

**Third 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*

**Vol. LXVI No. 36 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 26, 2014**

ISSN 0542-5492

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

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ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 26, 2014

*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 and 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.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Mr. Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

### PETITIONS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing no bills, we'll move on to petitions.

#### Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that

their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by M. Melanson, J. Penner, T. Hay and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any further petitions? Seeing none, committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to oral questions, I have some guests that I would like to introduce and draw the honourable members' attention to.

In the public gallery we have Joe, Alfina and Angelina Grande, who are the guests of the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

And also seated in the public gallery we have from Blumenort School 45 grade 6 students under the direction of Cameron Hiebert. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

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

And I seem to have missed this one, but I'd like to draw the attention again to the public gallery where we have with us today Chris Kennedy, retired registrar of the Brandon University, and Kathy Kennedy, host on CJOB radio, who are the guests of the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell).

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

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Fiscal Management Government Spending Record

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Well, I want to wish the MLA for St. Boniface well with this upcoming first-quarter poll. I know there's a lot at stake for him, and I know that it's an evaluation of his leadership in many ways.

The decision to spend the vote tax subsidy in its entirety on taxpayer—using taxpayer money to fund scary fairy-tale attack advertisements was his, and it'll be a measure of his decision. Those results, of course, will be of interest to his colleagues as well, and I'm sure they'll be watching for different reasons.

But the fact remains that there is a pattern emerging here. And this Premier's pattern is very clear: He takes tax money to buy attack ads just before a poll. He splurges on a helicopter purchased just before an election. And, of course, his priorities were not the taxpayers of Manitoba when he did that, when he made those decisions, so this'll be an evaluation of that and his decision-making processes.

Would the Premier acknowledge today that this kind of spending is not smart spending but rather is selfish spending?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to answer the question, why we think spending in health care is a priority for Manitobans.

But before I do that, I'd like to table the document that the Leader of the Opposition referred to yesterday and put that on the record so that people can see it. And, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Leader of the Opposition again put misleading information on the record. He indicated in 2001 and 2002 that we had made a futile effort to correct the StatsCan record about the number of people living in Manitoba.

And I want it to be clear to him that we do stand up for Manitobans, when Manitobans are undercounted in the province of Manitoba, and they require services and supports like everybody else, that we stand up for them. That's very different than the Leader of the Opposition.

And I want him to look at that document and understand that in that period of time, there was—we had alleged that there was a serious undercount of 19,000 people. And I want him to have that for information because in my next answer I will show

him what the result of that intervention was by the provincial government.

**Mr. Pallister:** And the government agenda becomes even clearer, Mr. Speaker: lie, buy and cry, that's the NDP agenda. Lie about somebody else's record to cover up their own lies, buy their way to power with large, giant tax hikes that they promised they would not invoke, and then, even though they're recipients of incredible amounts of largesse from elsewhere, cry for more like a spoiled teenager.

Now, the biggest boost in federal health-care transfers in the history of federal health-care transfers has occurred during this government's administration. But, oh, my goodness, it's not enough, Mr. Speaker. We have to listen to the NDP whine for more.

And no wonder, because they throw money around without concern for results. The Premier himself said in Estimates, medicare is about spending, nothing more than that. They see a shiny red helicopter, got to have it; that'd be a great campaign ad, got to have it at any cost. Break all the rules, the AG says, throw money away; break all the rules and pay for three and get one. Well, that's not smart shopping.

Would the Premier just admit that his shopping is focused not on being smart but on being selfish?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we raised an issue with an undercount in Manitoba. I'd like to table a second document for the Leader of the Opposition now, and the members of the Legislature, on what occurred as a result of that intervention by the government during that period of time.

\* (13:40)

We were concerned there were 19,000 people were missing. The Leader of the Opposition alleged that that was a futile effort, and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, if he looks at the document, he will see that the federal government corrected the record to the tune of 34,000 Manitobans they discovered in Manitoba.

So I want to give the Leader of the Opposition the opportunity now to correct the record, to apologize for misleading the House once again about what actually happened the last time this issue came up. Mr. Speaker, 34,000 were recognized by StatsCan and the federal government as legitimate citizens living in Manitoba and deserving of the supports like all other Canadians get across this country.

**Mr. Pallister:** Lie, buy and cry, Mr. Speaker. The Premier should apologize for breaking the laws of our province. That would be a good start.

You know, when these poll results come out, I know that his caucus will be standing behind him, Mr. Speaker, but if I were him, I'd check for weapons. The ideof March might have passed but the weapons might be there, and if the polls don't show that this strategy of deflection, of overspending, of promising, of misleading—if that strategy doesn't work, the Premier's out of options, and his colleagues won't be blaming themselves for that.

The crisis in our social-service delivery, in our infrastructure delivery, in our justice system, it won't be handled by the ministers. They'll be looking to blame the Premier for it just as much as he's looked to blame everyone else every time something goes wrong for him. Closing ERs and running longer waiting lines, waiting lists for treatment lengthened, waiting lists for ambulances lengthened, and will the health-care minister that just moved from that post take responsibility? No, she'll blame the Premier.

So this poll result, I think, the Premier should—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The honourable leader's time has expired.

**Mr. Selinger:** Let's try one more time. He's got two documents now that unequivocally demonstrate he was wrong, Mr. Speaker. The correction was 30,900 citizens in Manitoba as a result of StatsCan's intervention. The Leader of the Opposition has the chance to apologize to the Legislature for his misleading information.

He has the chance to stand up for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. He could stand up for Manitobans when the federal government decides to close Veterans Affairs offices. He could stand up for Manitobans when the federal government decides to cancel the band councillor program—band constable program in the province of Manitoba. He has a chance to stand up for Manitobans when it comes to allowing more people to live in Manitoba from all around the world.

And once again he has demonstrated today that when he puts information on the record, he never takes responsibility for his errors. He undercounted the number of jobs that was going to be created in Manitoba by our infrastructure program. He used the same approach when he made announcements when

he was in office, and today he again refuses to take responsibility for misleading the Legislature.

### ER Services (Beausejour)

#### Physician Services

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the pleasure to stand up in this House and ask the Health Minister a question which, once again, as she has done with many other questions coming from this side of the House, nothing, no answer.

So today I ask again, Mr. Speaker, as simply put as I can: Do I have her commitment that during the upcoming spring break and for the many busy months ahead of us, do the citizens—will the citizens have access to a doctor in the ER in Beausejour?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for the question. We know that people want safe health care close to home. It's why we are always recruiting to bring in more nurses, more doctors and to make sure that people have access close to home.

We understand why the residents of Beausejour and the surrounding area are concerned, and ideally we do need physicians to be taking call to ensure that there is always a physician available locally. I know that the region is working with the local physicians to alleviate the burden of those physicians who are taking call to ensure that everybody is taking call to provide full service. The RHA has regular meetings with the medical staff at the hospital and we feel we are making good progress.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are always working to recruit more doctors in Manitoba.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Day after day this minister gets up and repeats her talking-points rhetoric with no plan, Mr. Speaker, with no plan.

Fact is past three years the call list at the Beausejour ER have had more and more blanks on it. The temp nurse service has had an increase in usage. What this tells me is that the employees within the IERHA are losing faith in this minister's leadership. She has no plan, just rhetoric.

Why is she putting patients at risk and closing ERs?

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell you that we are always working to recruit more doctors. It's why we're training more doctors. It's why we're increasing rural residencies to doctors, and, Mr. Speaker, we know that our plan is

working. Do we have more to do? Absolutely, and we will not stop working on it.

But because of our aggressive recruitment plans, we have new doctors that are coming into Pine Falls and into Lac du Bonnet, and we will keep working with the people of Beausejour to have more doctors there as well. I know the local RHA is working with physicians in the area to see that all of them take calls so that we can relieve the burden on those who are taking calls. But I can tell you that we are actively recruiting, and the money is always on the table.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Mr. Speaker, there's a group of concerned citizens with us today in the gallery.

This minister has no plan. Call-list blanks are up in the ERs. Temp employees are on the rise. ER services are drastically being reduced, which is putting patients' care at risk.

What assurances does this minister give to those citizens of the Beausejour, Brokenhead and surrounding area that during the upcoming spring break and for the many busy months ahead of us citizens will have access to a doctor in the ER in Beausejour?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, we have been working hard to train more doctors and to bring in more doctors. It's why there are now 562 more doctors working in Manitoba than when they were in government. More than 120 of those doctors are working in rural Manitoba.

We know we want to bring in more doctors, and I will assure people of Beausejour and across Manitoba that we will never cut \$37 million from rural health care like they did when they were in office.

#### **Vita and District Health Centre ER Reopening Timeline**

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye):** Mr. Speaker, 19 ERs closed. Medical experts agree having the ER at the Vita hospital closed is like playing Russian roulette with people's lives.

People's lives have been saved by doctors when the ER at the Vita hospital was open. Seventeen hundred people per year visit the ER when it was open and operational.

Mr. Speaker, when will this Health Minister stop gambling with the lives of the people in southeastern

Manitoba and reopen the Vita ER, or does she just not care?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, we know that Manitoba families want access close to home. It's why we are always working with our RHAs to continue recruiting.

We have not removed any funding to the emergency-room coverage in Vita. The money for staffing is still on the table and we are actively recruiting. But in order to make sure that we are thinking of patient care and patient safety first, there does need to be a minimum number of doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals available. The Vita health centre is still offering clinical and hospital support, but patient safety must be the top priority.

We will keep recruiting. The money is there, but we need to make sure patient safety is our top priority.

**Mr. Smook:** This government has promised that the ER in Vita would reopen, and 525 days later the people of southeastern Manitoba deserve to know when, what is that day?

This government has closed 19 emergency rooms since they took power. People in southeastern Manitoba are starting to wonder if they can trust this new Minister of Health after the former minister's record of closing ERs.

Mr. Speaker, when will the ER at the Vita hospital reopen?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, we have turned around that massive exit of doctors that we saw in the '90s under them and we've increased medical seats as well. When we came into office, they'd cut medical seats down to 70 doctors training a year. We're up to 110 and we're keeping more of them in Manitoba.

Do we want more doctors? Absolutely. It's why we've increased rural residencies, it's why we are always actively—to recruit more doctors, it's why our efforts are paying off. We have more than 562 more doctors working now than when we came into office, and more than 120 of them are working in rural Manitoba.

We want more doctors, and we're going to keep recruiting and we're going to keep training more of them.

**Mr. Smook:** With 19 ERs closed, there should be some doctors around.

\* (13:50)

The people of southeastern Manitoba deserve a date for when the ER will reopen. No more rhetoric and spin from this minister and her cue cards. The government is gambling on road conditions and ambulance availability when it comes to health care and safety of residents in southeastern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, when will the ER in Vita reopen and when will this minister stop gambling with the health care of Manitobans? Can the minister tell the residents of southeastern Manitoba and the people in the gallery when the ER at the Vita hospital will open?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell the people of Vita that we have not removed the funding to the emergency in Vita. We will still keep recruiting for there. But patient safety has to remain the top priority. There does need to be a minimum number of doctors, nurses and health-care staff in order to keep it open. We do have the clinic open to offer clinic and hospital support.

And beyond the 120 doctors we've recruited to rural Manitoba, we see new doctors have just come to Minnedosa, to Pine Falls, to Lac du Bonnet. We will keep working with every region, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they have the doctors that they deserve and the access that we think they need.

#### **ER Services (Killarney) Physician Services**

**Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods):** Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is under the NDP government 2,200 doctors have left the province of Manitoba.

We are still facing doctor shortages in southwestern Manitoba. Deloraine, Boissevain, Killarney still rotate the emergency-room service on an ongoing basis. This leaves uncertainty in the communities as people are not sure which ER is going to be open. Additionally, people now have to travel up to a hundred miles to find an open emergency room.

Will the minister commit to restoring the Killarney emergency room to full status, or is this the health care Manitobans can now expect?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** I do thank the member for the question, because I know that he will be happy to hear that the region is sponsoring four international medical graduates to go through the provincial assessment process who should be

able to practise by this spring in various ERs around the region.

**Mr. Cullen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is about patient safety or, in this case, the lack of patient safety.

Mr. Speaker, this government made a promise to residents of Killarney and area that full-time ER service would be available April 1st of this year. Killarney is to have a complement of 5.5 doctors. However, Killarney will be down to one doctor next week.

Unless the minister can find four and a half doctors over the course of the next week, this government has broken yet another promise. Is this, in case, the fact?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, we've got four new doctors coming into the area, and I will keep working until we find more for that area.

**Mr. Cullen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we will see if Killarney has their emergency room full-time next week.

Nineteen ERs closed across the province, many more sharing on-call services. More money going into health care than ever before and Manitobans are getting poorer service than ever before. This government keeps providing lip service and the situation keeps getting worse. Unless the minister can find four and a half positions—and doctors over the next week, residents will suffer through yet another broken promise.

Is this the patient safety that the minister keeps talking about?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, we have a strong plan to bring in more doctors and it's been working. We brought in more than 562 new doctors in this province since we've been in office. We brought in more than 120 to rural Manitoba, four more coming in the spring to the member's area. We've got new ones coming into Minnedosa, Lac du Bonnet, Pine Falls as well, and we will keep working on it. We're training more doctors. We're recruiting more doctors and we will keep doing that.

What we won't do is cut \$37 million from rural health like the Leader of the Opposition did when he was around the Cabinet table and then wonder why all the doctors ran from this province.

### ER Services Rural Manitoba

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz):** What a revelation, Mr. Speaker, after 14 years they have a strong plan and they found four doctors.

Mr. Speaker, there are 19 closed ERs in Manitoba and many others on life support offering only part-time services. Emergencies are not bound by time of day or days of the week.

