capital program in the last number of years which work on the flexibility that we have built in the capital program. First of all, we've had various stimulus programs; now they're starting to significantly wind down, and we peaked at about \$80 million a year from the federal government. It's now around 30 through stimulus and other infrastructure programs. So there was some shifting around at the capital program for that.

Last year, we had to 'priorize' floodfighting, and it wasn't strictly a matter of MIT shifting the capital program into fighting floods, it was also the issue of capacity, and not just on the immediate highway system. For example, many of the same contractors that might have been doing contracts on the highway system were working on the emergency outlet—their members weren't aware of, in terms of its scale and impacts. So there was some shifting and some further shifting. Even this year, we—we're looking at about \$50 million worth of work on our transportation system, mostly on bridges, this year and next year.

* (15:20)

Essentially, I would say, last year, if you were to look at impacts on highways directly, we did a lot of that work initially last year. There's still a few highways that are impacted across the province, but obviously restoring a highway to its original condition is certainly less complex than a bridge and, you know, in some cases we're not only significant repairing bridges, but we're replacing bridges. Coulter bridge comes to mind, Killarney—there's a number of situations where you've got either major repairs or replacement. So there's been a—there has been a shift, again, as we focus in on that impact.

And the other thing I was going to mention is we did have significant amount of projects last year, again, this is mostly because the resource is being put into the flood. What happens is, obviously, we have a contract that's programmed. We put the tenders out, the contractor receives the contract, but

it's not always completed, you know, that season. So we have a fair number of jobs that were actually tendered last year; it's called carry-over within the department, I'm sure the member's aware. So there's a fair amount of carry-over last year that's continuing this year. This all does affect the sequencing of capital programs, and most definitely we have had and we will continue to 'prioritize' flood-related infrastructure and that will have some impact on other projects in the system.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Chair, through you to the minister: I guess just following on that question where we were talking about damaged bridges and infrastructure and the question I was asking about write-downs and write-offs, this is a question obviously I asked the Finance Minister, but that usually occurs in the year of damage, which was last year, and has there been any write-downs or write-offs of provincial assets in your knowledge?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I can only speak from the MIT-EMO perspective. The general principle with any damage due to floods is, essentially, you repair it; in some cases you repair, reconstruct and build to a higher standard. The best example of that I can think of in the member's region would be the Coulter bridge which, when it is complete, will meet the needs of that area for many decades to come. It's significant work in the oil and gas industry.

But the key thing with DFA, anything that's DFA-claimable is—we're able to claim back in a major flood such as last year up to 90 per cent from the federal government. And essentially what that means is when we get damage to the system there are, essentially, from our system standpoint, is no need to write it off because we're rebuilding. We will be rebuilding the bridges mostly over this year and next year, but we've already been on a six-month rebuilding on the highway system itself.

In terms of our overall claims, I went through this on Friday, but we, certainly, under DFA, I think we're at about 150 million for provincial infrastructure—not all MIT—there's some damage to parks, et cetera. So the simple answer really is that there is no need to write off if you set the goal of reconstructing back to original or better condition, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Helwer: Okay, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister: I guess that falls on the next question, or one of the questions I asked the Finance Minister,

and he suggested I come and ask this committee. It has to do with the military presence that was availed during the flood, and they did a great deal of work in some very challenging circumstances. Is that cost directly covered by the federal government, or does it come through provincial costs?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. I think, whenever I talk about the military moment last year—the member knows from Brandon they were very much involved in Brandon in a very—a key period of time, also, up and down the Assiniboine River generally and also in the Souris when we hit the third crest. But the protocol is very clear: we call the military only if there's no other resources, and there were three times last year when that was essentially the case. The federal government dispatches them, and in the case of—all three cases they were dispatched almost momentarily, I think within about 10, 15 minutes. I think in the case of the Assiniboine we had the military on site within 15 minutes; I think in Brandon as well. And of course having Shilo in close proximity proved to be a huge advantage, and I certainly hope that will be something to be remembered in the future of the federal government if there's any discussion about the importance of bases. It was not just as a training base; it was useful.

So they are dispatched and then it is a cost that is entirely the federal government. So when I say they were there to help us, they were there and the federal government backed us up a hundred per cent, both in the dispatch and the cost.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, just to be clear, then, there is no cost to the provincial government directly from any of those military events. The federal government covered them directly. Are there any costs associated with that that we would cover as a Province and then claim back?

Mr. Ashton: No, not directly. I mean, of course, they are—they were involved with various missions that did involve other components that would have been covered by the Province. Some of which, it would be recoverable from the federal government.

For example, on the Assiniboine dikes we had a combination of military resources, both technical. They were—I think this glass of water, well, it's not full right now, but if it was they had the ability to—you know, to track, in the middle of the night, seepage that would be the equivalent of this glass of water using the high-level technical equipment. But the great part of the military, as well, is their ability

to help us with deploying sandbag dikes, some of the tubes, and other equipment we had—pumps. So they had all sorts of expertise.

And again, we, certainly, were involved in paying certain costs, you know, over and above the military costs. But the military came in at their own costs as recovered through the federal government—I assume through Public Safety Canada, I'm not sure. I'm not sure how the federal system works. But we—they were there for us, and, no, they have not sent us a bill.

Mr. Briese: Will—probably not, but under EMO, under DFA—are any of the restoration and recovery debris cleanup programs eligible under DFA?

Mr. Ashton: Yes.

Mr. Briese: That include all types? Or that—I would wonder, does it cover farm property like grassland, ranchland and stuff? That probably falls under the MASC programs, I would think, but.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it all—[interjection] It all depends. Yes, farmland in production is covered.

However, I do want to add a bit of an asterisk; we've had difficulties in the Interlake. DFA is not as clear-cut as it appears. So if you end up with—as was the case a number of years ago, where the federal government, basically, stating that there was an impact on one sector: agriculture—primarily, one sector. The federal government, basically, was not positioned to cover what might, otherwise, have been covered if there was—if it was a DFA program. So we went on provincial cost, alone, to cover some of the significant costs that the farms in the Interlake had been dealing with.

So again, there's—if it's an eligible program, within the eligible program there are eligible costs, and that can include farm costs as well.

Mr. Briese: Last summer, there was—there were some students and youth hired to help with the cleanup process. Is there any indication of that happening again this year?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I—you know, I'm not saying that there wouldn't be some students working this year. I mean, there are various programs that are out there in a normal sense, but our—you know, last year was a very accessional—exceptional circumstance; we were right in the middle of the flood. I mean, we still have flooding—you know, flooding impacts, and we've,

certainly, been working with municipalities to provide the kind of assistance that would be required.

And I do want to stress, by the way, that there are many areas—and the member knows from his area, as well—where it's only really been the last period of time that we're actually able to—you know, for people to get in. The lake levels are down. There's obviously not the risk of ice damage that we've—you know, we traditionally get in the spring. And so there's certainly going to be a, you know, fair degree of cleanup, but—and these are happening at a time when a significant area already has been cleaned up or is in the process of being cleaned up as we speak.

* (15:30)

Mr. Briese: In the past number of years, just north of Winnipeg there's been a couple of cases where there's been some property buyouts.

Is DFA involved in those property buyouts? Do they pay part of the cost on those buyouts?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we do have some role in that. If you go back even to '97, you know, there was a similar process there on the Red River.

There's various steps you go through following a flood. I mean, one is to analyze what happened. Second is to see what you could do differently, with what you have in the way of mitigation and settlement patterns before.

But, that was one of the lessons we learned out of '97, which is that you start with the premise of flood protecting but you have some homes that cannot feasibly be flood protected, so buyout is an option. It was in '97 and in 2009 that was the case.

Now, in 2009 there were a fair number of buyouts that took place post—you know, the 2009 spring flood and some of that though was Crown land. It was very special programming, so, in that case, DFA did not apply. But DFA, it can be component of buyouts but it's usually a—it—I mean, I hate to use this as an answer, but, it really depends on the circumstances, and that's been the pattern in previous floods and that'll be the pattern here as well.

Mr. Briese: So, and I've heard the Premier muse on it, and a couple of Cabinet ministers, throughout the last summer and late fall on the possibility of some buyouts. I know there's buyouts being done right now around the Shoal lakes but—and possibility of

some buyouts on some properties around Lake Manitoba.

Is there any program being developed that would look at the possibility of buyouts and, if so, if there were buyouts, from what your last answer, I take it, that the DFA would be involved in those buyouts?

Mr. Ashton: Well, again, it all depends. Principal residences are eligible, in terms of DFA recovery, not seasonal residences. Of course, we covered both permanent and seasonal through various different programs.

On the broader issue, I want to stress, when it comes to buyouts, it's a component of future mitigation but the first key element, as it was in '97 or 2009, or after any of the major floods, is to not only rebuild the previous structures, you know, the residences, but to attempt to protect them, flood protect them, against the flood of record.

And, member's quite aware, you know, the '97 flood that's—in the Red River, it's '97 plus two feet, you know, flood levels '97 plus two feet.

We have interim level in around Lake Manitoba. I stress interim, because as I've indicated in answers in the House, and member is aware, we do have a review of the regulatory regime that will be reporting, that will have some determination on, you know, perhaps longer term policies in that area. But, in terms of the specifics, it's very much tied in to that mitigation and we will be certainly considering it.

I know we're going to—we're expecting some recommendations from the commissioner, Ron Bell, former president of the AMM, that the member's more aware of his role. And, part of it is, he's also had a specific role on the appeals process as well, so, there's—so he's been able to get a good sense what's been happening out there.

So, as we rebuild this year and next year, and I've said it's going to be historic, we're now looking at 30,000 claims versus 10,000 in '97; biggest cleanup restoration since 1950.

Indeed, we will be looking at buyout in some area, but, you know, I could tell you one thing, the experience—and the member I know was talking to a lot of people, you know, flood victims, directly and I've talked to a lot of people, as well.

By and large, virtually everybody I've talked to starts from the premise of rebuilding and re-establishing confidence in the area. And, when I

travel around Lake Manitoba, and I've met with many people, the one thing I point to is, how we've re-established confidence in the Red River Valley.

And, if you want an indication of that, in 2009 with the flood that was greater than the 1950 flood, we had no homes flooded. I think we had one affected by water seepage in the Red River Valley. And it's meant a recovery in property values, recovery in people building, rebuilding, you know, building on their homes, businesses and farms. So that's our main goal around Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin and the other affected areas.

And it's also important for the municipalities. The member, I know, from his previous life as a municipal leader, will know that one of the big concerns of many municipalities is not to lose a significant part of their assessed tax base. And, again, if you get into buyouts, that—it does become an issue, you know, potentially losing part of the tax base, which can lead to a shift to other ratepayers. So it will be a component. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) made that announcement fairly early on last year, but it will only be one component. Our main goal is to rebuild and to get everybody back to normal.

Mr. Briese: I have been up and down the west side of the lake several times this spring already, and some of the properties—there's a few of the properties that are simply, as far as I—and this is my opinion—but they're simply irrecoverable. Definitely, the Big Point area, east of Langruth, it's an absolute shambles. Just about everything was taken out of there, including the shoreline, and I'm seeing a lot of that when I go up and down the lake, is—the lake had a natural shoreline. There was hump around the lake, and the flooding, in many places, took that natural shoreline away, which allows, in any—almost any kind of situation, now, for the water to escape the lake a lot easier and spread outside the lake parameters.

But the Big Point set-up, for instance, is privately owned. There were 84 or 85 cabins there, no year-round residences. It—they tried to save it. They diked; it got hammered and literally totally wiped out. There's a few cabins that—I think there's about 24 or 25 that made it through it. They were looking at—they were just got through the point of getting permission to subdivide and sell the lots, and that was going to be their retirement scheme, and it's all gone. Like, it's lost income, and it's all gone. And I know they're retirement age, and they would

certainly entertain the idea of a buyout really quickly, because there's not much left there.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, and again the parameters really are somewhat different here. If it's a seasonal settlement, that's the, you know—that's the MASC process. The general principle, by the way, with buyouts—I'll talk from the EMO perspective—DFA is really—if you start getting to the point where the cost of rebuilding and flood protecting is greater than the, you know, the value of the home, that's where you really get into buyouts. That's what was the basic rule in '97, and it was a similar rule in 2009, so that'll be the same sort of thing we would apply here.

And I can tell you, though, the other—and I know the member is talking to a lot of his constituents and others that he would know around the area, you know, so I defer to him. I mean, I've talked to a lot of people impacted by the floods. What does tend to happen with buyouts, though, is the people tend to be more interested in the buyout during the event. And, actually, as you get further away from the event, there are fewer and fewer people that are interested in the buyout. And largely because, I mean, it's very stressful during the flood, and one of the key issues you often hear is, you know, people want to end the stress by just basically going through a sort of buyout.

When things do start to return to normal and when there's—particularly if they're able to, you know, through mitigation, or—you know, I'm not going to pre-empt the discussion, you know, that will obviously come out following the Lake Manitoba regulatory review, but if there's an ability to have a different regulatory regime on Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, and there's certainly the physical ability now with the outlet. We've proven it. I mean, it's down 2.8 feet over what it would have been without the outlet on Lake Manitoba.

* (15:40)

That may change the degree of settlement, you know, that are concerns. And I really stress that, and I know the member knows this, so I'm not trying to get into a debate. I know he would know this better than anyone. But I do stress again that our goal is to rebuild and—not only to rebuild to the state that was there before, but as—wherever possible to rebuild in a way that's even better—I mean, like '97, you know, with the additional flood protection, like after 2009. And, by the way, we do have the ongoing flood

protection work that we're doing post-2009, as well, so we didn't just buy out 2009. We're involved in some significant improvements on flood mitigation.

Even in 2011, by the way, we did a significant amount of work. I'll take the Ralls Island dike, you know, for example, where we were able to do some work during the flood that's now being converted over into, you know, permanent flood protection.

So our No. 1 goal is that, and I, you know—so I don't want to make it sound like when we were talking about buyouts. Yes, buyouts are an option, but they're really—many cases, they're more of a last resort than a first and preferred option, and I'm sure the member's finding that with people in and around the lake.

And I realize it's a bit of a generational issue. I mean, I do get—you know, I've met with seniors who have a different time frame. You know, a lot of people say they don't, you know, they don't have a sort of a 20-, 30-, 40-year time frame they're looking at in the rebuilding, so I certainly appreciate that.

But I think, when it comes to the actual recommendations, our goal is to get people rebuilt. Will there be some buyouts? I'm sure there will be, but there'll be far more residences—summer—you know, or permanent and seasonal—rebuilt than ones that won't be.

Mr. Briese: I think a lot of the anxiety comes from, right at the present time, from people wondering what is going to be the new levels of the lake. They've been told that they had to build to 821 or 822, and then they were told that that recommendation is going to come out of one of the committees that's been appointed to look at that, and so, that's not necessarily true. And when they go in—and I certainly agree with the minister's principle that the best solution here is to rebuild and reclaim the properties, but it's—the anxiety that's out there is that, at what level and at what cost, because the more you have to go in the air, the more the cost is.

And this is somewhat different than—I know, make a reference to the Red River flood and the peaks in the Red River, but the Red River rolls into that valley; it lasts a few weeks, and it rolls out, and, I think, in almost every situation, the farmers have been able to crop the land before the 15th of June. It comes in; it empties out very nicely.