When is the Minister of Health going to drop her empty rhetoric and spin and actually take some action to improve ER services in Manitoba?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** Well, let's put a few numbers on the record. It's actually more than 560 doctors that we brought in. We've also brought in more than 3,500 more nurses since we've been in office. They actually had record numbers of doctors leaving the province under their watch.

And let's talk about nurses for just a moment. Mr. Speaker, they fired a thousand nurses when they were in government. That doesn't leave a lot of people in ERs anywhere in Manitoba.

**Mr. Briese:** Mr. Speaker, 14 years and 2,200 doctors have left this province.

There are five hospitals in my constituency and one nearby in Minnedosa. McCreary is short a doctor. Gladstone and Carberry have part-time ER services. MacGregor has no doctor. Neepawa and Minnedosa are both short of doctors and accepting no patients. She tells us she's got four doctors coming. When the NDP formed government, all these facilities had adequate doctor resources.

Why has the Minister of Health ignored patient safety? Why has she actually allowed ER services to deteriorate under her watch?

**Ms. Selby:** Five hundred and sixty-two net new doctors since we've been in government; 120 net new doctors working in rural Manitoba since we've been in government. Expanded surgical services in rural areas, including in Swan River, Minnedosa, Portage, Morden and Winkler. Renovated hospitals in Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden-Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake, and new ones coming in Selkirk, Notre Dame de Lourdes.

I can tell you we will not cut \$37 million from rural health and we will not freeze health capital spending like they did.

**Mr. Briese:** For the first time in my life, I have no family doctor in my community or in a nearby community. Mr. Speaker, 2,200 doctors have left Manitoba under the NDP reign of mismanagement.

After 14 years of broken promises, empty rhetoric, will this minister stop talking, actually take some action, any action, that will actually improve ER care in rural Manitoba?

**Ms. Selby:** We've taken a lot of action, and that accounts for more than 560 net new doctors working in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, one of the first actions we took when we came into government was to take the medical seats that they had cut down to 70 to now training 110 more doctors. They voted against that, of course. We've hired more nurses, we've hired more doctors, and we're having more residencies being trained in rural Manitoba.

We know it's working. Do we have more work to do? Absolutely. And that's why we are always actively recruiting. And we're seeing the benefits of that in Minnedosa, in Lac du Bonnet, in Pine Falls, in many areas around Manitoba, and we will keep working to make sure that everyone has access to a family doctor.

### Health-Care Services Government Record

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** This Minister of Health is so focused on her talking points that she isn't paying attention to the questions or the fears—or the fears—of patients that are being expressed about their closed ERs. We have a group of residents from rural Manitoba here today, and the behaviour of this minister in answering these questions is very offensive.

Mr. Speaker, despite her rhetoric, her and her government are failing Manitoba patients. They're spending more money, but they are not getting the best results for patients. We've gone from hallway medicine to highway medicine to taxicab medicine.

I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to tell Manitobans why, despite doubling spending in health care, things are getting worse for patients instead of better. Why are more and more patients more afraid of the health-care system that isn't there for them?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, last year we had the largest graduating medical class on record, and that's because we're training more doctors. The opposition doesn't get it.



When you cut medical seats like they did, you train less doctors. When you cut nurses, when you fire a thousand nurses, doctors flee the province.

\* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing more doctors coming to Manitoba, we're seeing more doctors stay in Manitoba, and we will keep working with the regions to make sure we have more doctors because we know how important it is to have health care close to families. It's why we're doing innovative things like mobile clinics to connect over a thousand people with new family doctors.

We'll keep working with the regions and we'll keep bringing in more doctors.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, if there are so many doctors in Manitoba, where are they? We've got 19 closed ERs because of no doctors. Does she really know what she's talking about? Despite her rhetoric and because of her lack of leadership, the NDP are failing Manitobans in health care.

There are 19 closed ERs. Over 2,200 doctors have left Manitoba because they don't want to work here anymore. We have the lowest retention rate in Canada. Doctors don't want to stay here and work, so we have a revolving door; 2,200 of them have left. Babies are being born on the side of highways in blizzards in the middle of the night because of no doctor, and now patients are being sent home by taxi in -40° weather in the middle of the night and dying on their doorsteps.

I'd like to ask this Minister of Health: Why are so many patients being denied safe care in Manitoba?

**Ms. Selby:** A net new gain of more than 560 doctors since we came into office, and we will keep working. Our plan includes training more doctors. Our plan includes recruiting more doctors. Our plan includes offering more rural residencies to encourage more doctors to practise in rural Manitoba.

Our plan does not include cutting a half billion dollars from our funding in order to fire more nurses and fire more doctors. Our plan definitely does not include firing a thousand nurses. For every nurse they fired, we've hired back three and a half.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, news releases do not bring doctors to Manitoba.

This Minister of Health just doesn't seem to get it. She does not seem to understand the seriousness

of this issue. This is all about patient safety, and her mismanagement and her lack of leadership is putting patients' lives at risk. This is about grandmas and grandpas; this is about moms and dads; this is about kids and babies falling through the cracks because of closed ERs and doctor shortages. This is about patients who are afraid that they won't get the care they need when they need it. This is not about her rhetoric.

So which part of this does the Minister of Health not understand?

**Ms. Selby:** What we get on this side of the House is that Manitobans do not want a two-tier, American-style health-care system. We know that's what they want. The Leader of the Opposition has said that he would like to see an American, two-tier style of health-care system in this province where people with the biggest wallet will move to the front of the line.

Mr. Speaker, that kind of medicine, that's called limousine medicine.

### **Post-Secondary Education Interest-Free Student Loans**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Students, Manitoba, met with legislators all last week. Their representatives, Dana Hatherly and Hannah Jones, are with us today in the gallery.

They are very concerned about the level of student debt. Tax exemptions they might get after graduation are not as important to students as the upfront costs and the burden that they will shoulder from their student loans.

They have repeatedly asked this NDP government to consider eliminating the interest on student loans, and they have been getting no response.

Why did the Premier ignore the students' recommendations in their recent budget?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Interest rates were reduced twice: prime plus a half, now prime. Mr. Speaker, bursaries have been increased. Tuition fees are the third lowest in the country, the lowest in the country for community colleges.

The graduate tuition tax rebate allows a student to recover 60 per cent of the money they invested in themselves, or their family invested in them, after they graduate from school. And they now can get it while they're in their third and fourth years as well.

They can have access to the graduate tuition tax rebate in years 3 and 4.

They have among the lowest rates in the country, and we will continue to find ways to make education affordable. Our increase in post-secondary education this year: 2 and a half per cent for universities, highest in the country, highest in the country last year; and 2 per cent for colleges, among the best in the country.

Everywhere else in the country, post-secondary education has been slashed by Conservative governments. In Manitoba, we've maintained that funding and improved that funding.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, since 2009, in Newfoundland and Labrador, students have had their burden of interest rates removed from their provincial student loans. Students in Prince Edward Island have also had their debt load lightened with interest-free loans since 2012.

It can and it is being done on the east coast. We should know how it can be done here in Manitoba for our students. The students have not been able to get an answer from this government to this simple question.

Has this NDP commissioned any cost analysis or impact studies to assess making student loans interest-free in Manitoba, and will the Premier table the report this week?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, we've taken a variety of measures to keep the cost of post-secondary education among the most affordable in the country.

Just recently we announced \$5,000 for everybody that hires an apprenticeship individual in Manitoba and \$1,000 for every new employer that takes on an apprentice. And in Manitoba, we want apprentices to get credit at colleges. We want college students to get advance credit at universities so they can shorten the time that it takes for them to be able to get into a working job with good, strong credentials.

Student funding is up. Money for universities is among the highest you've seen across the country. The tuition fees are among the lowest in the country. We've reduced the interest rates on student debt, and we've made it less necessary to take out a loan, because we've improved the bursaries in Manitoba. And we have a graduate tuition tax rebate program, the best in the country, which is available in the last

two years of a student attending university, partially available to reduce the cost to them going to school.

We will look for additional ways to keep university costs affordable for all people wanting to go to university in Manitoba, and we will ensure that Manitoba has a strong post-secondary system which is affordable, accessible, has good quality and gets good results for young people in Manitoba.

### **Provincial Funding Cuts**

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, students need strong universities funded to provide the resources for an optimal learning environment.

In 2011 the government promised it would increase funding to universities by 5 per cent each year for five years. Last year the government broke its promise and cut that increase by 50 per cent. This year the government once again broke its promise, cutting the increase by 50 per cent. This is, sadly, just one more in a long line of the government's broken promises.

When education is so important to help Manitobans and to provide a way out of poverty, why is the government repeatedly breaking its promise to universities and to students?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I regret that I have to remind the member, when he was a member of the federal Cabinet, they made the largest reductions to funding to post-secondary education in the history of the country. They slashed funding for post-secondary education. It was a dramatic reduction. They slashed funding for research.

He was a member of the Cabinet that made the decision to abandon post-secondary education as a federal responsibility in this country, and now it's only 11 per cent of the federal contributions to post-secondary education. That trend of removal of the federal government from supporting post-secondary education was started when the member from River Heights was a member of the federal Cabinet.

And today he pretends to support education. When he had the chance, he cut it. He did not support it.

### **Manitoba Music Industry Juno Awards 2014**

**Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley):** Mr. Speaker, I don't know, if I was a younger person in Manitoba, and I wouldn't claim to be one anymore, but if I was,

I might be a little bit excited. I might even be a little bit optimistic about what's going on in our province.

Just today we found out the Grey Cup is coming to Winnipeg. That's pretty good. We've got exciting new proposals for our downtown, which members opposite left in a shambles. Things turned around there just a little bit.

And you know what? I think there's a music thing going on. I think there might be some people coming here to share some of the best musical talent that our entire country has to offer, and wouldn't you know it, Manitoba's going to be there with our own musical legacy.

Can the minister tell us about the great stuff happening in our capital city these days on the music scene? Thank you.

\*(14:10)

**Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection):** In Manitoba, we speak music and we're proud to be the host of the 2014 Junos.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is where Canada's heart beats, and the industry is stronger than ever, \$71 million to our economy, over 4,300 jobs related to the music industry. And in this province, we're proud to have people representing the industry in such a way where we have many nominations and people who have been nominated to receive a Juno.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're really proud of Manitoba. Manitoba's where it's at. Today we announced the Grey Cup. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) was there at the announcement of the Grey Cup. We have the Junos.

If you left it up to the opposition, there wouldn't be an MTS Centre. There wouldn't be the Jets. There wouldn't be Investors stadium and we wouldn't be having the Grey Cup. We wouldn't have the Junos. We would have zero with where the opposition is.

So today we celebrate. Manitoba's where it's at. Young people know it. We know it, and we're proud to be the host of the Junos.

#### **ER Services Rural Manitoba**

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** Teulon ER hospital has been closed, reopened, closed, reopened. Arborg ER hospital has been closed, reopened, closed,

reopened, along with 17 others closed, reopened, closed, reopened.

Mr. Speaker, we know, whether we want to go directly to Winnipeg, whether or not if they can survive the ride, we need some accountability from this government on whether or not it's going to be closed or open.

Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** This side of the House, we have a proven track record of hiring more doctors, hiring more doctors in rural Manitoba and hiring more nurses.

We know the recruiting efforts have paid off in Portage la Prairie, which has allowed us to have the full obstetrical services back, but we know that at times there have been some concerns.

When the Virden ER closed, it was concerning, but we worked hard to get that ER open. We rolled up our sleeves, and together with the RHA and the local community we were able to recruit more doctors.

We've got 562 more doctors working in Manitoba now. More than 120 of them are working in rural Manitoba, and we will keep working with communities. The money is always on the table and our recruiting efforts are very aggressive. It's why we see new doctors coming to 'midosa', to Pine Falls, to Lac du Bonnet and many areas.

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Speaker, they always say the money's on the table. They're spinning it like there's no tomorrow.

Record transfer payments, \$159 million on a untended air 'ambulance' six times more than our neighbours, and they can't keep a hospital open? Really? Come on, what is this NDP's priority?

I ask again: Will she commit to keeping Teulon, Arborg and the 17 other ERs open, yes or no?

**Ms. Selby:** On one side of the House you have our plan, which is to train more doctors, which is to recruit more doctors, which is to retain more doctors. Our plan includes hiring more nurses.

Mr. Speaker, on their side of the House you have a different plan. You have a plan to cut half a billion dollars from straight across the board, which doesn't hire more doctors. You have a plan for an American-style, two-tier health-care system so that people who can pay more can move to the front of the line.

And I know they don't like to talk about it, but here was their plan, Health Minister Don Orchard's plan to bring in more rural doctors: It was to give male medical student applicants preference over their female counterparts, because Orchard said that move would help bring in more rural doctors because men are more likely to return to their country roots to practise medicine. He admitted it was a bit—

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

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Speaker, last fall I had a constituent that went to the Gimli ER, then they went to the Arborg ER, then they went to the Selkirk ER, then they went to St. Boniface and almost died in a matter of a few hours. Manitobans deserve and expect they should get proper health care.

This minister said money's not a problem. They got lots of money, so why don't we turn it into reality and open ERs like they should, Mr. Speaker, look after all Manitobans?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Speaker, firing a thousand nurses doesn't keep an ER open. Putting a freeze on all health capital construction doesn't help a health-care system. Permanently closing an ER in Winnipeg at the Misericordia and four more overnight in Winnipeg doesn't help either and neither does cut \$37 million from rural health care. When you add home-care user fees and try to privatize home care, you don't provide better service for anyone, but that was all their ideas when they were in government.

#### **ER Services (Hamiota) Closures**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health seems more concerned with taking partisan potshots at us instead of ensuring that patients in Manitoba are getting safe patient care.