This was a lake flood. It doesn't empty out quite as nicely. It takes a far longer term to go down, so—

but that's where the anxiety is, and if we are going to rebuild, where do we rebuild to, where we got or what do we got to do on it?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I know, and I think the member's really hit the nail on the head. That is the, you know, the million-dollar question here. What is going to be the final level? The difficulty for us, of course, in the interim, we have a clear precedent, the previous floods, the flood of record, and, of course, we have to factor in not just the lake levels but also wind set-up, because essentially a lot of the damage last year was that major wind storm that took place.

By the way, that's not unlike '97; '97 was a one-in-a-100-year flood, but it was a one-in-10,000-year wind event during a significant part of the critical time. So what you end up with is, we have an interim period. Once the review is done—and there's two relevant reviews here—one will deal with a regulatory range; the second will deal with kind of the broader flood-mitigation issues. At that point, there may be a different level that will be established, and I appreciate the anxiety that's here, but it's no different than what happened at, you know, post-'97.

In fact, I would say we're going to be considerably ahead of '97 in terms of, you know, timing, because the recovery—the member's quite right. In '97, the immediate recovery was there. There was a crop in most of the Red River Valley in '97. Actually, ironically, a flood that, you know, goes in and recedes actually is often good for farmland in terms of depositing soil, cleaning out, you know, various elements. So actually, it was actually a good crop year in '97 in most of the Red River Valley.

It's a different situation around Lake Manitoba; we recognize that. Shoal lakes, we recognize that as well. And a lot of it, again, is impact on ranch land, you know, it's pasture land which traditionally has been the low-lying—more susceptible to water, you know, historically. So the member is quite right, but, again, our goal here is to get it right. If there's a way we can affect, you know, through this review, end up with a different regulatory range with either the mitigation we have already or mitigation that we put in the future, there may be a lower level that people can rebuild to. But the worst scenario, to my mind, would be to artificially decide to have a lower level and end up with a major flood in the future. I'm sure people would be furious with that, and that has been the real other lesson out of '97, which is, in addition to all the flood works, you know, in addition to all of

the work that you do on that level, determining what level you build to, sticking to it is really important. And I do take some objection, by the way, to those that like to characterize, you know, that somehow some of these settlements—and I hear this all the time, you know—why are people building there?

In the case of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, you know, I'll just focus on Lake Manitoba for a moment, and the member knows this, from '61 through to last year, the regulatory regime worked. There was significant flooding in the '50s prior to the Fairford outlet, but it worked for Lake Manitoba, less so for Lake St. Martin; there were some significant issues there. But, by building the—and it is, at this point, an emergency outlet—it completed, really, the third element, which was you have an inlet, an outlet in Lake Manitoba but no artificial outlet out of Lake St. Martin. And it impact as the member knows, you know, the operation of the Fairford Dam in the winter quite significantly.

So the—it's in a very different circumstance, and I've always said on the public record and I'll say it again, that that was one of the key elements with the flood last year around Lake Manitoba. And, having said that, that's why this review is so critical. If we can come up with a better long-term flood mitigation system, which, to some degree we already have through the emergency outlet, there may be an ability to have a different standard for building. But we can't go with an artificially low standard, have people rebuild to that and they get hit by significant flooding again.

What we can do is start with the current policy which is flood of record, plus, you know, plus the freeboard if you like, and if we can get the play to bring that flood of record down through flood management, mitigation, we can adjust the building at that point in time. And, certainly, our goal is to do that over this year into next year, is to get a clear decision. It should—it's a fairly complex issue but, as the member knows, the—I think the last report was 2003; I was actually the Minister of Conservation at the time I received the report. So a lot of the discussions and debates, you know, because there are very significant issues there, and I'm not going to get into them, you know, in terms of there are those that would suffer from low water levels, those that suffer from high water levels, I mean, obviously, the focus this year was flooding. But artificially low water levels could have very significant impacts on quite a few users.

So I'm assuming that they will be able to do the review. They've got the technical expertise. We'll have a report and then, very shortly afterwards, we'll be able to come up with a—not just an interim building requirement, but a permanent, long-term building standard for Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

Mr. Briese: I think most of those studies have been done before, over the years, and I think they've—they had kind of arrived at levels on the lake. But the major change in this past year and—the decision was made to run more water through the diversion—50 per cent more water than had what went through it before—on occasions before—to protect other properties, and that's fine if that's the decision that's made in a flood stage and you move the water that way. But now we have a diversion that's got a capacity of 34,000 not the 25 that it had for the first, whatever, 30 years of its life. It's now up to 34,000 and there's still no extra outlet capacity to Lake Manitoba.

*(15:50)

I don't know, and I'm not an engineer. I don't know the figures that would come out of—and I don't really want to get into too much of a debate, but I don't know the figures that would taking away that extra 50 per cent through the diversion in the spring would've made but it would certainly would've left Lake Manitoba somewhat lower. I notice, even this spring, with—and I'll maybe make that a next question.

One thing I wanted to finish this comment up with is, I see the Assiniboine River from the flooding last year now has the—and some of the work that was done along the Assiniboine River has the vegetation removed. We've got a sharp cut on the bank along the Assiniboine River that's going to slump, and between Portage and Winnipeg we're going to lose some more of the capacity of the river, I think, simply because of that. And I'm wondering if there's any mitigation work planned on something like that.

Mr. Ashton: On the issue of what happened last year, one of key things that the independent review will be doing will be, you know, assessing anything and everything from last year.

I do want to point out, by the way, Lake Manitoba, that there's historic evidence that there was a significant natural outflow and a significant flood in the latter part of the 19th century from the Assiniboine into Lake Manitoba. So I'm not going to

make any assumptions, you know, that work will be done through that and just through the normal post-mortems that are done in terms of floods.

And, certainly, the member's quite correct in identifying some of the issues on the Assiniboine dikes and the Assiniboine River. There's a couple of things I want to stress there. We, on a pre-emptive basis, did some significant work on the Assiniboine dikes, going back to January, not in the ideal circumstance, winter construction, but based on what we clearly identified at, you know, were preconditions for a flood. I can't understate how important that was. And, I referenced earlier the military involvement, they were a key part of it as well in maintaining the Assiniboine River's capacity.

One of the things that is apparent, too, if you look, say, over the last 20, 30, 40 years, and that is that the capacity in the Assiniboine River has decreased. A lot of it, by the way, the irony is when you don't have floods you end up with silting. When you have floods you get—end up with channels being clear, new channels being established. You know, floods are actually a natural occurrence. The problem really is when they're excessive and when they impact on human settlement, and, obviously, last year—this year you got that, you know, that worst combination.

I do want to stress, by the way, that there's a bit of mythology out there as well, too, which is that somehow the operation of the flood system last year benefitted Winnipeg. The big challenge we were faced, actually, one year ago today was actually the Assiniboine River Valley which could have been devastated by any kind of breach in the dikes. And we were at a point where there was significant risk of that—

An Honourable Member: Including Highway 1.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, including right up to Highway 1 itself. You know, the member's aware of the geography in that area.

And I do want to stress, though, that we do have an outlet now for the first time. We've always had an outlet from Lake Manitoba. It's called the Fairford structure—Fairford Dam. What we have now is an outlet out of Lake St. Martin. And I do want to stress, as well, that when we looked at any and all of the emergency responses last year, going back to May, June, July, end of August, we did do some immediate accessing of engineering expertise and there were a number of options that we did look at.

Well, we could of dredged the Assiniboine, cost prohibitive, wouldn't have gotten the results. I could run through any and all of the kind of scenarios we looked at.

But, when it came down to Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, the one clear thing that we identified and the engineers identified is you can't do anything about Lake Manitoba without doing something about Lake St. Martin. And you can't do anything about Lake St. Martin without doing something about Lake St. Martin, without ensuring that you don't do something at Lake Manitoba which complicates the situation on the Lake St. Martin. So that's why we proceeded with the outlet. It was completed November 1st. It has already dropped the level of the lake by an estimate of 2.8 feet, Lake Manitoba, and the other lake, Lake St. Martin, by 1.5 feet. And so that was the prime concern.

The issue of a further outlet, again, it's dependent on the ability to manage it through once it gets into Lake St. Martin. That will be one of the key areas that the task force, this independent review, will be looking at, and we'll certainly consider their report. Very similar to what happened in—after '97 where the IGC report, which is drafted by KGS, a well-known engineering company in the province, came out with a number of options. People may recall we went the route of the preferred option, being the expansion of the floodway. That was not the only option; there were two options that were presented. The diking very much came out of that.

It'll be the same with the experience of 2011. We're not at the decision point yet, although we did do a lot of work during the flood, in response to rapidly changing circumstances. If anything, the unwritten story, I think—and I want to say this on behalf of MIT, but also the municipal—municipalities that are involved with this, and that is, quite frankly, that if it hadn't been for a lot of the stuff that we did do, a lot of the things we did during the flood, that as much as we had significant damage, it would have been a lot worse.

Mr. Briese: Yes, I appreciate the answer, Mr. Minister, that—and the comment you made about the siltation on the Assiniboine River by not having enough floods, and I think—and you probably might even agree with me, but I think probably to a degree we've overused the Assiniboine Diversion over the last number of years and haven't allowed the river to flush out properly. We hit a certain number and it's—

we're flushing it into Lake Manitoba at times that I don't think we've probably had to.

Now, on the other—well, you're referring to your—the new channel and—first of all, I guess I would just ask: What are the flows on the new channel? How much water is actually going through it, the new Fairford—not the new Fairford—the new Lake St. Martin emergency channel?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, not having the MIT staff here I can, at the next meeting of the committee, get a—get the member the current update.

I do want to stress, by the way, on the Assiniboine it's not as simple as at the—most of the usage of the Portage Diversion and the Shellmouth Dam and the floodway the last number of years has been a combination of things—and one of the key things I want to stress is often the timing of flows. So the Portage Diversion does continue to have a significant role.

But it's also important to note, by the way, that in the Assiniboine River and even in terms of the impacts on the Portage Diversion, the unsung hero here, in a lot of cases, is the Shellmouth Dam. The Shellmouth Dam made a huge difference last year, and again it was, you know, the foresight of Manitobans in the '60s, '70s, supported by a federal government that had a very active role in supporting similar projects, the PFRA that did it. And so the key thing you know I always stress is, there's three major components in our system: the Shellmouth, the Portage Diversion, and also the floodway. But also, quite frankly in terms of Lake Manitoba, the outlet. The outlet that currently exists—I mean the 1950s there were periods of time where we were—that Lake Manitoba was chronically flooded. The difference in the '50s would have been less settlement in and around the lake, less impacts. But I've talked to, you know, some of the people who were around in those days, and you know they—they're reminded of that time.

So when you talk the Portage Diversion, and I realize that the Fairford Dam came in ahead of the Portage Diversion, there is a holdback, the Shellmouth, there's an inlet, and there's an outlet, but was what missing was an outlet for Lake St. Martin, and I'll get the member the latest flows from it.

Mr. Briese: Well, what I'm wondering about, minister, and I don't know whether this requires MIT staff or not: the figures that I've heard you using lately are Lake St. Martin's down a foot and a half

and Lake Manitoba's down two and a half feet, is the figures that I think I've heard you using. I know there's more flow coming through the Fairford, but why isn't it—why hasn't it taken Lake St. Martin down more than that? Why hasn't it went down two and a half feet, too? Like, it's a smaller lake; it's—if the new channel's doing its job, I would have thought it would have—Lake St. Martin has still got more of a spread on the flood level than Lake Manitoba. Why hasn't it taken it down more?

* (16:00)

Mr. Ashton: Well, one of the key issues here, by the way, is—and this is something that we shared publicly at our briefing just a week ago, the—there's continued, you know, high flows from rivers that have not traditionally had high water flows, like the Waterhen. And that has been a continuing challenge with Lake Manitoba, is the inflows. And, of course, Lake Manitoba is a large, very shallow lake, you know, by world standards, which does mean that, you know, it is very susceptible to those kind of inflows.

But I can get the member the latest numbers. What I could do is, if the member is interested, perhaps when the MIT side is here, I'll make sure that we get Steve Topping and, you know, his technical staff—I'll have somebody from that area here to give the member the latest information.

Mr. Briese: I've certainly looked at those numbers and I've noticed that in the last, roughly, two months, there's been almost no drop in the lake level. And I realize the Waterhen's running fairly fully, but that's—that just, in my view, adds to the argument that maybe we need some more outlet out of Lake Manitoba and that's why I'm questioning the new channel and the flows, is what is actually going out of there, because it just doesn't seem to be dropping Lake St. Martin that much.

Mr. Ashton: What's important, and I—to note again, it is spring. There's always a spring runoff. This is the time when you normally have higher levels in the lakes, rivers and streams, and that's essentially what's happening here. Certainly not any—we're comparable to last year, but there's always a runoff. And if you look at our projections going back the last year, there's already three factors we're looking at to—which bring the level down; one which adds to it.

The No. 1 is the relatively dry conditions. We had a relatively dry fall and winter. Number 2 is the outlet and—but No. 3 is—we predicted during the spring period there would be runoff and that's what's

having the impact right now. There's runoff throughout the system. It may not be as significant as last year, but I do want to stress again that, in actual fact, many of the lakes and rivers in the province are still at fairly high levels historically. Not, maybe, as high as last year, so this is not unanticipated at all.

As for the issue of a further outlet, again, you can't have a further outlet from Lake Manitoba unless you have a further—outlet from Lake St. Martin, without increasing the flooding on one at the expense of the other, or decreasing the one at the expense of flooding in the other. So that will be something that, again, we're going to be looking to this task force, its report and looking at the issues.

We have not ruled out an additional outlet, but I do want to stress that the combination of those three factors is still going to lead to us getting back to within a normal range over the next few months, which, to my mind, is huge if you consider where we were at just a—you know, a few months ago, I mean, like, you know, in the summer of last year. Or, if you look at the situation in the Lake Manitoba area, historically; in the 1950s, we would run at flood stage for years because there just simply wasn't any kind of expanded outlet that you have now with the Fairford.

So, I'm sure this will be continued to be debated and discussed over the—you know, the next six months here, but we're not ruling it out. However, I do want to put on the record that probably, historically, one of the most successful initiatives, in terms of mitigation, was the outlet. It's delivered the results and what you're seeing now is really nothing to do with the outlet. It's more to do with just standard spring runoff.

Mr. Briese: By the way, I do remember the mid-'50s and—I hate to admit it, but I do remember it and I think that was probably the wettest my farm, where I still live—my dad's farm at that time—ever was. I remember where he made ruts in the field. That—I've never seen ruts there since that time, so.

No, I just—I'm still trying to get around the—I heard you say that you couldn't put another outlet into Lake Manitoba without expanding the Lake St. Martin emergency channel. At least, I thought that's—that was what you said to me a moment ago.

So, all the Lake St. Martin channel, then, is doing is taking the top flow off the Fairford that is there simply because of the flood stage. Like, the—if the—if Fairford was down to 812, then there probably

wouldn't be any need—there wouldn't be anything going through the channel, because at 812 there's very little water goes through Fairford, or eight—anything below 812.

Mr. Ashton: Well, yes, I mean, the member is correct, and I'll defer to him in terms of the, you know, specific knowledge in the '50s, I think, he says. To reinforce this, you know, it was a wet period. You know, that's certainly the historic evidence, and it's one of the reasons—not the only reason—that was behind the construction of the Fairford structure. The key thing to remember here is: the higher the lake level, the more of the push, the more of the flow. So member's quite correct in that sense.

There—you know, there have been other options that people have looked at over the years. There's some evidence of silting in and around, you know, the Fairford structure itself, so there—you know, that would be one of the issues that will be looked at. You know, of course, member's also aware that as soon as you're into issues like that, you're also into, potentially, DFO issues with the federal government, fish habitat, et cetera, so it's not as straightforward as it appears.

But I do want to stress that when you're also looking at Lake St. Martin, you've got to be cognizant—we were, even in the emergency outlet—of environmental issues' impact on the fishery and Dauphin River, you know, issues in and around access into those communities, impact on potential access and other issues in Dauphin River. So it's not as simple as it appears.

Having said that, again, though, we got two reviews. One is looking at the regulatory regime, and the second is on the mitigation. And even the—I wouldn't want to make any assumptions about the regulatory regime as well, because there are things that you can do.

I think one of the key decisions there will be, obviously, the degree to which you draw down the lake or you maintain it at a certain level, and you have maybe a lower maximum level, you know, to provide some buffer against flooding. But, again, that has impact on some users. You know, there are fishers; there's some residences are impacted that way.

I can tell you, I was minister in 2003 when a report came in, and I would say it was one of the

most controversial reports at the time I've ever seen because there was no consensus. And I'm not assuming there will or won't be one around the lake this time. I'm assuming there'll be a lot of healthy debate, and if there is a consensus, that would be very nice to see because there wasn't in 2003.

And that's not to be critical; it's just simple fact that there are some users that benefit over time by higher—you know, higher level and there are some users that benefit by a lower level. And the member knows who I'm talking about. North basin, south basin, you know, it's a complex decision.

But after last year, clearly, we immediately made the decision that we had to review it, you know. So we'll get a—you know, that report will be back shortly, and I thoroughly expect it will get a lot of feedback when it goes to the public hearings, which I think are scheduled—we haven't got a date yet, but over the—starting in the next few weeks.

So I'm sure the member will get all sorts of advice from his constituents, too, on which way to go, and the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), from some of his former constituents and current constituents.

Mr. Briese: Anything can be engineered. And, if there was another outlet put into—from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin, it could be engineered to not even take any flow unless it hits, say, 813 or 812 and a half, and then there would be flow there on top of the Fairford flow so that it would only be used, probably, when there is a larger use of the Portage Diversion.

Just—and I probably saw the figures at the time—the Lake St. Martin emergency channel was designed to handle how—what cfs at full bore?

* (16:10)

Mr. Ashton: You know, it was adjusted over time. And, again, not having the staff here, I can get the member, you know—probably what's more important there is the, you know, really, the actual experienced flows that we've seen. I think that gives a better gauge of what we did.

I don't know if the member's had the opportunity to see any of the pictures of it or—in fact, if he's interested, I'm sure we could arrange a tour, you know, of the area—*[interjection]* You've flown over it? Okay, so you've seen it. You know, seeing it on the ground, it's quite impressive work. And it—the member's quite right, by the way, in saying that, you

know, you can engineer anything. Well, I was going to say the reality is—and, you know, I got a lot of engineers in the department; I got an engineer in the family, my son's an engineer, but they'll also tell you that, you know, when you're dealing in the current world with, you know, environmental issues and other issues there are also some restrictions. There's also the cost factor, and what was, I think, really indicative was the fact that we were prepared to make a, you know, I want to say a notional commitment of a hundred million dollars. There's various components; there's the actual construction; there's, you know, the community benefits agreements. Various things that we put into place to put that package there, but I remember last year it saved a lot of people right around Lake Manitoba.

The degree of priority that we placed on Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin is clearly represented by the—by that hundred-million-dollar investment. You know, we put \$130 million into the Red River Valley after the flood in terms of flood mitigation, which is very significant, but we put a hundred million dollars during the flood; you know, we budgeted that—we're actually, I think, about—beneath that now. And that speaks volumes to the fact that our intention is to treat Lake Manitoba just the same way we have other areas—Red River Valley south, Red River Valley north—in previous floods, which is fight the flood and then get them—get people back to normal as soon as possible.

Mr. Briese: You budgeted it, but did you spend it—a hundred million dollars—on that?

Mr. Ashton: We're actually a bit under budget, and there's various components. Again, it's not all the straight construction cost; you know, we did have additional costs that were put in place.

Because one of the key elements there was—and I really want to commend the First Nations communities. The biggest impacts for—in—for many years have been with First Nations. They were not only significantly affected by the flood last year; they were also significantly involved in the construction process. And we did do a fair amount of work to mobilize that. A very high percentage—and I can get the exact percentage, but a very high percentage of the employees that fought the flood, involved in the construction of the outlet were First Nations from—people from affected communities, which, I think, was huge. And many others from Lake Manitoba area, as well, were part of the floodfighting effort. And I also want to give a—thank

the industry as well—the Heavy Construction Association and the—and its member firms, because they did mobilize.

But we—yes, we're under that hundred million right now. And, of course, I'm sure the member will be asking me how—if it's recoverable from the federal government. And I wish I could say the cheque is in the mail, but our position is it's—it should be eligible for 90-10 funding; it was clearly an emergency. The federal government has indicated some willingness—Prime Minister—and I take the Prime Minister's word at 50 per cent funding. We are certainly going to be seeking to recover as much as possible under the 90-10 formula.

Mr. Briese: You know, the—I presume most of the costs of the—of that project are in now. And I have seen some preliminary breakdowns on those costs, but I'm wondering if the minister can provide the—a full breakdown on the costs that went into that—into the emergency channel.

Mr. Ashton: I—again, the MIT section—you know, when we get back into MIT I'll have my deputy minister on the MIT side, which is the department that was directly responsible for the construction of the outlet. So what I can do, and what I will do, is get the latest updated cost on the outlet.

Mr. Briese: My apologies to the staff because I—it seems that I'm kind of wandering to more MIT stuff here than EMO, but it's kind of hard to break out some of it too. [*interjection*] They're saying I don't need to apologize.

So, now, there's another section there that—the Buffalo Creek out to Lake Winnipeg, or almost to Lake Winnipeg. What's the status of that project?

Mr. Ashton: So when you're talking about the Buffalo Creek, you're talking about the—I just want to get clarification of what.

Mr. Briese: Well, there was a second—there was the main emergency channel and then there—then through the winter they were working on a second channel. I thought that was Buffalo Creek, maybe I've got it named wrong. But the second channel out near Lake Winnipeg where they were going to—it was going to go from the Fairford, or the, pardon me, the Lake St. Martin emergency channel—I keep saying Fairford—the Lake St. Martin emergency channel, there was to be another channel went off into a swampy area there that would just kind of diffuse the water going into Lake Winnipeg. And I

think that work was done through the winter, but what's the status of that? Is it—

Mr. Ashton: What I was going to suggest, I can—I'll have my deputy from MIT here next time around, and we—I could give him a sort of a summary. But I think it's probably better if I give him a, you know, I report back from the—you—when the deputy's here. And I'm not sure if we're going to be sitting again tomorrow, but if we are I can make sure that tomorrow I can have the MIT here.

But I can—I could certainly indicate that we did proceed all the way out to, but not including Reach 3. But, you know, again, it's actually easier probably to, if, in addition to—you know, I can answer whatever question the member wants in Estimates, but if he's interested, to provide a bit of a briefing on it. We had regular briefings last, you know, year during the flood. And it might be interesting also to his other colleagues as well because there's a—you know, I'm getting a fair number of consistent questions, and I think a lot of it really is—I think the media's been doing a good job just to cover, you know, the flood, but you don't get the same intensity of coverage.

And so a lot of cases, for example, the people know that the outlet was operational, but they're not aware of the logistics of it. So I'll undertake to give detailed answers at the next set of Estimates. But, if the member's interested in a briefing with either MIT—you know, the rest—or if there—if he's interested in basically a briefing with the EMO staff, as well, you know, we don't deal on the EMO side with the actual—you know, we deal with claims, et cetera. We don't deal with, you know, the actual physical infrastructure. I can do that as well.

Mr. Briese: I'm told that that emergency channel extension at Reach 3 has been completed, but not opened. And I'm just wondering why it hasn't been, what the reasons are and I—maybe I have to wait for your MIT people to find that out too. But I'm told there's a block in it and that—but it's all finished, it just hasn't been used, and I'm wondering why.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll arrange to get that information the next time the MIT staff is here. In fact, maybe what I'll do, I'll start off with a similar type response to what we did today, which is a, you know, a brief written response that I'll probably read into the record if it's not too extensive, although we do have agreement with critics to, you know, to have stuff attached if necessary.

Mr. Briese: And the other thing I'd like to find out, too, is the Lake St. Martin emergency channel itself, what the status of it's going to be going forward? Is it going to be blocked off once the lakes are down to a manageable level or is it going to be left there to take water out of Lake St. Martin at any time it reaches a certain level?

I know there's the Dauphin River that takes water out of there, too, but just wondering if there's going to be a movement to block it off too.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll include that in the update on where we're at. I'll cover both the construction, current situation and the future situation.

And just one brief comment, though, is that it was an emergency outlet and, you know, we did not focus on the permanent structures and it was treated very much in that category by everyone including many of the federal officials.

And I do want to put it on the record that we had very good co-operation from all departments and agencies at the federal level and we would not have been in a position really to construct an emergency outlet without that degree of co-operation. And I already mentioned the, you know, the role of First Nations on the construction side as well.

* (16:20)

Mr. Briese: Yes, I know I've got it here somewhere, and I haven't been able to locate it, but the initial engineering report strongly suggested that there be another channel into Lake Manitoba that would complete the whole process, something in addition to the Fairford one, and it's my understanding that that's not going to happen at this time and it may well never happen unless there's another huge flood comes along. Is that what would—what the minister would say or are they still—if this committee or this review committee come back and say that's imperative to making this whole system work, will that be accepted and then proceeded with?

Mr. Ashton: The engineering assessment, and again my deputy minister on the MIT side led the engineering— the assessment with, you know, two well-established engineering companies that have expertise in this field, and the issue of an additional outlet from Lake Manitoba was identified, various options were identified, but it was always understood that the prime, you know, phase 1 if you like, the main area where we were going to proceed, was the emergency outlet from Lake St. Martin because it allowed us to operate the Fairford structure at its

maximum physical capacity, not its regulated capacity. And when I say physical capacity—normally, we had to significantly cut back the flow through the Fairford structure in the winter because of potential impacts in terms of ice, and the bottom line here is we are in a position with what we put in place to have seen a reduction of 2.8 feet. We're well on track now to getting back within the normal regulatory range and below flood level, and that, I think, is a significant accomplishment.

So when I say that an additional outlet is something that's still on the books, that's something again that this task force will look at, you know, the additional outlet from Lake Manitoba and, again, the consequent impacts on Lake St. Martin. And to my mind, you know, I don't want to understate the degree to which we made a significant investment that really paid dividends, but I could tell you one thing: The bottom line is that we will also look very much at this independent review and all options in the future. Nothing has been ruled out for Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

Mr. Briese: Have the—I'm going to back up here to the Portage Diversion—have the rules of operation on the Portage Diversion changed over the years? Has there been any changes made to the original rules which I do have a copy of? But have they been updated or changed at any point since that time?

Mr. Ashton: Again that's more the MIT side of the department, but I'll make sure that I do get that information for the member at the next committee hearing.

Mr. Briese: I guess I'll go back then and try and get onto DFA a little bit. When you—and I can't remember the exact figure now on permanent residents, it's somewhere around 240,000 or something was the—for the maximum. That's—those figures, I remember properly, they used to be a lot lower, and are the feds committed to coming in for 90 per cent of those types of costs?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, they are.

Mr. Briese: And another issue is the mitigation work that goes on now. For instance, the—there'll be some more work probably needed to be done on the Assiniboine River, and certainly there is some to be done in Brandon. I recall reading a directive that said that the federal government was now willing to come in at 50-50 on mitigation—or prevention—preventive works, I should say, not mitigation works, preventive works. Is that commitment there? Like they—and is

there a ceiling on that commitment, as we hear that they're going to do, whatever, \$2 million of diking, or whatever? Is the feds—that commitment's there, and is there a ceiling on it, I guess?

Mr. Ashton: Well, it's a bit complex because we had the flood in 2011. There were some commitments made then in terms of general classification of expenditures. We obviously do have items that we will be looking at in the future. So they're—I would describe it as there's a notional 50 per cent commitment. It's not got specific dollar value attached to it. It was made at the highest level by the Prime Minister, so I think there's some—you know, we have some confidence that there will be some significant follow-through. It certainly won't cover a lot of the special programming that we have in place.

Anything involving seasonal residences, for example, is unlikely to be covered. And, you know, the only thing that we have some clear certainty on right now is with DFA eligible costs which are now running, you know, in the \$300-million range, where we have every confidence: we have a program, and we have the 90-10 funding. And what I can tell you is, based on that, you know, there's some certainty there, but in the more general flood mitigation area, the key issue for us is going to be what they will support.

I can indicate, just to switch for one moment from—back to 2009, the mitigation work that's been done there was done out of existing infrastructure planning, not out of any special allocation or strategic allocation. Strategic allocations are how we got funding for the floodway expansion; part of that, the floodway itself was a specific program and the Red River for dikes, so we are, you know, we're going to be into some significant discussions with the federal government over the next period of time.

The only thing I can say very clearly is that no matter what happens, we're anticipating that it will be hundreds of millions of dollars of provincial-only expenditures that will not be recoverable from the federal government. So there is a significant after-impact to us, fiscally, from the flood.

Mr. Briese: And that was somewhat predictable because a lot of the programs that were announced on temporary housing, or on cabins and things like that, the Province knew very well that they weren't covered under DFA when they made those announcements. The—so, it's—was predictable that there would be some—because of the types of

programs they put in place around the—especially in the inundation zone around Lake Manitoba, and somewhat, to some degree, in some other areas too. I think there was some mitigation done on Lake Dauphin, too, but I'm not absolutely sure. That would have been probably through DFA and permanent homes, but I guess that would be the question. Was there some DFA claims in—on Lake Dauphin too?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I—the issue of eligibility, I mean, you know, pre-flood—I just want to stress, there were some commitments on some of the pre-flood expenditures, the 50 per cent coverage level. As the member knows, part of the issue is what's during the flood, what's before, what's after, you know, what's eligible. And, so, we do have some comfort there. And, again, a very big difference if something is DFA eligible or not. If it's DFA eligible, during the period of the program, it's eligible for up to 90 per cent recovery from the federal government.

To put it in perspective, Mr. Chair, in the 1997 flood, spent \$280 million worth of compensation, or assistance pay, and I believe the recovery from the federal government at that time was about \$230 million because there was a very significant DFA component. There was some programming beyond that, but in this flood, as the member knows, we've added a significant component: seasonal residences for the first time. For example, Hoop and Holler, again, a unique situation.

* (16:30)

And, I know you're beginning to talk about the Ag programming side, which is, again, with the AgriRecovery, you know, is something that could be raised with the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order, please. A recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I am therefore recessing this section of the Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

If the bells continue past 5 p.m., this section will be considered to have risen for the day.

The committee recessed at 4:31 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:53 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. We resume. Any questions?

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Thank you very much for the opportunity to ask some questions today.