In Hamiota there is a sign on the ER saying that for several weekends it is closed because of doctor and lab issues. The sign also says, call an ambulance if you are seriously ill. So they have a closed ER, they have no doctors, and they're telling sick people, take an ambulance. We know who has to pay for the ambulance, and it's that patient because they can't provide the service.

Mr. Speaker, isn't that two-tier health care?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** No, Mr. Speaker, two-tier health care is when someone is denied service because they don't have enough

money to pay for it. American-style, two-tier health-care service means that people have to choose between their mortgage or getting an operation. We don't do that in Manitoba. What we do is work to bring family doctors to everyone in Manitoba.

Do we have more work to do? Absolutely. And it's why we keep working, why we train more doctors. It's why we've brought in more than 120 doctors to rural Manitoba. It's why we have more than 160 net new doctors in Manitoba.

Do we want more doctors? Absolutely. And that's why we offer free medical students for school—for students who want to return to service and work in rural Manitoba. It's why we have six new family medicine residencies in Brandon, Steinbach and Morden-Winkler to help train them. We will keep working to bring more doctors to Manitoba.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Time for oral questions has expired.

#### **MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

**Mr. Speaker:** It's time for members' statements.

#### **Giuseppe "Joe" Grande**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Today I am very proud to rise in the House to acknowledge one of my constituents who exemplifies the spirit of entrepreneurship and who is equally dedicated to giving back to his community.

On March 8th at the Sons of Italy Gala, Mr. Giuseppe Grande, better known as Joe, was the distinguished recipient of the Canadian Italian business professionals association Entrepreneur of the Year award. This annual award is given to a Manitoban of Italian heritage who demonstrates the entrepreneurial spirit to achieve acclaim within the community.

Since launching Mona Lisa Ristorante Italiano in 1983, Joe and his family have created an establishment that not only showcases their passion for amazing Italian food but also their passion for the people of the neighbourhood and beyond. The restaurant hosts a weekly talent night that features local musicians, and a dining room is actually a dining galleria where local artwork is displayed and sold. Adjacent to the restaurant all are welcome to join the Bocce League in which over 20 teams participate in weekly matches. Joe and Mona Lisa Ristorante family are also dedicated to supporting local organizations by hosting numerous fundraising

events such as stomp for the human rights and cut for the cure.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the House join me in congratulating Joe for being chosen as the recipient of this award and for his devotion to his community. I wish he and his family continued success for many more years to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

### Purple Day

**Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows):** Mr. Speaker, today we are painting the Legislature all shades of purple to increase awareness around epilepsy. Every year on March 26th, people around the world recognize Purple Day, encouraging education and discussion about life with this condition.

Epilepsy is a condition of the brain characterized by recurrent seizures. More than 300,000 Canadians are living with this condition. Because there is a broad spectrum of seizure type and frequency, each person's case is unique and must be judged and treated individually. Learning about epilepsy, it became clear to me that one of the greatest barriers faced by those with the condition is the stigma that comes with it. Unfortunately, there is a lack of public understanding around this issue. Epilepsy is not a disease, epilepsy is not contagious, and epilepsy is not a psychological disorder.

Mr. Speaker, Purple Day was founded in 2008 by nine-year-old Cassidy Megan of Nova Scotia to break through this confusion, and the movement has since spread around the world. Cassidy's goal is simple and heartfelt: for people everywhere living with epilepsy to know that they are not alone. Cassidy chose the colour purple after the international colour for epilepsy, lavender. The lavender flower is often associated with solitude, which represents the feelings of isolation experienced by those affected by epilepsy and seizure disorders.

\*(14:20)

The Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba is a strong supporter of Purple Day, encouraging schools, workplaces and communities to all hold events and wear the colour purple. Throughout the year, they provide important information and referral services to people living with epilepsy and seizures, and to their families.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Manitobans to wear purple today and show their support for those with

epilepsy. Through discussion and education, we can improve life for all those affected.

### Canadian Wheat Board Facility

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the CWB on the announcement of the building of a new state-of-the-art, high-throughput elevator facility just west of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba—this, in spite of the spenDP spending \$85,000 to demand a referendum to save the monopoly of the old Canadian Wheat Board—this, in spite of the Premier (Mr. Selinger), the former and current Agriculture ministers predicting the ultimate demise of the world of grain marketing as they understood it.

It now appears they were wrong. The new CWB has emerged as a significant player in the open grain market, with a terminal at Thunder Bay, Ontario, and now an elevator facility located in central Manitoba. The CWB has proven the spenDP wrong. Manitoba grain producers from across the province will now have another option to market their production. How could this be possible? We know the spenDP are such top-notch agricultural producers with their vast knowledge in agricultural production.

We know, from the vast marketing experience of the Premier and his Cabinet members, that this is why the spenDP were demanding a referendum on grain marketing to save the old Canadian Wheat Board. However, the spenDP felt it was not necessary to have a referendum for raising the PST.

Now, I'm willing to bet that the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald) is out there sharpening her scissors to help opening this new facility in which they're not putting any money into.

Mr. Speaker, once again, congratulations to the CWB on the announcement of building a state-of-the-art, high-throughput elevator facility. Congratulations to the RM of Portage la Prairie on attracting the CWB to their municipality. This is great news for the ag industry.

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

### Royal Manitoba Winter Fair

**Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East):** It takes the cake that members opposite would celebrate 2,000 job losses in the—Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for 107 years, people have gathered in Brandon to celebrate Manitoba's rich agricultural heritage at the Winter Fair. This year,

from March 31st to April 5th, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair will bring together people from across North America to celebrate everything agriculture has to offer.

One of Canada's largest agricultural events, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair makes agriculture approachable and fun for those who might never have had the chance to visit a farm. For those who make their living in agriculture, the fair is an opportunity to participate in industry and trade shows, raise awareness about agriculture and showcase their trade.

The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair is also a testament to the substantial role agriculture plays in the lives of thousands of Manitobans. Growing high-quality food is incredibly important to our communities. Agriculture makes up 9 per cent of our 'provincial' GDP.

During the course of the Royal, competitors from across North America will compete in equestrian events that include Grand Prix show jumping, hackney pony and horse competitions, barrel racing and many chuckwagon races. The fair also hosts educational and interactive events that teach people the fundamentals of farming, like junior cattle shows, dairy milking, sheep shearing and petting zoos.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair is part of our heritage and our future. This week-long fair highlights the best that Manitoba agriculture has to offer while celebrating the traditions that our province was built on.

Thank you to co-chairs of the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair, Darrell Hack and Wayne Buhr, and also to all the organizers, exhibitors and participants. Welcome to Rob O'Connor, who is experiencing his first Royal as general manager of the Provincial Exhibition in Manitoba. You help keep our agricultural traditions alive and well.

I hope to see many of my fellow members of the Legislative Assembly at the fair during the week, and I encourage everyone to attend this fantastic celebration of Manitoba's agricultural legacy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Bill Merritt**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in celebration of the life and work of legendary Winnipeg bassist Bill Merritt. A remarkable musician and consummate humanitarian, Bill Merritt passed away yesterday after repeated

battles with cancer. Bill Merritt contributed greatly to Winnipeg's world-renowned music scene and was friends with and performed with some of Winnipeg's most successful musicians from the '60s and '70s.

He played with many legendary bands during the city's golden age of rock 'n' roll, including Mood Jga Jga, Fabulous George and the Zodiacs, Be Bop Beluga, Rocky Rolletti and Prairie Dog.

As a founding general manager of the Winnipeg Folk Festival, Bill Merritt guided this province's iconic annual concert event through its early years into the late '80s. Many Manitoban youth and families have enjoyed and continue to benefit from taking part in the interactive, performance and circus arts of the Winnipeg International Children's Festival. This organization was founded by Bill Merritt to contribute to community arts development in an inclusive and accessible environment.

He will be fondly remembered by family and many, many friends as an extraordinary musician who cared greatly about people.

#### **GRIEVANCES**

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable member for La Verendrye, on a grievance.

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye):** Mr. Speaker, today, I rise on a grievance. My grievance is on this NDP government's mismanagement of our health-care system, the health-care system that belongs to the people of Manitoba.

The NDP has mismanaged health care in Manitoba, especially when it comes to the closure of rural emergency rooms. Since this government has come to power, no less than 19 ERs have been closed. Some have been closed permanently, some with reduced services. Mr. Speaker, this results in highway medicine. These closures are putting Manitobans' lives at risk.

During the 2011 election, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is on record saying, there's nothing more important than ensuring your family gets the care they need, regardless of where they live. Well, Mr. Speaker, that is just not happening. All over this province, ERs are closed. This results in many Manitobans being miles away from the closest ER and potentially life-threatening situations.

This new Health Minister, as well as the previous Health minister, are mismanaging our health-care system. Just before the 2011 election, STARS was born. I support a helicopter EMS, but

the way it was done was wrong. The Auditor General slammed the NDP for the way it was handled. How much money could have been saved by doing it right? Is this minister playing politics with people's lives? This Health Minister is justifying not tendering the contract for STARS by saying it would take 18 to 24 months to have a different helicopter service up and running. In the minister's words, many of them may credit—can credit their lives to the service. I wonder which one of the members opposite is this dismissing.

The minister talks about how important lives are, and I agree. Well, Mr. Speaker, it has been now 525 days since the ER at the Vita hospital closed. I know that when the hospital ER was open, the lives of many were saved. Two personal friends were saved at the Vita ER when they suffered heart attacks. If it were not for the doctors at the ER stabilizing them, they would not have made it any further.

I would like to ask the minister which one of them she would like to dismiss, because one of them sits here in the Chamber. Experts agree how important that first hour is, that golden hour, when it comes to the survival of a heart attack victim.

\* (14:30)

Why is this minister not doing more to get these ERs opened? With summer coming, more and more Manitobans will be spending time in rural Manitoba—at their cottages, at weekend retreats. The chances for accidents will increase. All we see is less and less services at rural ERs. More and more blanks on the on-call list. When will this Health Minister take responsibility for these ER closures and do something about it?

The minister keeps telling us we have more doctors, but with 19 rural ERs closed, where are these doctors? We know that about 2,200 doctors have left Manitoba since the NDP have taken power. Manitoba has one of the lowest retention rates in Canada. Within the last year, 439 licensed doctors have left this province. The Conference Board of Canada ranks Manitoba's health-care system as dead last in Canada. Manitobans have the worst access to after-hours primary physicians in Canada.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) promised that every Manitoban has access to a family doctor by 2015. I'd like to know how he's going to do this. Just another broken promise.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to the minister blame the federal government and blame the government of the '90s. The bottom line is this NDP government has had 14 years to improve the health-care system in this province. They have broken their word and turned hallway medicine into highway medicine.

Mr. Speaker, our health budget now consumes more than 40 per cent of the total provincial budget, but Manitobans aren't seeing any improved services. In 1999, the WRHA's administrative costs were \$5.7 million. By 2003, the costs soared to \$16.6 million. In 2011-12, the WRHA reported administrative costs of \$109 million. This NDP government is good at spending money, but with little results.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the average length of time that paramedics waited in an emergency room was 66 minutes. In 2013, that number increased to 76 minutes.

The NDP have made many promises regarding wait times in health care. MRIs—NDP promised eight weeks wait time, the present wait is 18 weeks. CT Scan—NDP promised two weeks, the present time is eight weeks. Good NDP math.

According to the wait your turn report, Manitoba is at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to wait times to see a specialist.

With 19 ERs closed, where are all the patients going for health care?

When will the Vita ER reopen? More than 1,700 patients visited that ER when it was open, per year. How much pressure is this putting on other ERs? Can the other ERs even handle the excess or other patients that are visiting? Manitobans are not getting the health care they need or deserve.

The Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) keeps talking about how important patient care is, and, yes, I agree with it, that's the most important thing. So why is this minister not doing something about it but closing 19 ERs? It is time this minister took control and started spending money where it'll make a difference to patient care in Manitoba. It is time to stop making promises that she can't keep and quit gambling with patients' lives.

Mr. Speaker, our health-care system cannot take any more NDP mismanagement.

Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are there any further grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing none, we'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader):** Could you please call Committee of Supply.

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

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

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### HEALTH

\* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Health.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** I do.

In the face of global economic uncertainty, we continue to focus on what matters most to Manitoba families by protecting and enhancing front-line services that they count on, of course, including health care. Budget 2014 provides a 2.1 per cent increase, or \$110-million increase, in funding for health care to ensure that Manitoba families continue to have access to existing health services as well as continued progress on our commitments to provide even better care.

Budget 2014 includes funding for a number of key government commitments. We're continuing progress on our commitment to a family doctor for anyone who wants one by 2015, including more doctors, nurse practitioners and opening new clinics such as ACCESS Winnipeg West at the Grace Hospital and two new QuickCare clinics in St. Vital and Seven Oaks and, of course, more to come, including in my constituency of Southdale.

We are enhancing rural health care throughout recruitments of health-care professionals, beginning construction on new clinics in Swan River and

Steinbach, a new ER and MRI in Dauphin, a new ambulance station in Ile des Chênes and a second mobile clinic to visit smaller communities.

We're building a strong care system and supports for families facing cancer, including the expansion of cancer hubs into northern Manitoba and continued progress on our commitment to reduce the cancer patient journey from suspicion to treatment to 60 days or less.

We're supporting seniors and enhancing opportunities for them to age close to home through construction of new personal-care homes in Winnipeg, Morden and Lac du Bonnet; celebration of the 40th anniversary of home-care program; and further investments to enhance fire safety in personal-care homes and other facilities.