Certainly, my constituency had a lot of disaster financial assistance claims over the past year, and there's been a number of issues with those claims too. A lot of different reports—and there's certainly been some issues with, I think, staff within the department, and how people were dealt with, in respect to those claims. I know there was some payments were made fairly promptly, some others have been dragging out for quite some time, and there's still a lot of issues and claims that haven't been addressed yet.

And one of the big problems that, even for people who were paid, was the reporting back. And people that had claims weren't exactly sure what—when they did get their statement, it wasn't a very detailed statement. And, I know that's been a problem with the DFA program in the past. I wonder if the minister could address that, in terms of providing better statements back to constituents once they've had their claim paid, or partial payments made, in that regard.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, you know, not getting into specific cases, obviously, I think, on the DFA side, I mean, there's often an issue with documentation; what's eligible, what's not.

One of the areas we often run into difficulties with is, is the fact that a lot of people aren't necessarily aware that if it is insurable, it's not eligible. And, of course, then there's the question of determining whether—how you determine what is insurable or not. And there's, also, often a confusion with other programs, particularly on the agricultural side, about what's coverable under DFA, which is essentially damage to property, and, with some, restoration costs, that it's not insurable. So, you know, generally speaking, you know, I'm not going to say that every claimant is happy. We have people that go through, you know, to appeal. I mean, that's obviously an indication that people have a differing—different opinion. I did outline last week that the statistics on appeals certainly show that the level 1—there are some appeals that are successful by the claimants, so, you know, you end up with those kind of situations. So not being aware of the specific circumstances, I can't really comment on that other than I do want to commend the work done by our staff.

This year, the whole number of claims is going to be about 30,000; that obviously includes MASC claims, it includes agricultural claims. That compares to 10,000 during the '97 flood, so we're very much dealing with a historic flood, which is historic on the recovery side as well.

So, you know, I'm not saying that there aren't outstanding issues; there are. But, by and large—in fact, we've ran through some of the statistics last week as well. Overall the—you know, we got a success—a significant number of payments made and cases closed on the DFA side, particularly in the member's area. So it's a specific case, again—I mean, there are the appeal processes, but we are making significant progress.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I think when the—a constituent has filed a claim and he gets his report back and he gets a partial payment, he doesn't really know what that partial payment's for. And I think if those things were spelled out, it may save the appeal process a lot of time and legwork as well. So that's just one thing that I've been made aware of.

I sent a letter to the minister's office, back December 19th, requesting specific information, and it goes back to the situation we've discussed before in the minister's office regarding sand points and sand-point coverage. And, you know, some people have been paid claims, other people have been denied claims; there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to why that is. I know a lot of the denial letters are going up—out now. Certainly, I've been encouraging those people to make sure they appeal that, because I believe there is a grave misinterpretation going on in terms of that process. And in the letter I specifically asked what insurance companies are covering this type of coverage. And, you know, I know the denial letters are coming back saying that this type of coverage is insurable, but, you know, if my experience in the insurance business—and as well as the companies that I know, none of those companies are writing that particular coverage.

So I'm quite interested in the minister's comments on that, and I'm hoping he would dig through the archives and have a look at my December 19th letter and provide me with answers to that if he would.

Mr. Ashton: The specific question was placed to insurance companies—again, this was the issue, you know, whether it's insurable or not. And on the specific question whether entries into a basement

through a sand-point well system are insurable Co-operators, Federated Insurance, and Red River Mutual all indicated that they provide insurance coverage for flooding related to sand-point well systems.

Mr. Cullen: That's interesting, I will check my notes on—certainly, on the Red River; I know in terms of the Red River Valley Mutual, I didn't think they were writing that particular coverage. But I know, certainly, the Wawanesas and the Portages, who write a lot of business in the province, do not cover that type of coverage.

I guess the question is: What's different this year than what occurred in 2005 when we had high water tables and there was no issues with DFA claims in that regard?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm advised that claims were denied at that time, and the difficulty, of course, when you're dealing with any basement situation—it's no different with basement flooding. Generally, we saw some issues where you had storms, you had—you know, there was a number of areas of the province—Emerson, northeast Winnipeg, Brandon—going back a number of years, I think 2003, where there was issues of what was insurable, what wasn't, and then what the damage resulted from. But I'm advised by staff that it was treated the same way as 2005.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (15:00)

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 Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner and the floor, not surprisingly, is rather open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): And from Friday, we had a—there was to be some written answers provided. Does the minister have those? And I can go through the list, but I—see what he has.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm assuming one of the requests, or maybe the one and only request, was

the fee listing. Is—am I correct in that statement? And I do have in front of me, and the fees are for 2012-2013 in comparison to 2011-2012 fees. And, just a note, there has been no increase in fees for that period of time or for the coming year.

Mr. Pedersen: So, Mr. Chairman, is it—my understanding then, this—can this list be entered into *Hansard*? Can copies be given to the Clerk and that can—rather than having them read out, or is that—how do we handle this in order to get them into *Hansard*?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, thank you for the question. Standard practice is certainly that any honourable member around the table can table a document. So, Minister, would you care to state that—what your intentions are with the document, for the record?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the documents are here on paper, and they, by all means, are available for publication—or tabled, as requested. Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Great.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. One of the other questions you were—answers you were supposed to come back with was the official position of Lonnie Patterson.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just on the original question, Mr. Chair, we'll get to that very shortly. But I also want to bring forward a request that was made earlier last week regarding the vacancy rate—listing of vacant positions. That will be provided tomorrow, okay, if that's all right, and also staff retirement for 2011-2012 will be provided as well. And the list of directors sitting in societies, boards and tribunal and commission, if that's all right. Our staff will provide a list of those individuals tomorrow.

Mr. Pedersen: That would be good. The other one I have is details of contracts within that—contracted out with MAFRI in excess of \$25,000.

Mr. Kostyshyn: On the contract it—staff has informed me that we have a little bit of research to do to kind of compile the documentation and, if that's all right, we'll try and get that to you, possibly not tomorrow but the day after, if that's all right with the member from Midlands, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: That would be good.

And did I ask—just while I'm going through my questions here—names of the staff hired 2011-2012? I had asked for a written list of that too. Did I ask today? And, if not, I'm asking for it now, and do you have it or will you provide that at a later date?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, Mr. Chair, the number of staff hired, just to recertify the question—the number of staff hired in 2011-2012, appointed or by competition, and I think the secondary question was number of staff reclassified and provide details, those were asked on Friday, if I remember right. And we will provide that as well very shortly—oh, they were answered on Friday. I'm sorry, yes. Those were answered on Friday.

Mr. Pedersen: I already read *Hansard* once today, but it was during question period—I got a little waylaid once in a while—distracted once in a while. So let's move on to some other issues, then.

I did get your notice today of a meeting with the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council, yourself, deputy minister, Kate Butler, Wednesday, June 27th. So we'll keep that date open for that.

Moving on to other issues within here, I wanted to spend a little bit of time on the coal tax, the coal ban that's coming on as of January 1st, 2014.

Can you tell—can the minister tell me how many units there are out in the rural area of burning coal?

* (15:10)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Since last spring 2011, 15 Hutterite colonies have switched from coal to biomass, okay.

As far as the question I sense that was being brought forward was—you were asking how many presently are using coal? Is that the question the MLA from Midlands is asking? I'm just awaiting the actual documentation from the staff.

But I do want to just maybe give you just a few other—indication is that we do want to pursue with the discovering of alternative sources of biomass. And we have further research that we're working on to move forward on the growing green projection. So I shall provide you with some figures very shortly. Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: Is the department currently involved in a study in regards—regarding emissions, regarding costs to switch to biomass from coal?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sorry, I kind of lost the contents of the question. I would ask the MLA from Midlands to repeat his question, please.

Mr. Pedersen: Is the department involved in a study of coal use and of the cost of switching to biomass from coal?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question, Midlands MLA. As you're probably quite aware, the Conservation Minister Mackintosh maybe have more updated information as far as the emissions scenario when we're presently working with him.

We do know that there's a number of Hutterite colonies that tend to use the coal, and I can't give you exact number at this point in time. But we are definitely trying to put some figures together regarding the actual numbers, if that's what's being requested at this point in time.

I do have—and just to add to that, we've—as you're well aware, we do have a program in place right now that the producers of the coal stoves could apply for and do the retrofit. So to date we've had six applications that have been received under the program, and well over 30 inquiries have been received from potential applicants. The applicants are currently being reviewed. So I think to sum it up, since the spring of 2011, 15 colonies have switched from coal to biomass fuel. And I also—I think, as you may appreciate, Mr. Chair, is that it's going to be somewhat difficult to put an exact figure per stove or per function of a heating system, because every one is somewhat different. And so it's going to be somewhat of a difficult task to pin it down dollar-wise.

But I do want to be very transparent of the numbers that we're looking at, and we'll have those numbers for you very shortly, if need be.

Mr. Pedersen: What is the name of the program that they're applying for under this coal conversion?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. It's Manitoba Biomass Energy Support Program, which was announced, you know, on January the 17th.

Mr. Pedersen: What are the available dollars for this program?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, we're—presently, we're reviewing the upcoming dollar allocations for the upcoming year. I want to ensure the MLA for Midland, last year \$400,000 was allocated towards the program and the update, accordingly.

Mr. Pedersen: So \$400,000 in fiscal year 2011-2012, and you haven't decided yet how much is in 2012-2013. What is the individual limit?

* (15:20)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question.

A new program coming out of the strategic is the Biomass Energy Support Program. It provides operating grants up to \$12,000 for coal users switching to biomass energy and the capital grants of up to \$50,000, biomass energy producers and consumers.

Mr. Pedersen: So just so we're clear, what qualifies as a biomass product?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Biomass is a made-in-Manitoba type of a fuel. I'll give you some example. There's a lot of biomass in the form of agriculture residue. I'll give you some examples such as straw, oat hulls, flax sheaves—*[interjection]*—shives, pardon me. These are materials that are often considered waste, so we just felt that it would be very appropriate—used in landfills—that we could use it. And rather than burn straw, you know, as we've witnessed and the ban that we put around the city, it might be an ideal scenario if we could bale up all that product and use it towards biomass energy. I think that would be a great thing as well.

But just to—and I want to assure, Mr. Chair, that, you know, there's other avenues of manufacturing biomass products and one that's—probably has a very strong potential is forestry residues such as the sawdust of the worlds and possibly if we were to look at the LPs of the world, I think there's some by-product out of there that may have some value in the biomass.

Mr. Pedersen: So when will the program dollars be decided for this fiscal year? Because you said they're not decided yet, and we've got a lot of coal outfits—parties using coal out there that would be looking at this. And at \$50,000 capital, many of these outfits have got a million dollars invested—you know, it's—\$50,000 is not going to go very far and very—it's going to go very fast.

So when will the program dollar amounts be announced?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you very much for that question. I want to assure the member from Midland is that, as we've indicated by 2014, we're wishing that we could move forward on the coal ban altogether. But I want to assure that we are reviewing the application numbers. We're presently reviewing the efficiency of the \$400,000 that was used last year's budget to maybe provide some suggestions of alternative means of reducing cost of the conversion of the present coal stoves into some other form of biomass.

I guess we could almost safely say we could treat it as a pilot project and move forward, but we will do some review and we'll move forward in providing the dollar amount in the very near future towards the anticipated budget.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Thank you, Mr. Minister, for a chance to ask you a few questions.

I did want to get one correction on the floor right away. There is no ban on burning around the city of Winnipeg. There are conditions on burning around the city of Winnipeg. I don't want to see that got on the record.

And is the focus of biomass replacement for coal in a densified product, or are you looking for furnaces?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As—you know, I guess we try and be efficient in the biomass product, where it may be. So I think the reality is, depending upon the proximity or the type of biomass, type of product, if it's within a fairly reasonable distance of the end user of the biomass product versus a high-density compacted type of biomass, wood pellet example, we will provide the necessary information. The cost is depending on the finished product and what's its efficiency would be.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to move on a little bit and ask a few questions around your department's increasing responsibility that—in the last year or so on food safety.

And I guess I'd like a little explanation as to where it is viewed your responsibility as is a department and where Health's responsibility takes over. And who will be responsible for inspection of, for instance, food processing facilities, provincial livestock killing facilities and federal livestock killing facilities, how these all relate?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As you know, there's been some upcoming changes, you know, in our deliberation with the Ag minister, federal Ag minister.

As you're aware Manitoba Health deals with food safety. So MAFRI is responsible for the safety of food up to the back door of the retail industry. So that's basically from the farm up to the retail—and even the processing plants that are provincially inspected traditionally. The federal government is responsible for the federal government inspection buildings or plants.

Mr. Wishart: I see you've allocated, and if I interpret it correctly, two additional full-time equivalents to help deal with this increased responsibility. There are a number of smaller scale particularly livestock killing facilities that will require inspection from your agencies. And there are probably some food processing facilities that would fall into that category.

Have you looked at who is federal and who is provincial in terms of food processing facilities and which ones will you be inspecting?

* (15:30)

Mr. Kostyshyn: The—and pretty straightforward—the provincial facilities will be inspected by the provincial inspectors, food inspectors and the federal—it will be inspected by the federal government. Sorry, I might have misinterpreted the question. Sorry.

Mr. Wishart: I guess what—I'm looking for clarification. There's a number of community kitchens that are food grade around the province. Who will be assuming responsibility for them and how frequent will the inspections be in these communities?

Mr. Kostyshyn: My apologies for misinterpreting the question, Mr. Chair, but it will be the food development centres, the food kitchens—no, Manitoba Health will be doing the inspections of those.

Mr. Wishart: So that would, in fact, be inside the back door, even though they are producing a product that will be retailed?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just a point of clarification. You're talking about the kitchens that are established to develop a new food product. Just on that clarification, Mr. Chair, that would be somewhat—be it the responsibility of consumer health that would be involved in—the consumer health will be assisting in the supervision of that.

Mr. Wishart: Just so I'm really clear. The example being the one that was recently announced and opened, I think, in Swan River, the—your, the minister's constituency. Then the Manitoba Department of Health will be responsible for the inspection of the facility and the products that would come out of there?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As you can imagine, there's probably a wide variety of potential new food developments, such as the Swan River's, as you

referred to. The consumer health will be involved in the development or inspection of some products, but there will be some products as well that will be manufactured. And if we're going to have major exposure of it into the retail market, and if I may use an example, some form of a sausage, a new type of sausage, we do have the Portage development centre, which will somewhat reinforce the safety food aspect of it.

So I think the question is somewhat wide range, and I'm just trying to clarify the fact that there are certain products that may have—the consumer health would be able to meet the criteria, but some products will have a little bit more in-depth interrogation—or an investigation to make the product safe.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister. I recognize the fact that this is a grey area, but it is one that you are responsible for and you have to define the lines between your responsibility and the Department of Health because we, historically, have had some issues of—with gaps in—related to Manitoba Health and what they inspected and what they didn't, particularly outside of the city of Winnipeg. So I think it is one that requires clarification.

Once that is developed, would a policy be forthcoming as to who is responsible for what? And in light of the fact that you're now offering a buy local campaign which focuses on Manitoba developed and produced products—which I suspect you'll be called on or the food processors association will be called on to certify—what will their role be in this? Where—will there be duplication there?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'm very proud to say, Mr. Chair, that, you know, we have staff, MAFRI staff, that's always involved from the start to the finish of the product. And I want to assure the Portage MLA that the Department of Ag and Rural Initiatives are well aware of the food safety issue, and I think there's no better time in society. We tend to be more conscientious, and I want to assure the MLA that we, truly, are not in a position to jeopardize any kind of that food safety issue.

But I do want to assure that we have some constituency—consistency with our staff working side by side with the appropriate people at the food development centres or their kitchens.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen). Honourable Minister.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes. I just want to apologize for the additional footnote that I got from my minister, but we also have people—regarding the grey area, I just want to clarify that. We have policies in place that individual cases will be worked out jointly with Health, okay. And then we'll be glad to provide the policies if so requested, okay.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Chairman, I want to move on to a different—somewhat related but different topic, the review of veterinary services in Manitoba. And I have a report that happens to be chaired by the honourable minister from August of 2007. How many of the recommendations in this report have been acted on?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to thank the member from—the MLA for asking that question. And I do strongly recommend those travels around in the rural landscape. And I honestly have to say it was quite a treat to meet a number of livestock producers and other individuals regarding the veterinarian task force moving forward.

* (15:40)

As you're probably well aware is that the legislation hasn't been reviewed since the 1970s, if my memory serves me correctly, and I was very proud to be the chairperson of that task force as we moved forward on changing some—making some suggested changes.

As you're probably well aware of, there were some very strong recommendations brought forward—as we all struggle, not only in the province of Manitoba, trying to retain veterinarians to our—to any provinces. You know, there's other agencies that tend to use the graduating veterinarians and our—one of the main focuses in the veterinarian task force report was to provide incentives to the young graduating students, whether it was by some form of a reimbursement in their tuition fees. There was a potential tax agreement that may have been considered, but with the understanding that the large animal practices was part of their requirements.

So, with that being said and, you know, I think the majority of the members present here from the opposition are quite familiar with the livestock industry and quite familiar with the veterinarian services. One of the biggest challenges is if you're a veterinarian, and you can make probably just as much money doing the small animals—I'm talking dogs, cats and those other practices, versus the large

animals, and also probably minimizing the risk of being somewhat bodily injured by dealing with large animals, that was the other major changes or challenges we had on the 'varian' task force—veterinarian task force.

So it was quite an educational tour, but I want to repeat the fact that Manitoba's not alone. The provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Ontario's faced major challenges. But also there's quite a demand for veterinarians—food inspection agencies, feedlots in—private feedlots, feed mills. There's quite a large demand for the young veterinarians and, you know, some of the veterinarians that are—maybe have a few more grey hairs than I do are still working out there because there is definitely a shortage of experienced veterinarians that choose to work with large animals. But I want to bring to the question that was brought forward—we have—there was 33 recommendations brought forward and, at this point in time, 20 have been addressed.

Mr. Pedersen: A long way around to get to a short answer.

How many veterinary districts are there today now in Manitoba?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Presently, the provincial and municipal funding is providing 27 veterinarian service districts in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So—and I have a letter from Jack Lewis, who's the chairperson of the Veterinary Services Commission, and in his letter, he's saying that 19 districts have nothing in reserve; three districts show \$1,000 or less; four districts showed under \$5,000; and only one district showed \$15,000 in reserve.

And yet, when I look at your budget in here, you've cut the veterinary services districts by \$180,000 this year. So what is the long-range plan for veterinary districts in Manitoba?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just to maybe explain some history on that, Mr. Chairperson, there is a partnership between the provincial and the municipal governments; that has been in place since the '70s. And what Mr. Lewis may be pertaining to is there was veterinarian technical enhancement grants, and that was particularly structured to improving or updating equipment within the veterinarian clinics—the 27.

So, with that being said, we often refer to that being the wish list. We've had to make some decisions—thinking down the road, it hopefully may be somewhat a new vision as we move forward in the years to come. The BSE definitely has had a very tough scenario, not only in the cattle producers, but the veterinarians of the world have suffered drastically.

But I want to ensure, Mr. Chair, that our province is committed to providing financial support, as they have, over the years, traditionally, with the municipal governments, in providing a supplementary fund to keep the veterinarian clinics in existence.

Mr. Pedersen: But you've cut \$180,000 out of the capital program and that's what keeps a vet offices going. They charge fees to pay for their labour and they charge for their administration, but it's the capital projects, whether it's the vet clinic itself or equipment within it, and yet, now you've cut—you're talking about a long-range vision. I'd like to know what the vision is when you've now cut \$180,000 out of the capital budget. And so where is the vision in—where do you see these 27 vet districts going in the next couple of years, because this is critical right now? We're at a low ebb in terms of cattle numbers; it's going to take a while to come back up. And that affects the vets in—just in the cattle business, that affects the vet's day-to-day operations. So where do you see the—this government going in terms of support for the veterinarian districts in the next couple of years?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The grants that was used towards the infrastructure and equipment improvement was brought in a number of years ago, and the reason it was brought in was the inventory was somewhat of the age. The program has been in existence for a number of years and at this point in time, we felt that majority of the vet clinics that were very active in handling the high clientele numbers had been able to increase their equipment to—of higher standards.

So, at this point in time, this is where we felt that there is other payment services that—when we talk about trying to generate additional dollars—payments for vet services of value to the province, like the biosecurity is one of the other alternative sources of revenue or food safety, which provides alternative sources of revenue for the veterinarians in the appropriate areas.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): The program that—I think you made reference earlier to a program for

bringing young veterinarian students back to the large animal industry in Manitoba. Can you explain what that program really was and is it still in existence?

* (15:50)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Some official documentation—veterinarian service scholarship fund, what we have in place is a forgivable scholarship of approximately \$1,125 per year over a maximum of four years if they're entering into a large animal practice.

Mr. Graydon: You cut the budget on the—on infrastructure and equipment and capital expenditures, but at the same time, for the last number, well, number of years now, the subsidizing that the veterinarian clinics got was set at \$19,000. Is that still going to be there, or are you planning on further cuts?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's still at \$19,000, maximum at \$19,000. I would—if Mother Nature behaves and we have a little extra dollars, I don't foresee any cuts in that. But I do want to say that, obviously, the private industry veterinarian clinics are also, you know, somewhat—doing some comparisons. I think Manitoba's—the province of Manitoba is very unique, because I think if you were to go to Alberta or to the Saskatchewan of the world, I think our government is doing a very gracious thing in supporting the veterinarian clinics in that's perspective.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, and I might point out that we aren't in Saskatchewan and we're not in Alberta, and this \$19,000 figure hasn't changed in since the NDP took power. We went through some pretty significant trying times in the cattle industry and those clinics do need to be subsidized.

But, having said that, perhaps the government would consider selling the clinics. Is that one of your goals?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I don't, I guess at the moment of trying to be honest, I don't have any intentions of selling it.

But I think—the MLA from Emerson—I think if you took the provincial map and if you did a true study of what veterinarian clinics were situated throughout the province years ago, the '70s, and where it's at right now, I think it's going to be quite interesting to see where the livestock numbers have somewhat moved into different geographical areas. In a—you know, industry's changing in a massive

amount. I have some concerns with the community pastures being some of the things that we're discussing right now, and in my area alone is probably the largest PFRA pasture in the province of Manitoba. And there's a veterinarian clinic right in the hometown and in—that is probably a good portion of his business. I think we have to—I guess my answer to the question is that there is other dictating factors that somewhat make the business somewhat viable, and if it means that the Province has to sell the business, the provincial veterinarian clinic, to have the private industry move in, I think there would be some serious consideration for the betterment of the cattle industry, and the dogs and cats, at the localized business.

Mr. Graydon: So what would the process be to sell these? Who owns them?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just point of clarification. The question was: Who owns the present veterinarian clinics, the 27 that originally existed. It would fall under the district—or the veterinarian—the municipal governments that are partnering in the association of those clinics.

Mr. Graydon: So then the disposal of those clinics would be at the will of the municipalities. That's what you're saying?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In true 'transparency' I would think there would be some consultation with the provincial government. Theoretically, it would belong to the associated veterinarian boards that are involved in that veterinarian clinic.

Mr. Graydon: So that would be the municipalities that are contributing municipalities. That's who make up the board. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: On page 93 of the Estimates book, there is an increase in staff of three at the chief veterinary offices—chief veterinary office/food safety. Could you explain where the three additional positions are for?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just point of clarification on the question. Page 93, was it two or three increase of staff?

Mr. Pedersen: In my book, on page 93, it shows an increase of three—from 27, the previous year, FTEs, to 30 FTEs.

* (16:00)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sorry for that, Mr. Chair, but basically, the three positions: one is the data entry,

which is kind of really not a new position, but it's a clerk or individual that would be data entry; the other ones are two new positions, as you're well aware of the transition of the transfer of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We will now be training some staff to be involved in the provincial abattoirs.

Just a point of clarification, as well, Mr. Chair, is the data entry one is a reclassification of position, so it's a—so what we've done is we converted the one position from a data entry to a food inspection agency.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Thank you to the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) for allowing me to ask a few questions.

I guess it's one of the—seems to be the annual question I ask the Minister of Agriculture about this time of the year, and it's in regard to the standardbred racing industry here in the province of Manitoba. The last few years, the Department of Agriculture has provided a grant to run the summer circuit—the fair circuit—and I wonder if the minister could tell me if the department is going to be coming forward with some funding for that circuit for this summer.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question, MLA. Obviously the circuit has, you know, been historically—had some economical benefits, I guess as far as the travelling circuit, and as we become more conscientious, or as far as the dollar distribution, you know, there are certain things that tend to happen in municipal governments, federal governments. And provincial governments is no less, no different. And, without a doubt, there has been some, I guess, investigation of the viability of it.

I want to ensure the MLA that there has been no negative decisions at this point in time, and I think, in the short timeframe, we'll probably have some answers pertaining to that question.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that response. You know, obviously, the time is ticking and we're, you know, nearing the middle of May and historically the circuit's underway, you know, towards the end of June. So, obviously, there's a lot of planning work that has to be done, and, quite frankly, a lot of people have their occupation on hold right now because of that because the decisions haven't been made. So the sooner the minister and department can make up their mind on that I would—I think would—it's to benefit everyone, and that really is the essence of the short term in terms of the industry.

I know the industry themselves have been looking for some long-term solutions to the industry as well. They looked long and hard at having a private firm invest some money in Brandon in developing a horse park at that point a few years ago. The government was opposed to that at the time, so the long-term implications were denied by the government at the time. So they're certainly having frustrations as they're moving forward.

In terms of—I know there's been some discussion about racing in the fall at Assiniboia Downs after the thoroughbred industry is done there in the summer. Has the minister been involved in any discussions about having racing at Assiniboia Downs in the fall?

Mr. Kostyshyn: You know, being the Ag Minister and being involved in horse racing, I have to be—we all have to be subconscious about trying to develop things that somewhat struggle being financially responsible, and, I guess, you often entertain discussions with various organizations to make it profitable, not only as the provincial government, you know, as you know, you know has a fairly large investment in the horse racing circuit, you know, in excess of \$5 million towards that Jockey Club and organization. And I think what—if I could answer the question is that, without a doubt, we have been looking at it.

I encourage the member opposite is—if you have some good strong connections or alternative plans that we could assist the horse association of moving forward. I think it's a great piece of entertainment, but I think we have to face reality is that it's been a challenge not only in the province of Manitoba to make it somewhat feasible to sustain itself and existence, there's possibilities of partnerships that could be developed. You look at the Brandon scenario where the Keystone individuals were able to obtain the Arabian horse show from Regina. That was probably one of their best entertainment sources because I believe they were able to generate almost \$1.3 million by that show coming from Regina to Brandon. So that itself was a positive in the horse—in directing the horse scenario.

But I think that's where the industry has to theoretically look around and find alternative methods of combining partnership with other organization to make it feasible and profitable for all concerned.

Mr. Cullen: And, you know, a few things to that. You know—I know the standardbred industry has had

some discussions with the Jockey Club. You know, obviously, the government is playing an important role in this in terms of making this happen, and there's been discussions for at least two years, you know, in terms of what a program could look like at Assiniboia Downs. But it seems that, you know, we keep bringing this question up but the government never seems to be willing to take the ball and run with it. You know, I think the industry's been, you know, pretty straightforward here in trying to come up with different solutions to make the industry viable. You know, unless we get some kind of a long-term commitment from the Province, you know, these people are going to pull up shop and they're going to go somewhere else.

*(16:10)

So I guess what we're looking for is a commitment from the government. Are you prepared to, you know, help this industry, or are you going let this industry die here in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I would have to say that probably in my first year of being Ag Minister, I think there will be a fairly intense review of the organization, and at that point in time, I guess, with all stakeholders involved make it a fairly open, transparent conversation. You know, being accountable for the dollar investment and realizing the economic spinoff that comes to the Province of that, but I—it's probably not a bad thing to somewhat entertain review. Certain things have been existent that are somewhat stagnant at the present pace. It's been going for a number of years, and I do acknowledge the fact that it's been under some discussion for the last two or three years to somewhat review those programs. And I think I can assure the MLA that we will be doing some exploratory investigations.

Mr. Cullen: Well, to that, and I know the industry, the standardbred industry has been looking at all different options. And they've been looking at developing a racetrack at the Keystone grounds in Brandon. And it appears they have some support from the, both the provincial exhibition and, my understanding is, the Keystone board level as well. And I'm just wondering if the minister has any discussions in regard to that proposal in Brandon.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, I'm quite familiar with that proposal that was brought forward at the Keystone Centre, and I think one of the things that—sometimes priorities have to be in place. As you know, the structure itself basically covers about 10 acres,

11 acres. So you've got a lot of building that needs maintenance on a regular basis. And as the government has been in partnership with the Keystone board and the exhibition people, I would have to say to the MLA that, if we're going to move forward with this in partnership that a good, sound business plan has to be involved. And then I want to ensure that we've had some very good positive communication with the mayor from Brandon. We've had some very positive movement with the Keystone board, and recently a new executive director has been involved with some new initiative ideas that has a, I think, a very positive outlook.

It's, you know, business sense is one thing, it's like trying to predict Mother Nature a week from now, whether it's going to rain or not. But I think that the intent is with the government. It wants to work with the Keystone producers and—or Keystone Ag exhibition people. We definitely will.

As far as the horse-racing track system, I think, you know, when you look at the Assiniboia Downs here, for an example, and then you look at the one in Brandon, I think there has to be a fairly sound business plan in place. So how do we honestly say that the one in Brandon's going to work versus the one in Winnipeg, you know, has maybe some issues. But I don't think we're closing the door on that thought.

But I would have to say that we would be somewhat conscientious that there has to be a very sound business plan in place that minimizes the provincial government's contribution to the program. By all means our government's—is really in favour of what's being done in Brandon. Our hats go off to that organization. And we will be the last ones to say that we will not assist them down the road. But we need to have a very sound, transparent conversation with the organization before we move forward.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I think the minister's right. But we've been having sort of, one-off conversations for several years and we don't seem to be moving forward, and that's the frustration that people are feeling. And maybe I'll just leave that for now.

The minister talked about rain and then flooding last year, and actually we still have some issues in western Manitoba with the high water tables. And a lot of producers are having some issues there in terms of getting the crop in. Now, it's certainly different than the east side of the province, some of the conditions they're facing there.

And I know some of my constituents have had some issues and had some claims ongoing; some agricultural producers from last year, in terms of the independent programs. I'm wondering if there's an appeal process in place for those producers that aren't happy with what Manitoba Agriculture has provided them in terms of their claims.