We're improving emergency care with the launch of an advanced-care paramedic program at Red River College, and moving forward with the implementation of other elements of the EMS review including the establishment of the provincial office of the medical director. We're continuing to focus on streamlining administration, increasing productivity and fighting for better drug prices. We've reduced the numbers of RHAs from 13 to five, cutting over a hundred board and executive management positions and saving over \$10 million, and that money has been reinvested into supporting front-line care.

As budget—as committed in Budget 2014, we announced yesterday that we're putting in new caps on corporate spending in the four rural and northern regional health authorities. Rural RHAs will be capped at 3.99 per cent and northern at 4.99 per cent. This, of course, builds on the successful cap of 2.9 per cent–2.99 per cent, rather, put in place for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority in 2011. But I should note that their actual spending was down to 2.54 per cent in 2012-13.

To further improve accountability and transparency in regional health authorities today, we're also putting into place requirements that all CEOs of RHAs, hospitals or personal-care homes need to annually report their expenses such as travel, meals and accommodations, and this information will be publically posted annually in June.

We also announced yesterday another major expansion to the Pharmacare 'formularily'—formulary with over 400 new brands and genetic medications being added. Our Pharmacare program is a universal one. An income-based deductible is reached and it is



one of the most comprehensive in Canada. We're able to add these new products by reinvesting savings reaped through our successful generic drug policies and by taking a joint approach to achieving low prices for generics in collaboration with other provinces. A lower price negotiated for six generic drugs alone will create over \$9 million in annual savings, which will not only mean that we're keeping money in the pockets of Manitobans, but also means saving government, which will then be reimbursed into further drug coverage for families. New drugs being added will help Manitobans with heart disease, preventing strokes to those who've had a joint injury and help with allergies as well as many other conditions. Since 1999, we have added over 4,000 drugs to the Pharmacare program.

While other provinces are freezing or cutting health-care spending, in recent years we have made significant progress in bending the cost curve in health spending while protecting services and maintaining balance in departments and RHAs.

Supporting families facing cancer continues to be a primary focus of our government. We've introduced important new initiative to ensure that patients have access to faster cancer training-testing, rather, diagnosis and treatment by setting the goal of reducing the entire patient journey to two months or less. This is a \$40-million comprehensive, aggressive and first-in-Canada cancer strategy. It will streamline cancer services and dramatically reduce the wait time for patients between the time that cancer is suspected and the start of effective treatment.

Manitoba currently has the shortest wait time in Canada for radiation therapy, at one week or less, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. This is a standard measurement of wait times used by every province, but only captures the wait time from when a radiation specialist declares a patient ready for treatment to the day that the treatment actually begins. This measure does not include the other parts of the patient's journey such as referrals, testing, diagnosis, retesting and the development of the treatment plan. This new initiative will address the entire journey from when a patient's family doctor first suspects cancer until the treatment begins.

The Manitoba cancer patient journey strategy includes accelerating cancer testing by hiring over 50 front-line staff, including eight more pathologists, two new cancer-testing co-ordinators and 35 more technologists; hiring more cancer patient journey

navigators who are already working at sites across the province to monitor and help patients and families through their entire journey, identify delays and issues and ensure faster testing, diagnosis and treatment. It includes bringing faster access to cancer treatment closer to home by expanding our 16 rural chemotherapy sites into full CancerCare hubs, which include patient journey navigators and enhanced services for cancer patients and their families. We've already launched cancer hubs in communities across the province including Gimli, Selkirk, Dauphin, Swan River, Brandon, Neepawa and Morden, and this year we'll expand services in Flin Flon, The Pas and Thompson.

\* (14:50)

As part of this strategy, we've also launched the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Cancer Control Program to directly engage communities in cancer prevention, treatment and awareness. We've also opened the new Urgent Cancer Care Clinic to help cancer patients get the urgent care they need without needing to go directly to an ER. We're also covering a hundred per cent of the costs for cancer treatment and support drugs with no deductibles for patients at home and in hospital. In the first year, over 9,600 patients signed up, and we saved over \$10 million through this best-in-Canada coverage. And I do want to note that Manitoba and Saskatchewan are the only jurisdictions to cover both cancer drugs and the support drugs that deal with the side effects of cancer.

Another key focus of Manitoba Health is our commitment to access to a family doctor for all. And as part of the funding in this budget, I was pleased to announce the location of the province's fifth QuickCare clinic, which will open later this year. This, of course, is one of four more QuickCare clinics in development for Winnipeg, on top of two already in place, and others in Steinbach and Selkirk. QuickCare clinics have already had over 67,000 visits and help to take significant pressure off of our emergency rooms. They're also just one piece of our broad plan to ensure access to a family doctor for all by 2015, an initiative that is not only about connecting those without a doctor to a regular care provider, but also enhancing the care available for those who already have one.

Since 1999, we have had a net gain of over 560 practising physicians in this province, and we're well over our way to our 2011 collection commitment of 200 more doctors. However, while

doctors are obviously a key part of our family doctor commitment, this plan is about a much broader vision of sustainability, accessible health care for Manitobans and it keeps Manitobans healthier by taking the pressure off our busy hospitals. It means we're maximizing the role of nurse practitioners, physician's assistants and all health-care professionals, as we bring together teams of caregivers to make sure that people get the right care at the right time, including the 14 my health-care teams, the 50 new health-care professionals to work in the doctor's office and help doctors take on up to a thousand more patients each. We are working, of course, in this expansion of family doctors because we know it's an important way to take pressure off of emergency rooms across the province. And we know that families expect to have safe, quality and timely emergency care.

I would also like to take a moment just to thank the staff in both of my constituency office and in my Health office, the Health Department, and the many, many Manitobans who work in our health-care system. They are truly the smartest, most dedicated and most compassionate group of people I have ever had the honour of working with. I benefit from their support every day, but I know that their true motivation is the desire to have the best health-care system that we can for all Manitoba families. And I am proud that in the face of global economic uncertainty, we continue to focus on what matters most to Manitoba families by protecting those front-line services that they count on—most importantly, health care.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments—Minister for Justice.

### House Business

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader):** Yes, this will be very brief. I won't take up the time for Health Estimates.

Just to put on the record that the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) and myself had agreed on the arrangement for Estimates, and we may have actually got a little bit ahead of ourselves. We had Health Estimates taking place in this room and Healthy Living and Seniors taking place in a different committee room far later. Indeed, the Health and Healthy Living Estimates have been

presented together, so I think there's agreement that we'll proceed with Health Estimates and Health Estimates only at this point. And then we will negotiate and determine how we then best get to the Healthy Living and Seniors Estimates at an agreed time.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I thank the honourable Justice Minister. So, it's agreed? *[Agreed]*

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**Mr. Chairperson:** Now, does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Chair, I do have a few comments to make.

I want to welcome the minister to her new role and wish her all the best. It's a extremely challenging role, and I think one that certainly has a lot of ups and downs in it, and do wish her well as she moves forward. I, too, would like to acknowledge the department staff and all health-care professionals for their hard work and commitment to striving for better health care. I know that it is hard work to be on the front lines. I know it can be often thankless.

As a nurse for 23 years, I fully appreciate those who are striving so hard on a day-to-day basis. I know what they go through. I can still vividly recall a lot of moments in my career at many different times to try to meet any of the challenges that were before us, and I know there are so many people out there that want to make a difference, both at the level of the department and also at every level of health-care delivery. So I would like to say to all of those people a very humble thank-you for what you are doing every day to try to strive for a better health-care system.

And I would like to acknowledge publicly and thank Dr. Dhaliwal for his vision and tenacity to ensure that there is a cancer strategy developed and moved forward in Manitoba. I know he worked passionately on that for many, many years, and I think that he may not have gotten as—far as far as he would have liked to, but he has made a significant difference in Manitoba in terms of being a champion for that cancer strategy and moving it forward. He put a lot of work into that and a lot of thought. And I think it was certainly vision and tenacity that brought it to where it was today.

So, publicly, I think a lot of us owe a great deal of gratitude to him, especially as we are reaching the stage in time where a lot of baby boomers and

seniors are going to be coming into the system. We know that with aging, we certainly see a lot of health challenges, and cancer is going to be one of those big ones. So I just want to publicly say that about Dr. Dhaliwal and to thank him.

And with those few comments, Mr. Chair, that is all I have to say at this time.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of the line item 21.1.(a) contained in resolution 21.1.

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

**Ms. Selby:** I would like to thank my critic for her kind words to the incredible work of all our health-care professionals and also the fact that she acknowledged Dr. Dhaliwal who is, of course, a remarkable man, and we do welcome Dr. Navaratnam to the job who, I think, is also an incredibly strong woman, and I look forward to working more with her.

Joining me at the table are Karen Herd, who is the Deputy Minister of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors, and as my critic acknowledged, this is a big portfolio, Health, so when you think of—that Karen not only has Health, but Healthy Living and Seniors as well, you can imagine that's a big responsibility on some very strong shoulders, so I'm glad to have her joining me today.

Alongside Karen is also Nardia—correct me if I say it wrong—Maharaj who is the acting assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer, and, of course, a brilliant woman in her own right. And Karen—I already introduced Karen, so I should introduce Jean—Jean Cox, who is the assistant deputy minister, provincial policying and programs, and a very hard-working, dedicated professional as well.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Driedger:** Certainly, Mr. Chair, I'd recommend a global discussion, because if we went line by line, we would never get out of this room. So I think it'll

be a lot speedier just to get through it in a timely fashion.

**Mr. Chairperson:** So, thank you.

It is agreed, then, that the questions for the department will proceed in a global manner, with all the resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded. The floor is now open for questions.

\* (15:00)

**Mrs. Driedger:** Prior to proceeding with my questions, I would like to take the time to welcome Ms. Herd to the job. The last time I think I was at this table she was in a different position and, certainly want to welcome her and wish her well. And also, to Ms. Maharaj who is assuming that very challenging role in health care, is dealing with the money and where money goes and how it's spent. And, for Ms. Cox, I think we have met before at other Estimates. But I welcome you all and do acknowledge the work of the department in often challenging times when we're trying to deal with a health-care system that is like a big ship that doesn't turn very, very quickly. The changes are often quite small but important.

A first question, and it comes probably with some confusion for me, just based on the changes that were made with the two different ministries, and it's not clear to me. So I just have a few questions just to try to understand that so I can get a better sense, too, of—because they're all mixed into this now. I need to be a little bit more clear as to what I can be asking and can't be.

But to the Minister of Health then, when did the Minister of Healthy Living lose her own department and get put into the Department of Health?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, of course, we did have a Cabinet change back in October—October 18th, of course, of this past year—that did bring Healthy Living and Seniors into Manitoba Health. We brought in, of course, the MLA for Kirkfield Park to take over that portion of the portfolio, which is quite fitting, I think, because I know that the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) does have many seniors in her neighbourhood and a really great understanding of what seniors need.

Certainly, we think that it makes sense to bring the two of them together. There're certainly synergies to bringing these two areas together in that we know how much healthy living influences health, how that the healthy—the health system both relies and benefits

from people having a healthy living and the things that they do to encourage it. So I think it was—it's a great way to make sure that we don't lose sight of how important living a healthy lifestyle and all the things that we can do in terms of prevention can lead to better health outcomes. And I think that this way it actually is a good way to co-ordinate the work that we do that at times does overlap, absolutely, but also allows the Minister for Healthy Living and Seniors to really focus on some of those things and to be sharing those ideas with Health and how they both influence and benefit the things that we're doing on this side of the department.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I would support some of the minister's comments, too, in that, you know, one would think that if all of that was together, you don't sort of split your thinking into health and healthy living, because if we did focus on healthy living we would be having a very strong impact on health, and that you do get your better synergies, I think, if there is a closer attachment, and you would then achieve better continuum of care, better delivery of service, better co-ordination, under, sort of, one roof.

That's why I was surprised, actually, when the government split them and then had two separate departments. And to me, you know, I thought that could take away from some of the benefits that could be achieved if it was maintained under one, you know, one roof, so to speak. So I do support what the minister says on that.

But the government was certainly adamant at the time that—and maybe I need to ask this of the Minister of Healthy Living, I don't know—but the government seemed to be absolutely adamant at the time that—and actually were critical of us if we would ever have made this same move and brought it back. Those were the kind of comments that were being made by different NDP MLAs, you know, and saying, well, you would get rid of Healthy Living. Well, in effect, that is what the government did and brought it under the umbrella of Health into one department.

So has the thinking changed all along the way, then, that they found that it wasn't that beneficial to have the two separate, and was there sort of an awakening that it is better to be done, you know, under one umbrella?

**Ms. Selby:** Certainly in Health we're always open to whether it's new ideas, new innovations. I think particularly in areas of health one must always be looking at ensuring that we are reviewing practice

and making sure that we're doing things in the most efficient and best manner.

Now, certainly, when Healthy Living and Health were split, we were still linked within the department, very happy to have them. We do share some stakeholders in some cases. We have separate ones in other cases. Really, certainly, we know how important the good work is that happens in the Healthy Living department, and I know that the work that those folks are able to do makes a direct impact on the state of health of Manitobans and their needs in health care.

We're formalizing what was already happening. There were lots of links within the department, lots of conversations, of course, between it. This is a way of formalizing the way that had happened already. I know that the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) is a really good role model in the position. She's a woman who is always advocating for both a healthy lifestyle and for the seniors, both in her constituency and around the province as well.

So, you know, I think it's important in health care to always stay nimble and always stay open to ideas and to make sure that we're always reviewing and currently doing what we think is innovative and best practices. And, although we were always happy to be working with them, we're sort of formalizing what was, for the most part, already happening.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the Minister of Health tell us if the Minister of Healthy Living is a junior minister, then, under the Minister of Health? Does she report to the Minister of Health? Seeing as one budget for the Minister of Healthy Living is significantly smaller—and I will get into that in a couple of questions to find out how you both work a budget when it's all mixed together now—but is the Minister of Healthy Living a junior minister reporting to this Minister of Health?