Mr. Clarence Pettersen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair, for that question, and thank you for the question from MLA from Spruce Woods. You know, it's kind of nice to have a laugh once in a while. I guess the question is, you know, there's probably been a number of scenarios as far as cases, so I guess if we could be a little bit more specific as far as the case you're talking about.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, specifically, I'm thinking of—I think there's three producers near Brandon, just east of Brandon, all agriculture producers in specialty markets there. You know, we've got some specialty products, trees and looking at special crops that they're growing, so, you know, pretty intense marketing there and there—and special circumstances.

And I don't think they're quite happy with what the Province is going to be allowing them for their losses. So, I don't think they've had any kind of an appeal process laid out for them. They've just made—had the offer made to them and they're not sure, you know, where to go from there.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, if you're quite familiar with it, there is an appeal process. Crop insurance does have an appeal process and—I'm assuming that the question is flood related, so there is an appeal process through crop insurance. An appeal process if you're not happy with it. So there definitely is an appeal process through AgriRecovery as well, so—and it's just being set up, so we could assist you in that particular—and we'll keep communicating.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, maybe what I will do then is just forward a letter to the minister's office so we can be aware of what that process is going to be, if that's okay.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, by all means. If you need further dialogue than that, we'll be glad to provide that for you.

Mr. Cullen: Just one last question. I had some calls from some of my constituents regarding fertilizer prices. That seems to be something that happens

every year. I'm just wondering if the minister's been getting any calls to his office about the increase in fertilizer prices and what undertaking his department is taking in terms of that, or if there's anything you could share with me in terms of those—some of those concerns out there.

* (16:20)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, as far as the provincial government, you know, we have pretty limited jurisdiction as far as, I guess, you'd call it investigation. I think that is a worthwhile question that maybe we could address with Mr. Ritz federally because it might be able to provide a bit of a Competition Bureau investigation, I sense, but obviously we've had some concerns expressed by producers of the high cost of the fertilizer. But at this point in time, I think we have some limited resources that we could somewhat have an effect of addressing the price of fertilizer.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm going to move back into some veterinary stuff again: chronic wasting disease and farmed elk in Saskatchewan. There is—I think the minister will be very familiar with this as it's in his back door. What is—now this is Conservation that primarily has been the lead on this, but what is MAFRI's involvement in terms of these escaped elk that are possibly in Manitoba?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question.

Yes, I've—actually was quite fortunate last week—I was able to attend the function in Swan River and had the fortune of talking to a couple of conservation officers regarding that particular issue. Some of you are probably quite familiar with a fellow by the name of Rick Wowchuk who is quite instrumental in the Envirothon students, very active in the moose population depopulation.

I think the question brought forward by the MLA from Midland is primarily a Conservation question. I guess in true definition, when we have animals that are in captivity, then that falls into the MAFRI department, whereas if they're in the wild, such as the elk that's been somewhat brought forward who are elk that have migrated from the province of Saskatchewan, I believe Conservation has been out doing some aerial flyovers and trying to track the migration of the animals.

And just as a little sidebar to the MLA for Midland is that I was told that there's an albino-type-of-looking elk that's kind of a unique type of species.

But apparently, there has been, but it's a very—it has been monitored and as to our knowledge in correspondence with Conservation, there has been a minimum amount of migration.

Mr. Wishart: We did bring this question up in Conservation and were informed that it was a joint responsibilities which is why we've come back here.

They—Conservation had set an emergency task force to try and identify and control or rid us of these stray animals that are tagged elk, which we're not sure of the origin on, whether they're Manitoba or Saskatchewan. However, they have been unsuccessful in doing that. They continue to 'prioritize' the calls, which your Conservation officers would probably have shared with you.

But the change in terms of focus with the federal government announcing that they would no longer be destroying herds in Saskatchewan that are identified with chronic wasting disease—and so far I think there's been over 60 herds destroyed—living next door to a large population like that without full containment of any type is an extreme risk to our farmed elk industry and probably a fairly significant risk to our wild oak industry—or wild elk population, as well.

Do you have any plans to deal with this change in policy and how we might work together to control this? There are some options and Conservation certainly was looking for suggestions as to how it might be approached.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question. As you're well aware that presently the province of Manitoba is CWD-free. We have no—I want to assure the MLA from Portage that we are in consultation with the Province of Saskatchewan and Manitoba because this has somewhat been a new vision for us because—as the announcement come through the federal department that there has been a reduction and somewhat rejigging the puzzle, if I could use that terminology, towards having CFA individuals monitoring the migration of the animals and sustaining our status as a CWD-free province at this time. But I want to assure that there is some consultation with Saskatchewan and Manitoba and Alberta on this particular issue.

Mr. Pedersen: The bovine TB—Riding Mountain National Park area—is still an ongoing issue for, particularly the cattle producers, although it's a concern—should be a concern to everyone. The Manitoba Beef Producers have been asking for the

appointment of a TB co-ordinator to oversee the eradication in the RMEA.

What is MAFRI's position on appointing a TB co-ordinator?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Being in a very close proximity to the Grandview district, I'm quite aware of it, and also having a fair amount of dialogue with the Manitoba Cattle Producers, I think a TB co-ordinator has its merit.

* (16:30)

As you can anticipate, it's really a joint effort between the provincial and federal government, and I think all team players should be involved in moving forward in this. And as far as myself, staff—

The Acting Chairperson (Clarence Pettersen): Guys, we'll have to recess. A recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I am therefore recessing this section of the Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

If the bell continues past 5 o'clock, this section will be considered to have risen for the day.

The committee recessed at 4:30 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:53 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Chairperson: We'll now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Mr. Pedersen: I believe I was just asking the question about whether the Province would appoint a TB co-ordinator.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I believe the answer was that we're in full support of a TB co-ordinator, but I think also in my comments was that we need to work in partnership with the federal government as we see that, especially in the Riding Mountain National Park—it's a federal park. I think we need to have a partnership as we move forward as that.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Chair, through you to the minister: Can you—can the minister give me an update on anaplasmosis and the strategy to manage it?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question. As you know, that's part of the reshuffling of the deck in the

federal situation. So we are in some consultation right now within ourselves in the department, but also—there is also communication with the adjoining provinces, Saskatchewan, Alberta, because, obviously, it is somewhat—not only a Manitoba issue, it's a western Canada issue.

Mr. Pedersen: The minister give me an update on liver flukes and a strategy to manage that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: And, quite an educational thing, as far as the liver fluke goes. But I'm sure the MLA from Midland is well aware that this basically persists—or, doesn't persist, but is kind of designated in a small area of the province. I want to assure the MLAs that—opposite, that there are drugs available and through our department and the chief veterinarian officer, we're able to obtain the drug that somewhat will assist of controlling the migration of this disease.

Mr. Pedersen: So is that a—as I understand, that vaccine comes in from the US. Is it a special issue—special licence required to bring that in? It's not available through regular channels through our veterinary clinics.

Mr. Chairperson: We go until 5 o'clock. Yes. It's going to be a brief answer.

Mr. Kostyshyn: To my knowledge, it's being classified as an emergency drug.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The hour being 5 p.m., regretfully, committee must rise.

JUSTICE

*(15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Justice. Would the minister's staff and opposition staff please enter the Chamber.

We're on page 143 of the main Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'm sorry, Mr. Chairperson. I think the minister has some information he wants to put on the record.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Yes, just a couple of pieces of information from last day that I'd like to get out of

the way and put on the record this morning—or this afternoon.

The first, there was a question by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) about staffing at Brandon Correctional Centre. So we've pulled together the staffing for the past three years, and we've used May as the appropriate month: May 2010, staffing at Brandon Correctional Centre was 168; May 2011, 188; and currently at Brandon Correctional Centre there's 194 staff.

Then there were some questions about juries. So my staff have been able to pull together some details. I'm told that 280 persons actually performed jury duty in Winnipeg, including alternates. Forty-two persons performed jury duty in the regions. So the total number of jurors was 322. There were 21 jury trials in Winnipeg and three in the regions for a total of 24.

And then I want to correct an erroneous answer that I gave at the last meeting of the Committee of Supply on Friday. At the time I indicated there'd been two accidental releases in 2012. That was incorrect. In fact, in 2012 there was only one accidental release and that occurred in the month of January. And I'm told in that case an individual was serving out his sentence and he was released 17 hours before the end of his sentence, as a result of a clerical error. That's duly noted as an accidental release, and is the release so far.

Mr. Goertzen: As I mentioned to the minister a little earlier on, just before we started the formal part of the proceedings, I will probably be little bit more erratic in my questioning today. Staff might feel that I've been erratic since the beginning of this, but to me it'll be more erratic and that often is a bad thing. But the good part is that usually means that we're closer to the end than the beginning. But let's see how it goes.

So I have some questions regarding, I think we were on courts when we left off. We still have the court staff here. So I'll just continue on a couple of things there. I had a question regarding—and somebody from within the legal profession asked me about the Winnipeg courthouse third-floor renovations. They indicated they've been in the process for, according to them, two years. I don't sort of check it on a regular basis, but can we get an update on where those renovations are and sort of what's going on there?

Mr. Swan: Well, it's—I mean it's—it was properly a question for Infrastructure and Transportation, but I am familiar with the situation, so I'll try to put information on the record that will be helpful.

I am aware of the issue on the third floor of the new law—well, the new Law Courts Building we still call it, even though it's been open for several decades. And as many lawyers, especially those who practise criminal law, are aware, there's been a problem with the tiles on the floor of the third floor. I understand the work will be proceeding this year. There's been work done to try out some various tiles to make sure they're going to be appropriate for the amount of use the courthouse gets. And, certainly, I hope that this year that work will be completed.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister tell me how many openings there are on the Provincial Court for judges at this point?

Mr. Swan: There's no vacancies. The court's fully staffed.

Mr. Goertzen: There was a—in regards to the salary of judges, there was a report that came forward from—I think it was Justice Oliphant had done the report, quite critical of the process by which the most recent judiciary salaries were set.

Does the minister have any comments about that process and then what the process might be going forward on how to set the salary of the judiciary?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I thank the member for the question. Yes, there was a decision. The appeal period on that decision hasn't expired, so I'm not at liberty to talk about details of it.

Mr. Goertzen: Not specific to that scenario, then, but is there—the minister have any comments on how the salaries are currently set? Is there any movement in the department to change the process by which judges' salaries are established?

Mr. Swan: Yes, you know what, I can't really comment except to say that the decision ultimately suggested that something other than the will of the Legislature was the appropriate result, so I'm not really able to add anything to that.

Mr. Goertzen: It was indicated to me by somebody—and I don't know this to be factually true; I guess that's why I'm asking—that the Court of Appeal is six to seven months behind on issuing decisions in Manitoba. Is that correct and would that be a—sort of, a normal time to wait for decisions?

Mr. Swan: Yes, in the Court of Appeal it is—it's an interesting situation. The actual number of cases that court hears has actually been declining over the past number of years. But the court will tell you, and I agree, that the overall complexity of the cases that they're deciding has become more complex. Probably the most extreme example of that was the—what I can call the Métis land-claim case where, in fact, some additional resources were found on a temporary basis to help the Court of Appeal deal with, really, a large amount of research that had to be done.

I am aware that there are cases that have been sitting with the Court of Appeal longer than that court would like, and what we've done in this budget year is to add an additional researcher to the Court of Appeal to assist the judges there in getting the decisions researched and completed sooner. But it is a matter of concern and we thought that some more resources over there were appropriate.

* (15:10)

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister quantify what longer than he would like would be? What are—what sort of—how far out are they, in terms of their decisions?

Mr. Swan: You know, and it—of course, it's impossible to give a perfect answer. Many times it depends on the case. I mean, there's some matters that can be determined quicker than others.

I can mention there is a national standard set by the Canadian Judicial Council. Their ideal standard, if you would, would be to have decisions issued within six months of the case being argued.

And again, there are cases that go beyond that six-month period. I know that is a matter of concern for the Court of Appeal and that's why we thought the request for an additional researcher was a reasonable one.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister provide, then, for me, a list of cases that are outstanding and is—and the length of time they've been outstanding, that are currently seized by the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Swan: Sure, yes. And, you know, in order to move things along, we can't really compile a list of cases. I mean, that would require going through the court registry and looking at each case. But what I think would make sense, and I hope my friend agrees, is we can ask the Court of Appeal that very question. Ask them, how many cases are outstanding.

I think it probably makes sense to ask them how many cases are outstanding over the six-month time period that the Canadian Judicial Council has suggested as the ideal time period. Of course, for a case heard yesterday, there will be an outstanding decision.

I think what the member is getting at, is those that may have been around longer than the court would like. So, I'm hoping that undertaking will be reasonable to let us move ahead.

Mr. Goertzen: Sure, and I can await for the response and from the Court of Appeal through the minister's office.

I was told that in Thompson there was some concerns raised about how long it was taking for cases, in fact—and again, I'm asking the question not knowing the answer, which isn't always the case, but in this case it is.

Some cases are waiting two years for a preliminary inquiry date in Thompson. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: Yes, in Thompson is a—unfortunately, a court centre that has a high volume for the population in that area, and that the serious cases that the member for Steinbach is asking about, the Queen's Bench cases, we know there have been some challenges.

I believe it was two years ago or three years ago, Thompson actually had a spike in the number of homicides, which created some difficulties.

The court—the Queen's Bench court has actually undertaken an initiative, which is going to start in September, to effectively use some better tools to try and move cases through more quickly.

I understand that staff will be trained on that—those improvements in the months to come, and I believe that's going to help move cases along more quickly.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the minister for that response.

Would that be correct, though? Would some cases be waiting two years for a preliminary?

Mr. Swan: Yes, you know, I don't have specific knowledge as to that. I mean, when there's—in setting a preliminary inquiry there's a number of different things that have to occur. In many cases, there can be delays because disclosure has to be provided and it

may take some time for law enforcement to pull that together.

Sometimes it can be a scheduled—the Crown attorney; sometimes it can be the schedule of the defence lawyer. And if it is a serious crime, there—sometimes there's a limited number of defence lawyers prepared to take on that work, and a community like Thompson, it's a fairly small defence bar; as well, of course, the availability of the court, although that is the one variable that we—I suppose we have the most control over, and we're taking steps to improve that capacity.

Mr. Goertzen: So it wouldn't surprise the minister if there's a two-year delay. I mean, I'd like it, but I wouldn't—wouldn't surprise him.

Mr. Swan: Yes, you know, if the question is would I be surprised to hear that there's a case where it's taken two years to get a preliminary inquiry, given all those factors, no, I wouldn't be surprised.

Mr. Goertzen: In Ontario they've changed some of their security measures within their courts, and I don't know if a lot of these things already exist in Manitoba, I have not sort of tested out the security, and they've never seen me as a threat, I guess, when I walk in, not so far anyway. They—it might change after Estimates—the one of the things that they were, in Ontario, I think, that they were asking, or changes, you can now require identification. So those who are working in the courts can require identification. People coming in, they can search without warrant, people or property entering the courthouse, and they can search without warrant any person in custody in the courthouse, and they can refuse to allow a person to enter or demand a person leave without—leave using reasonable force if they fail to produce identification.

Are any of those measures, are they currently in place in our courts—house or are they being looked at or is there any changes in security being looked at?

* (15:20)

Mr. Swan: I thank the member for the question about courthouse security. There's actually a law called The Court Security Act, and the court area's designation regulation which deals with some measures of this, which does give the court the ability to control access of individuals to the—to court premises.

I can tell you there was a security review of all regional court offices staffed on a permanent basis. It was completed in February 2009, and it was updated in October 2010 following some further site visits and some additional recommendations, and there are some various measures that are in place that I can talk about.

As the member knows, the Winnipeg courthouse has complete perimeter security. So anybody who wishes to enter the courthouse who is not court staff or a lawyer has to submit to a airport-style screening to make sure they're not bringing in anything that's contraband or anything dangerous. Individuals who refuse to submit to a search like that are not permitted access to the courthouses.

There are similar types of security available at other courthouses. The Brandon courthouse, the Thompson courthouse, The Pas courthouse, Dauphin courthouse, and actually two in Portage: the Queen's Bench—the older courthouse building and the Provincial Court, which is located in the Provincial Building in Portage. And it's up to the judges sitting in those particular courthouses if they want to have perimeter security or security for anybody entering the courthouse. My understanding is that hasn't been used very often, but we think it's important that that be there in an appropriate case.

I understand that in March 2009 we replaced an outdated unit in the law courts complex so there are reasonably new metal detectors in place. There's a protocol in place that provides for the detectors to be used whenever deemed necessary by the sheriff in charge of security at that location or upon request of a member of the judiciary, Crown, or a local police agency, and when those units outside of Winnipeg aren't being used, they're placed in secure storage.

And I guess I can also add that there's some ongoing work that's done to deal with security issues as well. If at any point a judge or another court official has any concerns in the courthouse, they would make immediate contact with the sheriffs, and there would be contact made with anyone who is seen to be a problem.

Mr. Goertzen: Just to drill down a bit then. So is he saying that—do the staff at the courthouse, do they have the ability to demand identification from somebody who's entering the courthouse?

Mr. Swan: Within the Winnipeg courthouse the staff do not demand ID. They do require the, again, if I can call it the airport-style screening. In the other

courthouses it would be at the direction of the judge to set up a similar kind of screening.

Mr. Goertzen: Has there been a request ever from security or have they made any issues about their ability to do some of this? I would imagine that as things go along and we deal with more violent offenders and perhaps people who are coming into the courthouses, is there any look at changing what staff is able to demand when they're dealing with security at the courthouse?

Mr. Swan: No, but there is the security committee comprised of judges and other individuals in the court system. So if they come back with other ideas on how it can enhance security, I would certainly be interested in discussing that.

Mr. Goertzen: That's a question regarding constitutional law. I don't know if I've asked a question on constitutional law before. I know I've got the deputy—I told him I'd surprise him. I don't necessarily mean we need staff shuffle here, but there's indication that one of the duties this year is to respond to approximately 154 constitutional challenges that are expected in 2012 to 2013. Can I get a list of what those constitutional challenges are, not on the record, but in the days ahead?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I see that page 64 is the supplementary information that, indeed, the estimate from Justice is that it'll be responding to approximately 154 constitutional challenges in the upcoming year. As is stated in the report, about three-quarters of those relate to criminal prosecutions.

What I will do is I will ask constitutional law to provide a letter basically summarizing or setting out the types of challenges that they anticipate receiving in the year to come. I would expect, given criminal practice, that there'll be some pretty common patterns of the types of notices that they receive. So I think I can get an answer that will give a pretty good description of the expected workload over there to the member.

Mr. Goertzen: Somewhat related to the constitutional side, but maybe not entirely, in British Columbia, they're dealing with an issue on immediate roadside prohibitions orders that their province had put in, and there's been some judicial challenges around that issue. And I think that they're trying to work through that to allow for an administrative penalty on failing a roadside Breathalyzer for somebody who's been seen to—or

do—has blown over a certain level. Is the department interested in any of that kind of an initiative in the future at all?

We're giving him a—or a head tip that prosecutions—I have a question on prosecutions immediately after that, so.

* (15:30)

Mr. Swan: Yes. British Columbia, in the past two years, brought in a new package of measures to deal with impaired driving and, as the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) correctly indicates, some portions of that package have been successfully challenged in front of a court in British Columbia. The best understanding I have is that, rather than appeal that decision, BC is actually going to be going back to the legislature and looking to bring in some modifications.

British Columbia, like most of the provinces, including Manitoba, has kept moving the goalposts when it comes to administrative penalties for those individuals that are suspected of impaired driving, and one of the steps, which was part of BC's legislative changes from two years ago, was tiered suspensions. We've also moved down that road in Manitoba. I was very pleased that the Legislature unanimously agreed to tiered suspensions here in Manitoba so those caught—or suspected of driving over .05 then receive progressively higher suspensions, the first one starting at 24 hours.

British Columbia's also moved down the way in terms of vehicle impoundment. Manitoba has actually been recognized by MADD as one of the leaders of vehicle impoundment, but we generally use the criminal standard of over .08, whereas British Columbia's been more aggressive on that front.

It's fair to say that we watch what all provinces do. We also do work closely with MADD Canada, who do a lot of work on examining what each province is doing to try and take on impaired driving. Just this morning I was out in Portage la Prairie with the RCMP and the president of MADD Canada, talking about a new program in Portage, which is replicating what they do in Brandon, called the Report Impaired Driver 911. There's been good results in Brandon in the year that it's been running. Also, I was pleased to have the executive director of MADD Canada, Andrew Murie, here to talk about our legislative proposal to—not on the administrative side, but on the other end of it, to require ignition

interlocks for anybody who's convicted of a Criminal Code impaired driving charge.

So BC has taken some steps. It's always good to see what our cousins across the country are up to. We'll be interested to see how they respond to the courts, and we're hopeful that the things we're doing in Manitoba will help to bring down the number of impaired drivers, but we do leave the door open to coming back and looking at other things that we can do.

Mr. Goertzen: Are all the Crown prosecution positions currently filled within the department?

Mr. Swan: Okay. The question of vacancies is always a bit of a snapshot, I guess. I've got a number which I think is appropriate on or about April 13th. I'm told that on that date there were seven permanent positions in Winnipeg with a vacancy and five regional positions—permanent positions where there's a vacancy. I understand that offers have been made to five of the current articling students in Winnipeg which will fill five of those seven positions and an offer is pending a couple of other vacancies.

I understand, regionally, two of those Crown attorney FTEs were, at the time, underfilled with articling students.

There are also some term vacancies as a result of maternity leaves, sick leaves. There is three term positions open in Winnipeg and one open in the regions.

Again, we hope to, first of all, draw from within and use articling students. This does not include the additional positions that we'll be adding over the course of this fiscal year. We announced a further 11 Crown attorneys. So fair to say, it's a good time to consider articling with the Crown, and we'll also be working at trying to attract others, whether it's from private practice or whether it's from other parts of the country to come and join us.

And as the friend knows, I'm going to put it on the record, if my friend wants to consider a career with the Crown, I know some very good people. And I know the member always has a lot of passion and with suitable supervision I think the member would be an excellent Crown attorney.

Mr. Goertzen: I'll take that as a reference from the minister, then, for any future application. It might go almost anywhere. You never know where it might go.

Can I get the current workload so it's—of today or, you know, send a letter, I suppose, for the workloads per Crown attorneys that's generated by PRISM system, I believe?

* (15:40)

Mr. Swan: I'll take that request under advisement. I don't have material with me today.

Mr. Goertzen: That information is still available, right? Just not right here?

Mr. Swan: Yes, you know, it's compiled from time to time. I could take that under advisement, try and provide something for the member that won't require Crown attorneys to be counting files as opposed to doing their work, but I'll see what we can provide.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I remember a few years ago, the then-minister was quite proud, sort of, this new PRISM, I think that was the acronym for whatever it stood for. The system generated that and it could do that.

The system still does that, right? Nothing's changed in terms of how the computer system tracks these things, doesn't it?

Mr. Swan: The member's correct. There is a system called PRISM that manages a lot of the information in the files, and nothing has changed. Nothing substantial has changed in PRISM. Again, it just doesn't spit out numbers each day, but we can go back and try to find the last time that information was compiled and provide that.

Mr. Goertzen: All right. It's not my intention to have staff sort of counting files. I was under the impression, with different requests in the past, that this was actually produced quite readily now. So I look forward, then, to getting the most recent statistics that the department has from that computer system.

In terms of family law and the issue of records, particularly divorce records, but any sort of family records, I'd asked the Premier (Mr. Selinger) during his Estimates—and I won't get into the substance of the issue of NDP staff going through divorce records—but I did ask the general question to him, and he suggested it might be more appropriate to put it to you, about the, sort of, the policy reasons or the public policy reasons for having those kinds of records open to the public.

I know British Columbia, I understand, has a much more restrictive system. Looking at their—I

think it's under their rule book for the Court of Queen's Bench or their equivalent of it, but what's the minister's position on the accessibility? I think he practised that law—or that area of law when he was in private practice, so how does he feel about the openness of those records?

Mr. Swan: Well, some records are already not available for anyone to look at. Generally speaking, child protection cases are not able to be reviewed.

Generally speaking, I mean, we do have an open court system. Having said that, there is the availability of any individual who's a party in a court action to ask the judge to make an order to seal the records so that there's no access, or limited access, by other individuals.

Generally speaking, I mean, judges control the availability of those documents, so there—I don't believe that's a matter that the judges have taken up as a major issue, and I don't know that I see it as a major issue either. Again, generally speaking, we do have a very open court system. We've already—there already is an exception for child protection; I have no disagreement with that. But I—at this point, I don't believe there's any intention to go down the road that BC has done. The judges, on the other hand, may come back with some ideas of things they'd like to do.

Mr. Goertzen: Under recent changes to The Manitoba Evidence Act, there was going to be a listing of gangs who were proven to be criminal organizations. How many gangs have now been listed under The Manitoba Evidence Act?

Mr. Swan: Well, yes, the member is right. We passed legislation that would allow for the application to designate a particular crime organization as—to have them designated as a criminal organization for the purpose of provincial legislation. The goal of that is to assist with various things that we can do under provincial legislation within our own control.

And we set up that legislation quite carefully because we knew there would be—it would be a minefield for problems if we didn't proceed carefully. We set up a procedure that would be, I think it's fair to say, pretty painstaking to make sure that all the evidence was gathered and that there was a complete case. We went through—and the member knows when we briefed him on the bill, there was a whole bunch of different steps that need to be taken,

each one of which has to be answered in the affirmative.

So, as of today, there has been no criminal organization deemed such under this act, but I do expect that there will be some applications coming forward.

Mr. Goertzen: Regarding municipal police boards, is it still the intention of the government to require every municipal police department to have its own municipal police board?

Mr. Swan: Yes.

Mr. Goertzen: There's been no consideration of regional boards in areas where it might make more sense to have that?

Mr. Swan: Yes, the legislation does allow for regional police boards. So, if there were communities that were ready to move in that direction, that would be—that could be a possibility.

Mr. Goertzen: I undertook a—an experiment, which I don't know if I'll do again, but I did this time on using social media, asking if any citizens had any questions for the Minister of Justice. This is almost like the forum that they use sometimes in election debates, I guess, now, and they let people—average citizens ask questions. So I did get a couple of questions. So these aren't my questions, so please don't speak to the—don't comment on quality of the question. They're probably much better than my questions actually. But I'm going to read you one of the questions I got, and there's of couple others.

The question I have about justice is regarding the remanding of cases. It seems to me that cases are remanded quite often. Doesn't that tie up the courts unnecessarily? Would it not be more efficient to set a court date and if, for unique circumstances, one side needs an extension, that should be determined ahead of time. This would also require both sides to make all information available in a reasonable time. I don't know much about the system, but it sure seems like tons of time, which is money, is wasted by continual remanding of cases.

And I will respond to the person who sent this, with the minister's answers.

* (15:50)

Mr. Swan: It's a big question and an important question. I would agree with any Manitoban who says there's more that we can do to try and move cases more swiftly through the court system.

The existing system, which does sometimes result in cases being remanded—the remands happen for various reasons. I mean, some cases, it's in order to let a party obtain counsel, whether it's a counsel of their own choosing or Legal Aid, private bar lawyer or Legal Aid staff lawyer. In some cases, it's in order to allow the lawyer to see particulars, which is a brief statement by the police of what is the key evidence that led to the charge being laid. In many cases, it's because the full disclosure hasn't yet been provided by the Crown attorney to the person or the person's defence lawyer, and sometimes, in any case, it's out of the control of the Crown attorney, because the police has the duty to provide that disclosure.

Sometimes a remand can happen because the Crown attorney or the defence lawyer for that matter need to speak to witnesses.

Sometimes parties change lawyers. And certainly when there's steps which could result in a final hearing taking place, the Crown certainly wants to make sure that police and witnesses are available. The defence counsel wants to know that witnesses are available too.

The Provincial Court, several years ago, undertook something called the Front End Project, which was intended to move cases along more speedily and actually have a judge seized or involved in the matter at a very early step. That Front End Project was well recognized, not just in Manitoba but by the United Nations. It won a prize or an award for being an innovative way to deal with things. We'd like to find more ways we can move ahead on that kind of approach to move things ahead more quickly.

Certainly, there is a desire to speed things up and to move things more effectively. We changed around the department a little bit, so Dave Brickwood, who's sitting here with us, instead of just taking over the portfolio of the assistant deputy minister of Administration and Finance, has now been given the role of Administration, Finance and Innovation.

We have a director of Innovation who works closely with the ADM and will be looking at ways—they are actively looking at ways that we can make cases move through the system more efficiently, provide less wasted time for our Crown attorneys, provide better scheduling within the justice system to try and get the court, the defence lawyer and the Crown attorney all ready to set dates and have things move ahead.

So it's a very big question, and I hope that provides a bit of an answer as to what we're planning on doing.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister. I'll send that to Trevor who sent that in.

I have two more questions, and you know I did specifically say no case-specific questions or I would have got a lot more, and so you'll be happy I filtered that out for you.

There was a question about whether or not prisoners have Internet or computer access in our jails.

* (16:00)

Ms. Melanie Wight, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Swan: Yes, there are some facilities where inmates have access to computers that are connected to the Internet. In those facilities the reason for the access is for educational reasons, because I'm sure that the member for Steinbach, like myself, we sometimes hear from people who believe that people have access to computers and TVs in their cells. I've been around every facility and haven't seen that yet, and I don't think the member has either. But, yes, where appropriate, inmates may very well have access to a computer hooked to the Internet for the education and training purposes in our facilities.

Mr. Goertzen: And then the last question I had provided by a citizen, was what was the total cost of transporting prisoners between jails and between the jail and the courthouse? What does the province spend every year on transporting prisoners between facilities and between the court and jails, I guess?

Mr. Swan: I don't want this experience in participatory democracy to come up short. From discussing with my official, it would be very difficult to come up with a global figure because there are many—there's a few different ways that expenses are incurred transporting individuals in the justice system.

Some of the transfers between, for example—just as an example, the Milner Ridge and the Winnipeg courthouse would be through the sheriffs. In other situations, it may be the correctional officials who do the transfers. In some cases, it may be transfers from a correctional facility to a courthouse; in some cases it may be transfers between correctional facilities or

between a correctional facility and a remote community, some driving, some flying.