**Ms. Selby:** And I would maybe, if I could refer my critic to page 10 of the Estimate book, she'll see there that we have an organizational chart for Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors, and she can see there that at the top of the chart there are two separate boxes at equal level of Minister of Health and Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors. If you go down from there, it does go to the one deputy minister. We do share a deputy minister, but you can see that there are some separations in terms of advisory committees and appeal boards, Addictions Foundation on one side, other advisory terms.

\* (15:10)

But much of what is happening, and you can see if you start at the bottom and work your way up, whether it's the Administration and Finance, the Health Workforce, regional policies, public health, primary health, provincial policies and programs, Healthy Living and Seniors, of course, being specifically more towards the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors, but, of course, there is crossover into Health, whether that be in terms of home-care support and health in general of seniors.

So, well, of course, at the top you can see there is a division of two ministers, separate but equal, on the same line. We do work together because, as my critic has mentioned, there is a lot of synergies there and I think it's important to recognize that they do go together quite well, and I think that we can work to both provide strength to both sides of the department.

**Mrs. Driedger:** So, based on that answer, it then appears to me that this—the Minister of Healthy Living, even with a small budget, is not a junior minister, that she is a full-fledged minister and the two of them are somehow functioning under the umbrella of Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors.

Can the minister tell us then—the last time I was at this table in Health, I believe the budget for Healthy Living was around \$40 million. I think somewhere I saw that it might be \$55 million. How does—I guess the first question would be, is the budget for Healthy Living in the area of \$55 million?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Chair, as we pointed out, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors, we do share a deputy minister, we share some of the health staff, and certainly we share an interest in making sure that we're providing the best health-care system for Manitobans. But, as the critic also pointed out, we do divide up the responsibilities within it. So I wonder if, perhaps, my critic might be better off referring some of her more specific Healthy Living and Seniors questions to that minister, who would probably be able to give her a more thorough breakdown of those particular questions that she would have and, perhaps, although we're working globally, that we could focus on the areas that are under the responsibility of the Minister of Health.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Chair, that's a confusion of these Estimates, though, is because both budgets are all together in this one document. For me to

understand where Health dollars are spent versus Healthy Living dollars are spent, I need to know what that budget is for Healthy Living.

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Chair, I would be happy to refer the critic to page 11 of the Estimates. She can see there, there is a breakdown of the budget, and if you look at No. 6 there, Healthy Living and Seniors does have its own line in that breakdown there.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Thank you. That certainly helps me in my understanding.

Can the minister then indicate, did her department absorb all of the staff that were related to the Department of Healthy Living?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, we absorbed the staff, but we do, of course, share the deputy minister, administration and finances. Other programs and services, in some cases, support both ministers. Some are more specific to one side of the portfolio and the other.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The—so it's interesting, because we have the Minister of Health here, then, managing a budget of somewhere in the area of 5.2 to 5.3 billion dollars. We have a minister, also, then, given a portfolio for managing a mere \$44 million. Why would we need two ministers, then, within this department? And especially with the minister's comments that it makes sense that it's all under one, why then do we need to have a Minister of Healthy Living? That almost looks more like window dressing than it does anything substantive.

**Ms. Selby:** Well, I think that it's quite clear, and my critic has also said it, that it is important to keep a focus on healthy living and on seniors and all those programs that do so much in the preventative form of it. I think perhaps more specific questions on what exactly the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors does, she can probably better answer, day-to-day, what it is that she focuses on and how she meets with groups and shares information and develops policies in that way. Certainly, we believe that patients, families, First Nations, whether it be municipalities, community groups or advocacy groups, any—you know, in my department, I hear from folks like Heart and Stroke and Cancer Society—as well as, of course, just business community and regular folks have a lot of good ideas and a lot of good advice. And we're always looking forward to having those groups bring advice forward to the minister's office.

Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we are able to keep a focus on Healthy Living and Seniors, and I think, again, probably the

Minister for Health Living and Seniors can better explain what she does and what the focus is in her particular area. But certainly, working on prevention and awareness, very valuable work to be done as part of an overall health-care system.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And certainly, the portfolios were always together up until more recently under this government. And it was always a Minister of Health that addressed all of the health along the whole continuum. So, you know, I do, you know, I do see the value of having that one roof. I don't see the value and the necessity to have a minister, appearing to be a junior minister that looks like window dressing only, in a position where, if you took that salary and you took the assistant—I mean, there's \$200,000 savings right there that could be saved and put into perhaps something on the front lines of health care. But the minister's right, I do need to take that question elsewhere, and it probably is to the Premier (Mr. Selinger), not to the Minister of Healthy Living, to explain why he would feel the necessity to do that.

\* (15:20)

I'd like to get into, now, the audit by the Auditor General on the helicopter EMS. I've now had a chance to look through a lot of it. I still haven't—want to read it twice to get to the real nitty-gritty, but just based on some of the minister's responses so far, this audit really did slam the government for mismanagement of this contract.

And, you know—and in the answers the minister is giving in question period, I don't get the sense that she understands the seriousness of the allegations made by the auditor, because, based on her answers today, she's just reading her canned points written out for her, and it leaves the impression that she doesn't understand the questions or the issues. She doesn't seem to be at all concerned about the breach of tendering principles—which are really significant—or policies or the law that was broken in this.

So I would ask her, because she's running the biggest department in government—there's lots of contracts there. This is a scathing indictment of gross mismanagement by the government on this issue. And I appreciate that this minister inherited it, but she doesn't have to defend it if she sees the problems and the errors that were made. And I really—based on her answers today, really have to ask her, does she understand the significance of an audit like that that has slammed the government on how they moved ahead with this HM-EMS contract?

**Ms. Selby:** I did want to address the first part of the critic's question and talk about the balanced approach that we are taking to continue to protect those services that Manitoba families depend on, while cutting costs and reinvesting them back into the programs that we know. By bringing Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors together, we certainly found efficiencies in that we have one deputy minister for the entire department. We have one administration and finance for the department as well.

This is really what we've been doing right around government to cut overhead and move resources to invest in growth and steady jobs—good jobs—investments in core infrastructure, but making sure that we're protecting those investments in health care, education, other services that families depend on.

For instance, in Health, I know the member is aware that we brought the RHAs that were—from 13 down to five. That was a savings of \$11 million that's being reinvested right into the front lines. I just announced, of course, what we know, that in 2011, we brought in the corporate cap for the WRHA to 2.99 per cent. And I should commend folks there for their hard work, that they actually came in at two point—I believe it's five four per cent—in the last—their last budget. But the member's probably aware that we just extended that, both in the budget and announcing yesterday that the corporate caps will go to rural RHAs and northern RHAs, 3.99 and 4.99, respectively. Because it is—certainly, people want to know that the money that we're spending in health care is being spent in an efficient manner and that it's going to those front-line services that people count on.

Absolutely, that is something that we're looking at in many areas across government and Health—we really have been working on that for some time, and I will commend the previous minister of Health for the work that she started on that.

Of course, while we are looking for efficiencies—and as I've said earlier, we're always looking for innovation and making sure that we're providing the newest and best health care that we can on the advice of our medical professionals—our focus is always, of course, on providing the best patient care. And we know that in circumstances there are times when, in public interest, and when there's only one qualified proponent, that government may tender without a contract.

In this case, when it was a life-saving service, we'd seen the good work that had been done on STARS in the flooding of both 2009 and 2011. We felt it was important to continue with that, and we've heard from Manitoba families that, particularly in rural Manitoba, how much they depend on it and how many families and lives have been served by STARS since they have been here.

**Mrs. Driedger:** You know, I would say to the minister that her answer really doesn't have a lot of credibility, because on one hand she's talking about looking for savings and efficiencies in the system and then on the other hand she's defending a contract where this government knowingly agreed to spend six times more than what a service was worth. So you can't have it both ways on this one and, if, you know, this minister continues to, you know, go down that road, she's going to keep losing credibility with her responses because it's just not matching up.

I asked yesterday whether the minister would provide a copy of the 2009 feasibility study and she didn't answer the question in question period, and I would ask her again right now. Will she provide me a copy of that feasibility study?

**Ms. Selby:** I understand that there may be some privacy concerns with that report. I've asked my department to review it and see what might be able to be released, keeping in mind there may be some privacy issues in that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** What kind of privacy issues? Because, certainly, you know, any patient information, which I doubt would be in that report because it was a feasibility study, what exactly would be privacy information?

**Ms. Selby:** As I said, I have asked the department to review it. I know they are working on that. I will see what—which is able to be released and we are hoping that we will be able to provide that very soon.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I appreciate that. I look forward to receiving a copy of that.

Can I ask the minister why her government did not follow through on the recommendations of that feasibility study?

**Ms. Selby:** In November of 2010, of course, our Throne Speech, we did announce our intention to purchase an air ambulance helicopter. While we were investigating potential helicopter-based air ambulance service providers, of course, I know the member will remember that a major event hit. We

had the flood of the century that was devastating to many parts of the province. Just as we had in the floods of 2011—in 2011 we did contract STARS to provide that specialized emergency service by helicopter ambulance. We know the good work that they did during that time and were able to get to places that we just would not have got to otherwise. Based on the benefit of that service, we did decide to maintain that lifesaving service and we know that STARS, since they've been flying in Manitoba, have gone on over 600 missions and have transported over 400 people that—I have no doubt many of them would credit their lives in being here with the good work that folks were able to do.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Perhaps the minister didn't get the full question. But the feasibility study was done and it was provided to government at the end of 2009. The minister mentions a Throne Speech that was in December of 2010, so that's a whole year down the road that's basically been lost.

\* (15:30)

What I am wondering is, if you had followed through at the time of getting that feasibility report and government had it in its hands at the end of 2009, you could have had a helicopter EMS up in the air long before what you really did.

And so I have to ask the minister again, you know, considering that the feasibility study said that 35 to 50 lives could be saved annually, that must have perked up a lot of ears in government, and yet—and if the government really cared about patient safety, shouldn't they have acted immediately at the end of 2009, when it said that 35 to 50 lives could be saved annually? Why weren't the recommendations followed through at that time if the government was so committed to patient safety?

**Ms. Selby:** And, yes, as I said, that's right. In November 2010, the Throne Speech, we announced our intention to purchase the helicopter ambulance. While we were investigating that—potential helicopter air ambulance service providers, of course, that's when the flood of the century came.

At that time, it was determined that we should contract with STARS again, as we had in 2009. We know that they provided a really good service in those times, were able to get to places that we just would not have been able to get to without them. Based on that, we did decide to extend—to maintain the life-saving service that they provide.

We knew that it would take about 18 to 24 months for another option to be available, so in June of 2011 we announced that it was our intention to enter the long-term contract with STARS. They were the only provider who was able to offer helicopter-based ambulance service at that time. We knew that putting a contract to tender for a helicopter ambulance service would have meant ending the service, and during that time we know that STARS was able to transport over a hundred patients, many who, I have no doubt, credit their lives to this service.

In some circumstances, when it's in public interest, when there's only one qualified proponent, government may enter a contract without a tender. We think, in the case of this situation, it was the right call for a life-saving service. I think, in the case of a life-saving service, it is a call that a government makes that is the right one when they're talking about such an important service to serve rural Manitoba families.

It's not what all governments do. Certainly, I know the Filmon government signed a one-year untendered contract with Connie Curran to look at ways to cut \$65 million from hospitals.

We were thinking that, in the case of making a life-saving service and the good work that they had done in 2009 and 2011, that we decided to continue with STARS based on the experience that we had with them during the floods.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The minister is avoiding answering the question.

And, certainly, you know, the Department of Health didn't come to a grinding halt with the flood. In fact, I remember asking questions. I think there was maybe one personal-care home that might have been affected where they had to move patients. So it's not like the department was inundated with having to deal with a lot of things. Other departments certainly were, but not Health.

So it's—the minister's explanations aren't really flying right now, because if the department gave the report to the minister at the end of 2009, there was absolutely no reason—no logical reason not to act on it, considering what the report's recommendations included and also considering their findings. You know, they are estimating, you know, saving 35 to 50 lives annually. They estimated 600 to 800 patient transports.

So I don't understand, and I don't think the minister is giving an adequate answer to this and I think she has to for her own credibility. What happened to that report? We know it got shelved. It was collecting dust, but why didn't the government act on it considering what the contents were of that study? I don't understand that, because that's pretty negligent, then, if the government didn't respond to that at that time. So can the minister take another crack at an answer on this one?

**Ms. Selby:** Frankly, I'm rather surprised at the lack of understanding that this critic shows for how important health care is to Manitobans and to Manitoba families and, certainly, no less during a major event like the flood of the century. To say that health care's not affected by the flood of the century just shows a lack of understanding and a—perhaps naïveté of how essential health care is. It makes me, I guess, not surprised that she has a leader who is looking to cut half a billion dollars from our system and doesn't understand that that will affect health care.

Mr. Chair, I can tell you that during the flooding EMS was severely affected, roads were closed. There were areas that were inaccessible. An ambulance by land could not get to many areas of the province. You could not have landed a plane in those areas. We know that a helicopter ambulance provided life-saving services.

We also know that during a flood of that size, of course, people are displaced from their homes, whether that be people who work at some level in the health-care system—perhaps, yes—also that we know Manitobans who are always seen as the most charitable across the country are also some of the best volunteers, and nothing pulls this province together like a flood situation of neighbours helping neighbours. I certainly saw—I was in a different department at the time, but I certainly saw everyone from students to faculties at universities in the department that I was looking over at that time stepping away from what would be their normal work of the day and lending a hand.