We can give a general number for some areas of that. I suppose we can give a global number, but I don't actually have anything at my fingertips that can allow you to give a quick a pithy response to the Manitoban, who's asked what is not an unreasonable question.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that. Maybe what he can do is when he gets that—I'm sure I've got a list of other answers to questions that I've asked—but maybe just put that on a separate letter, and I'll send that on to the person who asked me that question, so, just the global and then the breakdowns as you sort of described them would be fine.

Mr. Swan: We'll try to provide what we reasonably can without obviously getting employees to get away from their regular duties to do that. I'm sure we can come up with some ballpark figures on how that works.

Mr. Goertzen: Sure, that would be fine. Like, I mean, I know that in the—I won't send this as part of the response to the constituent—but I know that there are breakdowns in the expenditures. You know, they go to different airlines and different sorts of things. I'm sure that there must be sort of record kept.

Thank you for participating in my democracy project. We'll see if we do that again next year.

The member for the small communities of Morden-Winkler have some questions now.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Thank you, Madam Acting Chairperson, and it's my pleasure to be at Justice Estimates this afternoon to ask a few questions in regard to Manitoba Youth Centre—Agassiz Youth Centre, and also just a welcome to the deputy minister and staff persons for being here as well this afternoon.

I want to move things along—just conscious of the time. So my question, specifically, has to do with a new protocol that's in place at Agassiz Youth Centre. And can the minister indicate that there—or can he clarify that there has been a move to a new protocol in place at that facility called the responsible youth culture?

Mr. Swan: My officials are searching for the best possible answer. Can the member give just a bit more clarification on what this is?

Mr. Friesen: I understand there was formerly in place at that facility a protocol, an organizational philosophy, or a set of principles and practices that was referred to as the Positive Peer Culture. And it provided instruction as to how staff would deal with residents there. It would provide information about what practices would be undertaken or what would be done when there were incidents in the facility. And I understand that, more recently, there's been the implementation of a new set of guiding principles or practices, and that's been referred to as a responsible youth culture.

I'm wondering if the minister would provide clarification as to if that change has, indeed, taken place and what precipitated the change to the new protocol.

* (16:10)

Mr. Swan: I'm told that Agassiz uses—it does use the Responsible Youth Culture program, but it wouldn't really be right to say that it supplanted the older Positive Peer Culture program. What this new program does, it combines Positive Peer Culture as well as equip another plan specifically designed for young persons in a correctional centre.

The goal at AYC is to provide a safe, caring, positive environment based on mutual respect and accountability. It promotes healthy productive choices and gradual successful reintegration into the community because, of course, individuals who are housed at Agassiz Youth Centre are almost always sentenced young offenders, although there are certainly exceptions to that and changes to that. But, generally speaking, it's been primarily sentenced offenders out there.

And, of course, under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, anybody who's a sentenced offender will serve a portion of that sentence back in the community. So we're looking at doing that. It also equips the youth with useful skills and abilities through individual and group processes—the way youth look at the way they treat others, the way they treat themselves and the way they treat society.

So the idea of Responsible Youth Culture is to try to make it a 24-7 system—a way of living for young persons. I know I've had the opportunity to be out at Agassiz, and you see that there is actually a pretty impressive discipline for youth who may have done some very serious and, frankly, very violent things.

So I can try and answer your questions. I don't know if that's fully answered your question. It hasn't really supplanted what was there before; it's sort of built on top of the program that was already in existence at Agassiz.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister please indicate when the change came that established the Responsible Youth Culture?

Mr. Swan: I think the fairest way to describe it is, it's been more of an evolutionary process than an announcement that one day this new system would be in place. Of course, it involved training; it's involved involving youth at Agassiz in becoming involved with the system. So that changeover, or that change, has been happening for at least the last year or two. But there's been—there's no one day I can point to, to say, this is the day that the Responsible Youth Culture program came into existence. It's been pulling different pieces of it in.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for that response.

I wonder if the minister could indicate, let's say at Agassiz Youth Centre, apart from front-line management and administrative positions, how many current positions would exist for staff who—how should we say?—would be in the units who would be directly dealing with residents.

Mr. Swan: Before we begin anymore, I'd—I think—did I hear the member, right? That it—you basically want the number of staff at Agassiz Youth Centre, excluding management staff?

Mr. Friesen: Yes. If the minister could just produce a number of those positions, not in administration or in management, but those positions, let's say full-time or full-time equivalent, of people who would have direct contact with the residents day-to-day in a supervisory capacity.

Mr. Swan: Yes. Okay, I'll try to do that. Just keeping in mind that, I mean, even superintendent there, the managers do regularly have contact with youth but, for the purposes of your request, we'll exclude them.

And what about positions such as teachers? They wouldn't be directly supervising youth in the dormitory where they're being kept, but they would have contact. Do you want teachers included or excluded?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I would be—I'm not sure what terminology is used at Agassiz Youth Centre, I

would be looking—I mean, in a correctional facility that wasn't for youth you'd call them guards.

In this specific situation in the youth centre, I would be wondering whether the minister could just indicate how many people who have direct and regular contact but who act in a supervisory capacity; who oversee their actions; who are in those units with them; who report incidents of violence or misbehaviour; who direct their daily affairs, those kind of things, whatever terminology you attach to them.

So, outside of administration, outside of management, I wouldn't need the numbers for people who are teaching, but whatever equivalent position you would use instead of guard.

Mr. Swan: Okay, I'll do my best and I'll probably read over *Hansard* just—we'll look over *Hansard* just to make sure that we're trying to answer the question as best we can.

I mean, look, if there's an incident, if a youth acts out, whether it's a manager, whether it's a teacher, whether it's somebody involved in vocational training, or whether it's someone who would be a front-line worker that would work primarily in and around the cottages or the cells, they would all report that sort of thing, but I'll try to give you the best answer I can.

Mr. Friesen: Yes. I believe the minister just used the term, he called it a front-line worker, and that would be certainly the kind of information I'd be looking for from him. If he could supply it in terms of how many of front-line workers in those units there are at any one time.

And, further to that, if the minister could also then indicate, I would appreciate in knowing at the present time, if, of those front-line workers there's a full complement of staff or whether there are currently any positions unfilled and, of those current staff members, what percentage would he say would have less than two years seniority?

Mr. Swan: Sure. I'll try to provide an answer to that. Just keeping in mind that there are full-time Corrections employees. We also do have part-time employees and, if a position is unfilled, we still find ways to fill it for the operational purposes of the centre.

* (16:20)

So that may be a part-timer stepping up and taking more hours; it may be a full-time officer

coming and working extra hours in the facility. Generally, the comment about the nature of our Corrections staff is—I think is very fair. I mean, as we've expanded jail capacity, we've also embarked on a process of hiring, well, to use the technical term, a lot of correctional officers, and you'll see in the documents that we will be continuing to hire correctional officers at Agassiz and across the system with the result that there are a lot of correctional workers coming on line. And we just want to make sure that they're properly trained and properly managed. For example, for Agassiz, we opened a new 48-bed unit in the last two years, which was actually well received by the city of Portage la Prairie because it continued to provide opportunities for employment, and not just the city of Portage, but, certainly, the entire central region.

So I'll try to give the best answer I can. The main answer is that, when we do challenges, we make sure we take the steps to have somebody there to protect the safety of the other correctional staff and the safety of the residents in the centre.

Mr. Friesen: Further to that, if the minister could also provide by comparison, then, those same numbers for going back, perhaps, maybe two years and then four years and then six years, just to paint a fuller picture.

But the other question that I would like to ask would be just with the rate of—or with—to the extent of have senior staff at Agassiz Youth Centre expressed any concerns about the rate of staff turnover when it comes to those same front-line workers or, even in the absence of their expressing concerns, would there be any evidence to suggest that there is a high rate or an inordinately high rate of staff turnover at Agassiz Youth Centre at this time?

Mr. Swan: First, with respect to the staffing numbers at AYC, I will treat the member no better and no worse than the member from Brandon West, who made a request for staffing while I was at Brandon Correctional Centre. So I think, for Agassiz we can reasonably quickly pull together staffing numbers over the past two years. What we did is we just used May as the appropriate month, and we can give a snapshot going back two years.

With respect to turnover and staffing issues, it's a regular practice for my officials to meet with MGEU, the union that represents correctional officers, and they discuss a number of different issues. I can tell you it has been expressed that when there are individuals that leave the union wants to make sure

that we're moving quickly and appropriately to fill those positions because of the expansions over the past number of years.

Again, it is a relatively young workforce, and there are individuals who decide either that this is not what they're cut out to do or they may pursue some other opportunities. So I think it's fair to say that maintaining the appropriate staff is a challenge from time to time for Corrections, and they're always looking for talented people who want to come in and make a career out of it.

Mr. Goertzen: We're prepared to move to line-by-line consideration of the Estimates.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$166,204,000 for Justice, Criminal Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$35,535,000 for Justice, Civil Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$196,965,000 for Justice, Corrections, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$53,620,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,707,000 for Justice, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,266,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 4.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Acting Chair, I have a motion for the committee.

I move, seconded by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson),

THAT the Minister's Salary be reduced to \$89.99, the price of an upper-deck Winnipeg Jet's ticket, not a first-row seat.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): It has been moved by the honourable member for Steinbach,

THAT the Minister's Salary be reduced to \$89.99, the price of an upper-deck Winnipeg Jets' ticket, not a first-row seat.

The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Acting Chairperson, request a recorded vote.

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Is there a second member to support the challenge—yes, thank you.

A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

* (16:30)

All sections in Chamber for formal vote.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Chairperson: This section of the Committee of Supply, meeting in the Chamber, considering the Estimates of the Department of Justice, the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) moved the following motion,

THAT the Minister's Salary be reduced to \$89.99, the price of an upper-deck Winnipeg Jets' ticket, not a first-row seat.

* (16:50)

Order. This motion was defeated on a voice vote, and, subsequently, two members requested a formal vote on this manner.

The question before the committee, then, is the motion of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 16, Nays 30.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

The sections of the Committee of Supply will now continue with consideration of the departmental Estimates.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Is there any further debate on the Minister's Salary? Seeing none,

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,842,000 for Justice, Administration, Finance and Justice Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

FAMILY SERVICES AND LABOUR

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this

section of the committee are the Estimates of Family Services and Labour.

Shall we recess briefly to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates?

Are we prepared to proceed immediately?

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Labour.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Mr. Chairperson, I just want to say, not take too long, but, of course, it's a new portfolio for me. Half of it is new anyways, the Family Services side, and I do want to say, as I know the critic will know, it's a very challenging portfolio, challenging because you are dealing with people often who are in terrible situations. You know, you're dealing with children who may have undergone horrible kinds of abuse and exploitation. You're dealing with families who are facing the prospect of losing their children.

But you're also dealing with people who are tremendously dedicated to the protection of kids, and I don't think there is a higher calling, frankly, in the public service than doing that kind of work.

So I had one conversation, I remember, with someone about—were—was asking me how it was going in the new portfolio, and I was talking about how it was very difficult and very challenging, and you spent your days hearing very difficult stories. But they also reminded me that, at the same time, you're also in a position, really, to do some incredible things for people who need that kind of help.

So I've enjoyed the time that I've spent. I've got a tremendously capable and dedicated department staff, some of which we'll get to see as we move through the Estimates process.

Also, say, in addition, of course, to the child welfare side, we also have responsibility for child care, and there has been a lot of good work done in the child-care area in terms of expanding the number of spaces, being able to put in place a capital plan and capital projects.

Also, putting in place some new criteria to make sure that we have a robust early childhood education program. But we know that there's much more that we need to do when it comes to early learning in child care.

And so, if you look at the budget for this year, you know, we see that we've got an increase, of course, in our department by about 73, 74 million, or 7.7 per cent. We know that that is, I think, reflection of the government's priorities and a reflection of the priority that we put on services to families. If you—as we go through the Estimates, we'll explore that number, I know, in more detail.

But, certainly, a big part of that budget is also disability programs and, I know, as this House will know, I've been responsible now for the portfolio of people with disabilities for a couple of years. And, before coming into Cabinet, I had the opportunity to work with the former minister of Family Services on these issues. They're very important issues to me, and we will continue to do that work through this budget by providing additional funding to services for adults and children with disabilities.

As I also talked a little bit about our commitment in early learning and child care—and we see, of course, additional funding being made available in that area as well.

We also know in this Estimates—and we'll have to see how it goes, because we've moved the employment and income assistance out of the Department of Family Services and into the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. So I know there's still people, certainly, in the public that aren't aware of that change, and I know we may get some questions here. So we'll do our best to facilitate an answer to those questions as they come up.

Certainly, that transition is moving along. It is our goal to make sure that the people who receive those services continue to receive good services and a seamless kind of service from us.

We know that for many of those folks who are on the Employment and Income Assistance Program, they also receive services from Family Services.

They may also receive disability supports. So we want to make sure that they continue to get all of those services in a coordinated fashion, and that's certainly going to be our goal as we move forward on that transition.

I would say the other kind of interesting part for me about this portfolio—and I'll probably make many references to this as we go forward—is that when I became the Minister of Family Services, I also was two months into becoming a mother for the first time. I now have a six-month-old son at home. His name is Harry, and so that has brought for me a whole new perspective to this work, as I'm sure it did to any former minister in any party. That when you spend your day doing your best to help kids who are very vulnerable, and you go home at the end of the day and you look at your own kid, you can't help but feel the stories of those other children very personally.

And so I know that, no matter what party we belong to, I'm sure that we all share that experience when we look at our own kids, that what we wish for our own kids, we wish for all the children of Manitoba.

So that's my opening statement. And I could talk for another 15 seconds and then we can certainly look forward to the opening statement from the critic. And I look forward to answering her questions, but also taking some of her advice, because I know she has a great amount of experience in this area. And I do think that she's many, many things that I can learn from. So I hope this exchange is one of questions, but I also look forward to hearing what her thoughts are on what we can do better in the department.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 14, 2012

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Labour Force Decrease	
Bill 28—The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act		Cullen; Bjornson	1141
Rondeau	1133	Provincial Income Tax Rate	
		Ewasko; Struthers	1141
Bill 30—The Regulated Health Professions Amendment and Personal Health Information Amendment Act		Flooding	
Oswald	1134	Helwer; Ashton	1142
		Helwer; Struthers	1142
Petitions		St. Theresa Point	
Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba		Gerrard; Selinger	1143
Graydon	1134	First Nations Communities	
Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach		Gerrard; Selinger	1144
Goertzen	1134	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	
PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals		Gaudreau; Chief	1144
Briese	1135	Social Assistance Program	
Access to Clean Water for Manitoba First Nations		Briese; Struthers	1145
Gerrard	1135	Matter of Privilege	
Ministerial Statements		Taillieu	1145
Southeastern Wildfires Update		Howard	1147
Mackintosh	1135	Gerrard	1148
Smook	1136	Members' Statements	
Gerrard	1136	Metcalf's Garage (Treherne)	
Oral Questions		Pedersen	1148
Government Performance		Alana Robert	
McFadyen; Selinger	1136	Blady	1149
Finance Minister		Glen Robinson	
Schuler; Selinger	1138	Graydon	1149
Cabinet Ministers		Nursing Profession	
Taillieu; Howard	1139	Caldwell	1150
Job Loss		Municipal Flooding Property Tax Grant	
Cullen; Bjornson	1140	Nevakshonoff	1150

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Committee of Supply

(Concurrent Sections)

Infrastructure and Transportation 1151

Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives 1167

Justice 1178

Family Services and Labour 1189

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>