So to think that the flood of the century has no impact on health is incredibly naive, of course, EMS was severely affected. Road closures would severely affect their ability to access patients, to get to situations. There were areas that they just would not be able to get to, and that we had helicopter ambulance service in Manitoba, thankfully, to be



able to reach those people that would not be reached in any other way.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The only one naive in all of this is definitely this new Minister of Health who really is appearing to be in over her head on a health issue. After 23 years in health care as a nurse and all of these years as a Health critic off and on, I can guarantee her that I have a very, very good understanding.

\* (15:40)

I also know that many people in Manitoba were affected by the flood, some dramatically affected, but it doesn't mean that her Department of Health or her office—the minister of the day—should have come to a grinding halt. In fact, the minister just gave everybody the best reasons why that report should have seen the light of day, and it didn't. Her comments, her responses, actually—and she was right. That report, therefore, was so critical that her department should have ensured that it was acted on right at that time, to speak to all of the issues that she was talking about.

Now, yes, EMS is out on the road; yes, there are road problems. But the people in her department don't come to a grinding halt during a flood. They need—that's when they step up. And the one person that didn't step up is actually the minister of Health of the day because it was the department that created this report, and it was the department that saw the need for all of this; they did their work. Somehow, in all of this, it was the minister of Health that did not move on this report. And that does raise a lot of questions.

The flood should have highlighted the need for looking at a solid provincial helicopter program at that time. That was the first recommendation—approval is given to develop a detailed project plan for a provincial helicopter program. Seems to me, in the midst of a flood, that should've been motivation enough for the minister to move ahead. And yet the minister, for some reason, ignored this report that came forward from her department.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health: Who commissioned that feasibility study?

**Ms. Selby:** Well, of course, the floods in 2009 and 2011, well, of course, they absolutely did highlight the need of having a helicopter ambulance service. It's why we contracted with STARS at that time because we did see that during those major floods when we partnered with STARS, we were able to

offer that helicopter service to rural Manitoba families, to places that we just could not access.

We also knew that there would take 18 to 24 months for another option to be available in Manitoba, which is why, after seeing the good work that they did, the important work that they did and the fact that we know so many Manitobans have depended on the good work that they've done, and that STARS was the only provider who was able to offer a helicopter-based air ambulance service at that time, that we did go into a contract with them. We know that if we put the contract out for helicopter ambulance service to tender, it would've meant ending that service, and during that time, of the eight months between the announcement and the signing of the contract, STARS transported over 100 patients. Many of them, I have no doubt, credit their lives to this service.

So, absolutely, we did recognize the importance of it, and that is why we signed the contract with them: so that we could continue to cover that population that, in some cases, whether it's remote or just because of a weather incident is—would be unreachable any other way. So, absolutely, the 2011 flood highlighted why it was so important to keep STARS in the province.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Didn't the 2009 flood actually make that point—not the 2011 flood?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, as we've said today, during the flood of 2009, as well as the flood of 2011, we did contract STARS to provide the specialized emergency medical service that they can provide by helicopter.

While we were investigating the potential of a helicopter-based air ambulance service providers, that's when the major flood of 2011 hit—the flood of the century. So, of course, we went into another contract with them during that flood, and based on that service, decided that we would maintain the life-saving service that STARS does provide.

**Mrs. Driedger:** But could the government not have maintained that service just by continuing with an interim contract? They didn't have to sign this big \$100-million, 10-year contract. They've had—they had STARS—correct me if I'm wrong—but STARS was there under an interim contract twice. Why couldn't that interim contract just have been extended? Or do another contract, an interim one, and take your time to then properly tender it during that period. I don't see why, all of a sudden, there

was this big panic to get this contract out there—and it was untendered—when, in fact, the government happily had interim contracts. Why didn't they just keep an interim contract going until the tender was out and properly done?

**Ms. Selby:** Our focus, of course, always is on providing the best patient care. We know that that's what matters to families. Certainly, in some circumstances, when it's in the public interest, when there is only one qualified proponent, governments do, at times, contract without a tender.

We think that that was the right call, being that this is a life-saving service. We saw the good work that they did during the major floods that we experienced in 2009 and 2011. We partnered with STARS at that time to offer the helicopter ambulance service. We knew that it would take 18 to 24 months for another option to be available in Manitoba, which is why we did announce that we wanted to enter a long-term contract with STARS. They were the only provider at the time that was able to offer a helicopter-based air ambulance service at that time. Putting the contract out for tender for a helicopter ambulance service would've meant ending that service, and that—we knew that it was a valuable service.

And I would point out that, in 1997, of course, the previous Conservative government did not make any move towards making a helicopter ambulance permanent after the 1997 floods. They didn't acquire a helicopter. Certainly, we saw the important work that they did and felt that Manitobans know the importance of having that helicopter ambulance service, and that's why we acted on it.

\* (15:50)

And I note that, in 1997, with the other—one of the other major flood events that happened in Manitoba, the former Conservative government did not do anything to make a helicopter ambulance service part of our EMS system. They didn't acquire a helicopter; they did not move forward with making it part of our EMS service.

**Mrs. Driedger:** If the government didn't tender the contract, how do they know that STARS was the only provider able to offer this service?

**Ms. Selby:** Certainly, we know, at the time, there was no commercial provider in Manitoba that was able to provide helicopter ambulance service. I know this critic has a background in health care and knows that helicopter ambulance service is more

specialized; it's not just a transport of patients, it's not just a regular helicopter than can move people, it's a very specialized service.

We knew at that time that it would take 18 to 24 months for another option to be available, which is why we entered into the long-term contract with STARS, who was the only provider at the time that was able to offer that helicopter-based ambulance service. And we did not want to go forward with putting a contract out for a helicopter ambulance service to tender that would've meant ending the service that we had with STARS. We know during that time a hundred people were moved—and, certainly, see the value in that service.

I should say also, Mr. Chair, helicopter EMS service is not something that just came up, of course. In 2009, certainly, the experience of that flood did lead us to take a serious look at our capacities and the need for helicopter EMS. A feasibility study was then conducted in 2009, and in the November 2010 Throne Speech we announced our intention to pursue an air ambulance helicopter.

While we were doing that, while we were investigating a potential helicopter-based ambulance service, as I said earlier, that's when the major flood event hit, the flood of the century in 2011. Just as we had done in 2009 and in 2011, Manitoba contracted with STARS to provide that specialized emergency medicine services by helicopter. Based on that, we did decide to maintain the life-saving services.

But I should also mention that, when the previous Conservative government contracted for flood service during 1997, they didn't do anything to make it permanent. They didn't do anything to acquire helicopter EMS capacity when that flood was over. We thought it was important to take a look at it at a time when we saw how important it was in 2009 and 2011. The previous government did not do anything in the way of making it permanent or acquiring helicopter EMS capacity when the floods of '97 were over.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister explain why she thinks that they would have had to end that service? They could have extended the interim contract with STARS. It's done all the time. Why is she saying that they would have had to end that service when that actually is not true?

**Ms. Selby:** As I've said before, and I'll say it again, in some circumstances, when it's in the public interest, when there's only one qualified proponent,

government may enter into a contract without a service. We think in—or, without a tender, rather. We do think that it's the right call when it comes to a life-saving service. Previous governments, the previous Conservative government, entered an untendered contract with Connie Curran with the sole purpose of cutting \$64 million from health care, and we know that that resulted in firing of 1,000 nurses.

We think that, when it is a call about saving lives, that sometimes you need to put base patient care in the forefront, and knowing that had we waited for another option it would take 18 to 24 months to be available, we did want to enter that contract because we knew that STARS was able to provide the helicopter-based air ambulance service at the time. We know that they had provided very good service in 2009, 2011 as well, and felt that it was important that we continue that service. And as I've said before, during that eight months between the announcement and the signing of the contract, STARS did transport over 100 patients.

\*(16:00)

So I think when we were looking at wanting to make sure there was no break in service, we went ahead with what we thought was the right call on a life-saving service. Other governments think that it's appropriate to go to contract without tender in circumstances like Connie Curran, when the Conservative government went without tendering her contract for nearly \$4 million and resulted in worse health care for people.

Our focus is on providing the best health care. We know that this is an important service for Manitoba families, particularly rural families. We've seen the work that they've done and we felt that it was the right call on this life-saving service.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister tell us if the government asked STARS if they would accept an extension of the interim contract while the government went ahead and tendered properly?

**Ms. Selby:** We had—certainly had preliminary discussions with Ornge and Helijet in BC. They did not express interest, would not have been able to provide the same coverage of service immediately that we had from STARS. We know that Saskatchewan was also interested in STARS at the same time, and through their research, also did not tender their contract with STARS.

Certainly, our concern was making sure that we had a continuation of care. We knew that it would take 18 to 24 months for another option to be available. We were concerned that that would put a break in service. We had seen the good service that STARS had done. We were concerned about not being able to provide a continuity of that service, which is why we decided that it was important to enter into a contract with the life-saving service that STARS can provide.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The minister did not answer the question, and I will ask her again. I believe it is a key question, and the government does owe Manitoba some explanation.

And I'll ask her: Did the government ask STARS if they would accept an extension of that interim contract so that there would be no break in service, so that continuity would be in place while the government then moved forward with a proper tendering process? Did they ask STARS if they would accept that extension? Was it even asked?

**Ms. Selby:** As I said, the department did have discussions with Ornge and with Helijet. They did not express interest. They did say they were not able to immediately provide service to rural Manitoba, which, of course, is the most important service that STARS does provide, is getting to those remote and rural locations that we couldn't reach otherwise.

We certainly felt that in the public interest it did merit going forward with an untendered contract, as Saskatchewan did, to be sure that we didn't have a break in service. We know that looking at another option would've taken 18 to 24 months to be available, so we did announce that we wanted to enter the long-term contract with STARS feeling that they were the only provider that was able to offer the helicopter-based ambulance service at the time. We did not want to have a break in service, and we know that the difference of getting a highly-skilled medical team to the patient as quickly as possible can make all the difference. It's why we have an EMS service that works together to decide who is the first responder, should it be an ambulance, should it be a jet, should it be the helicopter ambulance.

We felt that it was important to maintain that service. We saw the good work that they did and that is why, like the government of Saskatchewan did as well, that in the public interest it did merit going forward with an untendered contract to ensure that we could maintain the service provided by STARS at that time.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The minister is still not answering the question, and it really is a basic yes or no answer that she would give. And the question is, did the government ask STARS if they would accept an extension of that interim contract?

**Ms. Selby:** I will go through the timeline again for the critic.

In November, of course, we did announce our intention to pursue air ambulance helicopter while we were investigating the potential helicopter-based ambulance service providers. That is when the 2011 flood hit, a major flood, the flood of the century. I realize this member dismisses it as not being something that would affect Health. We see that quite differently. We take it quite seriously and see that Health has an incredibly important role to play in times of emergencies of any kind, of course, and all the time. It's why that we continue to make sure that we're protecting front-line services and why when we're facing difficult economic times that we choose to protect nurses and doctors. And we know they made different choices, probably because of attitudes that we've seen today, that even during a flood that Health somehow is not important in a major weather effect like the flood of the century. We think differently.

During the flood of 2009 and 2011, we did bring STARS in. We saw that they brought in specialized emergency service. They were able to reach places that nobody else could get to. Based on that benefit of service, we decided to maintain that life-saving service. We decided that in this particular case, when it's in the best public interest, when there's only one proponent that is qualified to do it, a government sometimes enters a contract without a tender. We think this was the right call. We saw the good work that they had done. We know that, in the time between the announcement and signing the contract, a hundred people were served by STARS. Many, many, I have no doubt, would credit their lives to this service. So, certainly, we thought it was an important service and we wanted to continue that important service.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And we don't dispute, Mr. Chair, at all that a helicopter EMS service is critically important. We've always said that. It's about how to do it right that we are raising concerns about, and this government didn't do it right. The auditor has pointed that out.

\*(16:10)

Certainly, helicopter EMS is an invaluable service in rural Manitoba and there have been multiple times where that has been demonstrated. Also, hospitals are equipped to handle these situations. Hospitals don't go—you know, they're used to the challenges that come before them. So it's not like hospitals couldn't handle the challenge over the number of days of a flood. That's where, you know, all these front-line professionals really step up to the plate, and they do an excellent job. Certainly, a lot of credit goes to them.

The Department of Health certainly had a role to play in this, and the minister's office certainly had a role to play. It looks like it's the minister's office where this failed, and the minister isn't answering the question of did the government ask STARS if they would accept an extension. So I am going to answer that question because STARS did answer it to the media, and they said they might have covered a gap in service. They said, we would certainly consider it. But it appears that STARS wasn't asked if they would be agreeable to accepting an extension of their interim contract. The government did not even do that. So the government is at fault here for this whole debacle that has happened now, and the auditor rightly slammed them for it. The government didn't even ask STARS if they would stick around. We could've had continuity of service. Manitobans would appreciate that for sure. But it was how the government mismanaged this that is the question here—STARS was never asked. So, yes, there could've been continuity in service, but it does beg the question of why didn't the government ask STARS to continue on, and then go out and tender the contract.

There are qualified proponents out there. I don't know why the minister is indicating there weren't any other ones. There are other ones. They happened to talk to two of them out there, but there are other services out there that might have applied for that. The government doesn't know, though, you know, who the providers are, because they never tendered it. So, when they say that it would take 18 to 24 months for another option, they could've had an interim contract with STARS for that length of time. They didn't have to stop services.

So this Minister of Health really doesn't know what she's talking about when she is making all of these comments, and she really doesn't know what she's talking about because, this service, there were ways that they could've continued it. They could've continued it with STARS, if they'd asked STARS.

You know, certainly Manitobans appreciate having a helicopter EMS service, no doubt about that, but it is about who can get it done and get it done well and get it done right, and it wasn't this NDP government.

And, if they were so concerned about all of this, it then begs the question why a year after this feasibility study—which, by the way, I would say the minister should pay more attention to, because in that feasibility study it said that the program would improve trauma care, rapid transport of stroke and heart attack patients, rapid access to cardiac catheterization, care for children with complex disorders, emergent obstetrical care and care for neonates. It would also help in responding to natural disasters and it would be a safety net to Manitoba rural emergency departments in times of temporary service reduction. There are the reasons why that feasibility study at the end of 2009 should've been acted on. Instead, the government didn't do anything until the end of 2010 where they made an announcement—and that's all they did at the time was make an announcement in their Throne Speech; they still didn't act.

By the time they acted, if they had gone ahead at the time this report came to them, they would've had a helicopter service. They could've tendered it and it would've been done. Instead, the way they handled it was grossly, grossly mismanaged, and it was mismanaged in more ways than that. The auditor even points out that it put patients at risk, and I will be asking a lot of questions about that, because that is a serious, serious allegation that was made, and the auditor didn't take any of this lightly.

But there's another part to this too. This feasibility study said that the cost of this, the plan at that time would've been \$5 million a year, not \$12 million. I would ask the minister, now that we're way down this road, wouldn't she have thought that \$5 million was a better price to pay than \$12 million, because it's sure taking away from a lot of other front-line patient-care options that could be given to patients.

And, you know, we heard today about all these closed ERs. We've heard, you know, moms having babies on the side of the road because they can't get a doctor in Swan River for delivering babies. Would that money not have been better spent, you know, bringing down waiting lists or providing care for patients in a number of areas? Why not settle for a \$5-million-a-year contract versus a \$12-million-a-year contract?

**Ms. Selby:** I am glad to see that now—that this member does now recognize the important role of helicopter EMS. Certainly, I'm a bit confused, because on one hand she recognizes it, but doesn't recognize that helicopter ambulance is front-line health care, actually, that sometimes that front line is an isolated or rural area that no one else can reach. There is no doubt that a helicopter EMS is front-line service to many, many Manitobans. But I do want to say that I'm glad that she does recognize it, that now she recognizes that that's important.

I still wonder why she doesn't see the larger role that health care does play in Manitoba, especially when she doesn't understand how health care plays a large role in a major disaster like a flood. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. I know she has a health-care background, but her leader clearly doesn't understand the importance of health care when he wants to make massive cuts right across the system of half a billion dollars—clearly doesn't understand the importance of health care.

I think this member—and maybe it's because she can't see the connection between how health care is a vital part of Manitobans' lives every single day, that Manitoba families depend on Manitoba Health, that they depend on knowing that it's there. She's dismissing the context of what was going on in 2011. Perhaps she doesn't remember that that was the flood of the century. There was mass devastation. Families were hurting. Communities were hurting. People were displaced. Certainly, we saw that the flood protection that we had in Winnipeg made it—we were lucky in Winnipeg. But, certainly, for communities that didn't have the flood protection at that time, did not have the same experience. It was a very, very difficult time for many, many communities and many families.

During that time, of course, we did contact other providers. They were not able to provide that continuation of care, and that was our priority, is to make sure that we continued that very important care. We wanted that service to continue. Our priority is always patient care. It's why, when we looked at this situation we did go into an untendered contract, again, just as Saskatchewan did. We went into that with our eyes open to provide better health care, particularly to rural Manitobans.

It's a stark contrast, I know, to how things were done when they were in power. When they were in office Conservative policy was very different. They went into an untendered contract with Connie Curran

with the sole purpose of cutting \$65 million from the health-care system, again, probably reflected in their opinion that health care doesn't play a role in major disasters. We know what that undertendered contract resulted in; it resulted in a thousand nurses being fired in Manitoba.

\* (16:20)

We kept a valuable service in Manitoba. We wanted to continue that valuable service. And patient care was always at the front of our minds in looking at the good work that had been done and wanting to continue that work.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The feasibility study said that 35 to 50 lives could be saved annually. Can the minister tell us, now that we've had a helicopter EMS service for over a year, have 35 to 50 lives actually been saved? Has that proved to be true?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Chair, I know that this member knows full well how complex those situations are—emergency situations, in particular—that it really—there's the entire team with their experience, their expertise, their knowledge, can make a difference, and those differences can happen very quickly in these situations, as well. Certainly, have heard—I've had rural fire chiefs who took the time to write to me, to the department, to let us know how essential this service is for them.

I could give the member—if she wanted—I could give her the number of missions and transports that STARS has been on since we've had the contract. EMS, of course, is one part of the health-care system. It would be hard to, perhaps, break down which member of the team at which point in the service could be credited with which particular action in saving a patient's life. I think it's really—it's the team coming together, their expertise, their experience, their incredible quick thinking under the pressure that they work under.

But I certainly would be able to provide the member with the number of missions and transports that STARS has gone on, if that would be helpful to her.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Chair, I already have those numbers. I thank the minister for offering them, but through freedom of information, we have been tracking the number of missions.

Now, the feasibility study said that 600 to 800 patients could be transported annually, and we know that that is what is happening in Saskatchewan.

In Manitoba, in 2012, there were only 240 missions, and for 11 months of 2013, there were 235 missions. This is well below what was predicted could be done in that feasibility study and well below what's happening in Saskatchewan.

Can the minister tell us—because I'm sure she must have asked her department why things are—are these numbers are so low, but why is it that compared to the predictions and compared to Saskatchewan, we are flying—STARS is flying so little?

**Ms. Selby:** Not long ago, I actually was able to visit MTC in Brandon, which, of course, is our state-of-the-art call centre. I hope the members had a chance to visit, and, if not, I would recommend it. It's something Manitoba should be incredibly proud of. When you imagine the number of calls that come into there, the decisions that have to be made very, very quickly, you would wonder if it would be a place where it would look, you know—lots going on and how do people work under that pressure. But I was so impressed to see that people there, obviously, have the expertise, the training and the experience to know how to handle these situations as they arrive.

Those front-line services, the folks on the front-line service, of course, make the decision of what should be used. The nice thing about having the integrated dispatch system is that they can decide at that point, should it be the land ambulance, should it be a helicopter, should it be the life jet, and, in fact, in some cases it's more than one; sometimes they work together in a particular call depending on the situation. So, certainly, they make that decision on the front line of what is the best thing to send whether that be a helicopter, whether that be a land ambulance.

Of course, we also have the Clinical Oversight Panel that is together now under the direction of Dr. Brian Postl that is looking at dispatch, as well, and ensuring that we're making best use of the helicopter and best use of integrating it with our system as well. And we know that the helipad at Health Sciences Centre that will come into service will also be very beneficial to this service. So, certainly, I saw the good work that the folks do at MTCC. I know that those folks have the expertise to make those decisions, and it really is their call of what is the best way to reach somebody in an emergency situation.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Certainly, I do acknowledge the expertise that is in that centre in Brandon. I think we

do have a jewel there, and, you know, an agency there that is doing remarkable work, and I do give them a lot of credit. I actually do look forward to having an opportunity to visit there.

\* (16:30)

But the minister didn't answer the question. And I'm sure her department had to be asking this, because when they went into all of this, they were thinking that they were going to have, you know, 600 to 800 transports a year, and they're only seeing 235 to 240, which is costing about \$50,000 a trip. Why—and the questions must have been asked by the department or the minister, surely, somewhere. Why—and there's probably some valid reasons, and I'm just asking for those reasons.

Why would STARS not have been put into action more than 235 or 240 times a year when the Province had been expecting it would be used 600 to 800 times?

**Ms. Selby:** Certainly, we know the value of this life-saving service. We've seen the work that they've done. We know that they're able to get to places that you just can't get to sometimes by any other way. Certainly we depend on the folks in the dispatch centre to make those decisions. They're the folks that know what is the appropriate service to use at the right time. They make those decisions under very complicated situations sometimes. I've seen the work that they do; they have the experience and the expertise to make those decisions. And certainly I wouldn't be in a position to question their expertise and knowing what is the best thing to send.

But, as I said, we do have the clinical oversight committee in place under Dr. Brian Postl. They're going to be reviewing a number of things, including dispatch as well, to make sure that we are using STARS to its best ability, to make sure that we are integrating and providing the best care that we can.

And that is absolutely one of the areas that the clinical oversight committee will be looking at is dispatch. But I must say, having seen it first-hand, the good work that folks do at MTCC, the very stressful, I'm sure, and no doubt difficult situations that they have to make judgment calls on, I'm glad we have people on the front line with those kind of experience, with that kind of expertise, to make those decisions. And that is how it's done. Those folks make the decision of the appropriate server at the right time.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And, Mr. Chair, I'm not questioning the dispatch decisions. I believe they're probably making the right decisions at the dispatch centre, so that's not the question at all. The question is related to the prediction at the beginning that 600 to 800 patients would be transported annually. Now, that was in the feasibility study. We're seeing far less than that actually happening.

So my question is: How did the government, how did the department, determine—what was used to determine that there could be 600 to 800 transports annually? And would—if there had been a tender, would we have been able to have better numbers before us that might be more accurate than what was predicted at that time? Was it an overestimation? Or—what is going on here? These numbers are just so, you know, apart. And, surely to goodness, knowing that it's \$50,000 a trip, the minister has to have asked these questions.

So why the low numbers of missions on an annual basis here compared to what was predicted? The minister must have asked, surely to goodness.

**Ms. Selby:** Again, I'll say that we know the value of this life-saving service. It's why we chose to go with STARS. We saw the work that they did in 2009, 2011. We know that they provide a valuable service, and we know that they've been dispatched over 600 times. They've transported over 400 patients in the time that they've been here.

And, again, we take our advice, our medical advice from medical experts. Front-line workers, those folks who are working in the dispatch centre, they're the folks that make the decision of what is the right vehicle to use in the right situation. They have the expertise. They have the experience to do that. And really, we take our medical advice from the medical experts. I know, at times, that this member has called on me to ignore medical advice, but that's not something I'm willing to do.

Again, the clinical oversight committee is going to be under the direction of Dr. Brian Postl—is reviewing dispatch, a number of things as well to ensure that we have the highest quality care in what is a very complex critical care. Certainly, in my discussions with people who work in the field, particularly in the field of critical care, this is one of the most difficult areas in health to work in. It's—things change quickly; decisions have to be made very, very quickly, and it is the experience, the training, the expertise of those medical professionals that we decide on.

The folks at MTC are the ones that decide where to go. I can tell you that in 2013 MTCC fielded 119,000 calls, and in those calls they made the decisions of where to go, who to send. This isn't something that we do. We don't assign what service they should be sending. They're the experts. We follow their advice. They're the ones who have the experience to make those decisions of whether they should be sending an ambulance by land, by helicopter, by plane. And at times, sometimes they do work together, too, in order to provide the service that is needed.

So, certainly, we know that over 400 patients have been transported by STARS. We see the value in having that life-saving service in Manitoba.

**Mrs. Driedger:** You know, with every answer this minister keeps losing more and more credibility. It appears that this minister has not asked for why these numbers are so different and why her department might have then overestimated the number of transports that would be done. I mean, that's a—a contract was entered for \$12 million a year based on this government thinking they were going to have 600 to 800 transports annually. And it's her department that made that decision, and then they went out and they didn't tender it. Maybe if they'd tendered it, they might have been forced to look more definitively at what the use would be. This is very, very—*[interjection]* Yes, disturbing is the word, because you—the government went into a \$12-million contract a year based on these numbers that seem to be wrong.

The feasibility study also showed that the helicopter EMS would be a safety net to Manitoba rural emergency departments in times of temporary service reduction. And we know this minister and the previous minister of Health have touted STARS as, you know, the be-all and end-all for the 19 ERs that are closed, and yet now we find that STARS is semi-grounded.

So I want to ask the minister, with the—with what we presented to her in question period today about the severe shortage of doctors in many parts of rural Manitoba, with the 19 ERs closed, with the signs on the ER doors that tell people to take an ambulance—and I guess they are lucky if they can get an ambulance—STARS semi-grounded—where now, then, is the safety net? All last year, this Minister of Health was out talking about, you know, they have this wonderful safety net. Well, where is the safety net now for rural Manitobans?

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Selby:** Certainly we know that there are times when no other service can reach somebody, whether somebody is in a very rural area, a remote area, there are times that there is no other way to reach someone in an emergency situation. There are times when you cannot drive an ambulance in, there are times when you cannot land a life jet, and that is when we depend on helicopter ambulance service to reach people. I certainly heard from many rural fire chiefs who told me how important this service was to them and that they know that there are times when helicopter ambulance is the only way to reach people.

I know this member doesn't see—as she said earlier, she doesn't see how Health has a role to play in a major weather event like a flood, that she doesn't see how health would be affected by something like flooding. And, again, obviously, when a land ambulance can't drive over a road that's been washed out, that affects the service delivery, and that is why we know how important it is to have STARS in there, to get to people, whether it be just a remote area or something like a flood, where people just can't be reached.

You know, as I've said before, we know how important STARS's service is. It's why it was not an easy decision when we did look at suspending the service, but we did it on the advice of medical professionals. I know this member, in an interview, called on us to ignore the advice of medical professionals, to ignore the concerns that medical professionals raised, and it seems that she's doing that again today. But, whether it be those front-line workers that are working in our dispatch centre to make the decision of how to best reach somebody, how to best serve somebody in an emergency situation, or whether that be in any other health situation, we follow the advice of our medical professionals. We think that's really important to listen to them. I know that this member thinks that we should dismiss it and ignore it. That's not something we're willing to do.

I can tell this member that the safety net that we're building includes more than 560 more doctors working, a net gain of more than 560 more doctors—a number they like to dismiss. More than 3,560 more nurses are part of it. They fired a thousand nurses—not a great safety net. We hired more than 3,560 nurses since that time. STARS is a part of that safety net, having more ambulances is a part of that



safety net, and always working to improve the service to make sure that we do provide a better service. It's why we brought in Dr. Postl to head up the Clinical Oversight Panel, to look at seeing, are we doing the best that we can, how can we improve it.

Definitely we're always looking for efforts to make the system more safe. It's why we brought in critical incident reporting. There was a time when they were in office, when concerns and problems were buried, when they were hidden. I guess it was part of that culture of don't take medical advice.

We have a different culture. We think it is important. That's why we brought in critical incident legislation: so that problems aren't buried under the rug, so that when things go wrong—and, unfortunately, it does sometimes and it is very tragic when these situations happen—but it is important that we look at what happened, that we learn from it. And it's exactly why we brought in Dr. Postl and the clinical oversight committee: so that we can look at how we can improve this service, so we can make sure that we are using the STARS service in the best manner to provide the best service to people.

But, you know, hiring more doctors, hiring more nurses, having more ambulances, that is building a bigger safety net. Cutting \$37 million from rural health, like they did when they were in office, that's big scissors right across the safety net, Mr. Chair.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I guess the minister forgot to read the part of the auditor's report where she slammed this government for the breach of safety rules in their rush to bring this contract forward. And the auditor says, this government put patients at risk by what they did. So she can sit there and spout off all she wants, and she can play her petty, partisan games here. I'm not going to bite.

This is such a serious issue, Mr. Chair. This is a very serious issue. There's patient safety at stake, there's taxpayers' money at stake here—a lot of it—and, you know, every time this government can't defend its record, it starts to spout off their partisan, petty nonsense.

And you know what? I'm here to speak up for patients, and I'm here to speak up for the professionals that are trying to figure out what's going on here, and so I am not going to waste my time, like the minister is choosing to waste her time. She's forgot her role, and her role is to be there for

patients. That's what this is all about. It's not to be defending, trying to stay in power and make all of these ridiculous comments that she's making.

There are some serious issues, and I wish the minister would really focus on them. That's part of the stewardship and ministerial responsibility of being a minister, so I would urge her to refocus here and make this about patients, because that's what it should be about.

So the next question, then, to the minister is: How old is Manitoba's STARS helicopter? Do we have a temporary one, and are we waiting for a bigger, proper one? Is our helicopter, like, 25 years old, and did we buy it from STARS for \$3.2 million? Or what's happening here?

**Ms. Selby:** Mr. Chair, I know that the member mentioned, when she first got in here, that she hadn't yet had a chance to read the Auditor General's report, so perhaps I should just direct her to page 16.

Certainly, we were very pleased when the Auditor General said, on page 16, that adequate plans are in place to assess the quality of patient-care concerns. We were pleased to see that the Auditor General noted that, when concerns were raised, that we addressed them, including the temporary suspension of STARS. That was not an easy decision. We know how vital STARS is to people. We know that, particularly, rural Manitoba families depend on it. It was not an easy decision, but again, we needed to act on the advice of our medical professionals. When they raise concerns with us, we take that very seriously.

I know the member stated in an interview that we should ignore the advice of medical professionals, that, at that point, she wanted us to ignore what they were saying and go ahead and make decisions not based on medical advice. And that's just not something that we were willing to do.

\* (16:50)

So, again, I would urge her that, if she hadn't got to that section yet on page 16, the OAG—the Auditor General's report actually does say that Health has reacted with adequate plans to assess quality of patient-care concerns, absolutely, and also, further to that, have brought in Dr. Postl on the Clinical Oversight Panel. That panel will deal with other concerns, making sure that we have the training in place, that make sure that we're looking at dispatch as well. Dr. Postl has incredible experience with

these sort of situations, as—is somebody very, very experienced in this area.

And, again, the member once again dismissed critical care legislation, much like they did when they were in power, when things would go wrong and they would ignore it and sweep it under the rug. We do things differently. She dismisses that as something that is not important. We think it is. Critical care legislation is absolutely essential to making sure that when things do go wrong, and things, tragically, sometimes do go wrong, but we need to learn from them. We need to learn from them and we need to listen to medical advice. We are not the experts on it; the people in the front lines are the experts.

And I think that this member really hasn't talked about the fact that she's part of a government that when they were—when she was in government, when her leader was, they made cuts that hurt people, they took the scissors to the safety net. They fired nurses, they froze capital spending in health care, they were the ones that really did a lot of damage to the safety net. We know there's more work to do, absolutely, and we're always working to improve things. It's why we brought in Dr. Postl to take a look at the clinical oversight committee. We brought him in and the experts around that table to look at how we can best use the service, improve the service, and make sure that Manitobans are getting the safest patient care.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. If people want to have a discussion maybe you can go on the side, somewhere else. Only one person at a time can speak.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'll just help the minister a little bit here. It's not critical care; it's critical incidents. And, for the record, we fully supported that legislation. Now, the minister didn't answer anything about the age of the helicopter—

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

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. Order. Order, please. Please don't disturb the discussion. Just—if you want to discuss, go and outside and you can do it over there.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Back to the question, which the minister didn't answer, how old is the STARS helicopter that we are using right now?

**Ms. Selby:** Of course, we recognize the importance of our critical incident legislation. We're the ones who brought it in. We think it is very important that

when problems happen, and, tragically, they do sometimes in health care. People are working under very difficult situations, very challenging situations, decisions have to be made very, very quickly, and sometimes, unfortunately, things go wrong. That's why we brought in critical incident legislation, is so that when something like that happens that we can address it, that we can learn from it.

We know how things were done when they were in office, Mr. Chair. They ignored problems. They swept them under the rug. And it is hard for me to imagine, but they allowed 12 babies to die and still didn't take into consideration what happened to learn from such devastation that those families went through. It was actually left to us to apologize to those families and to bring in legislation to make sure that that didn't happen again.

Again, I will state that we'd want to always listen to our doctors, our medical professionals on their medical advice. When they give us medical advice, we listen. I know this member has called on us to dismiss that before. This is the same member who in an interview dismissed critical incidents as only three critical incidents. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but that is not how we feel on this side of the House. We don't want to bury problems. We don't want to make problems be secrets. We will never say there were only three critical incidents, as this member actually did say in an interview. Because for those families that is not only three critical incidents, those are people's lives. Those are people's loved ones. That is not something that can be dismissed as easily as both this member has dismissed in previous interviews and as her leader and her—the people around her table did when they were in government. They ignored things that happened. They left it for us to deal with, and that is why we brought in critical incident legislation.

She's aware of it now. Sadly, she referred to it as only three CIs in an interview. That's not only three CIs; that is three families who went through a very, very tragic time, a very difficult time. And what we can tell those families is that we will look at those incidents. We will learn from them. We will put better plans in place. It's why in this case we brought in Dr. Postl. It's why we brought in the critical— a Clinical Oversight Panel under the expertise of Dr. Postl and, of course, many, many experts around that table. Because we're not going to dismiss critical incidents. We're going to look at what happened. We're going to learn from them. We're going to tell those families that we are going to learn so that that

doesn't happen again. Because it isn't just three CIs, it is three family members.

So I can tell this member that if she would like to get into some more specific details of the age of the helicopter, I can absolutely get back to her on that. But I don't think she should dismiss critical incidents. I don't think she should dismiss medical advice. It's something we're certainly not willing to do.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Interesting little speech by this minister who probably hasn't spent a day of her life looking after sick patients or carrying a dead baby in the hospital or holding a dying person. You know, the minister is very naive and very insensitive in her comments. If there's anybody that understands health care and what patients go through when they're dying, or with critical incidents, or with anything else in health care, let me tell you, it's not this Minister of Health. And for her to be so offensive with her comments and twist some of that around, I do find offensive. And, again, because in this whole report we are talking about some very serious issues, in health care we're talking about very serious issues, and she doesn't seem to have the depth of understanding to be able to get in there.

What kind of confidence are people going to have in any of the decisions this government makes when we've got a minister that blames taxicab drivers for the death of patients, and then her first reaction is she's going to get tough with taxi drivers?

Well, you know what? There's just no confidence instilled in the system with the kind of comments made by this minister, the kind of decisions she's making. It really raises some questions, and these are all legitimate questions. And there are a lot of people asking a lot of questions similar to what I'm bringing forward because some of them are coming forward from the public, from patients, from nurses, from doctors who are really starting to have some concern about this Minister of Health's level of understanding about health care.

And, you know, I would urge her just to focus. I know, when this government gets cornered and they can't defend their record, they lash out. They fear-monger. They trash the opposition because that's all they know how to do. And you know what, maybe it's time to just get beyond all of that and, you know, try a little harder.

These are valid questions. I don't know why the minister has to get so testy about it. You know, why

can't she just answer them? These are questions that I would assume she's been asking herself of her own department, because, you know, if she was responsible for that portfolio with the decisions made—

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

## JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

(14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to some semblance of order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the ever-exciting Department of Jobs and the Economy.

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

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** I have a few questions for the minister. I see her department now is in charge of much of the EIA process. And I would like to explore a little bit the relationship, not only with the existing EIA supports that will be in place under her jurisdiction, but how they might be linked with training, Jobs and the Economy and other programs. That's sort of generally where we want to go.

But, initially, I wanted to specifically start with looking for some explanation on how the housing allowance will be increased over the next four years and how that will be phased into place.

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy):** I thank the member for the question. I gave a brief overview of this yesterday during opening remarks. I'll just return to some of the comments that I made there, and we can expand from that as the member's line of questioning sees fit.

I can say to the member that the new Manitoba Rent Assist program is, indeed, part of a four-year plan to raise the maximum benefit levels for EIA participants to 75 per cent of median market rent.

Certainly, we can cut to the chase here and talk about the fact that members opposite have raised a similar number in terms of a view that they might have on this. And, you know, I'll concede that point at the outset, so we don't have to spend time on that.

I would also say that advocates for those living in poverty and, indeed, people with lived experience have met with me and with the previous minister to talk about different ideas about raising access to resources, and work has been done to find what we believe to be the best possible path.

And so taking four years to raise that maximum benefit to 75 per cent of median market rent in my view has been a collaborative and consultative approach, and I think that there's been some very, very good advice coming and I can say quite honestly that listening to the stories of individuals living that experience right now—[interjection] Thank you—is indeed probably the most valuable part of this process for me to date.

I can tell the member also that the new benefit will indeed remain with individuals as they make the transition from EIA to jobs, or as is commonly used in terminology will be portable. House—all households currently receiving the EIA shelter and/or RentAid benefits and living in private rent will see an immediate increase in benefits effective July of this year, 2014. This increase for EIA participants will be \$70 per month for one-person households and \$50 for households with two or more persons.

One of the things that we heard loud and clear from advocates and from individuals was that there was a gap for those single individuals and that that was an area where we needed to focus immediately and so we are certainly following that advice. Also, Rent Assist will be expanded to include all income-eligible households.

So that is how the construct will unfold in the immediate future and I would hasten to add that one of the most critically important parts of this plan is that it's happening in tandem with the sustainable employment strategy to really work hard to assist individuals in finding a path to perhaps training, more education, essential skills training with a view to helping them secure a good job.

**Mr. Wishart:** And I thank the minister for that answer.

I just wanted to be clear, those that are on EIA with disabilities will also be in receipt of this benefit?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, the member is correct.

**Mr. Wishart:** When you look at the numbers on EIA and the percentage that are there because of

disability issues—I guess I'd like some explanation as to how we're going to transition them into sustainable employment in the future and what type of transition program would be in place because there'll be a period of time when they're in training and hopefully entering the workforce—at least to some degree—how is that going to work and at what point will EIA benefits no longer be available to them?

**Ms. Oswald:** So this is a really important question, I thank the member for asking it because without a doubt we want to ensure that we can work with individuals as exactly that, as individuals, and try wherever possible to avoid categorizing people and lumping them all into one group and making, perhaps, sweeping generalizations about what individuals are able to do or not able to do. This can be a bit more labour intensive, but the result can be so much better when there's an individualized kind of service. I have no doubt that the member would agree with that.

The launch of the sustainable employment strategy around a year ago, began with a real focus on a portion of our society that up until now, you know, hadn't faced a whole lot of expectations, really, in terms of their employment, those collecting EIA, and I'm referring specifically to single parents. And the member, you know, would well know that that most often would be single moms. There was a very concerted effort to take a new approach with this particular group and invite them to peer-led community meetings to learn from individuals that had had the same experiences and had made that transition from EIA to work, and to talk about the experience and how the supports that were there and that were continuing to nurture and grow, really were helpful and really were non-threatening and supportive in nature. And we have seen in a very, very short time, I'm really proud to say—and I give full credit not only to the department that's worked so hard on this—they really do deserve a lot of congratulations for their efforts—but for the peers who also came forward.

I can tell this member and the Chamber that since August, I believe it was, last summer, when we started inviting parents with young children to these sessions with a new approach—I would argue a more compassionate, understanding approach—and where they were given information about employment and training opportunities and offered follow-up appointments for assessments to begin on an employment pathway, the sole-support parent

caseload actually saw a significant decline. Between August 2013 and January '14, the sole-support caseload actually declined by 363 cases, which, I'm informed, is 4.5 per cent, which I think is really quite remarkable in such a short time with a new approach.

That work is going to continue, but it is also going to be expanded now to encompass individuals that are on EIA and that have a disability. Indeed, the marketAbilities Program exists now, and there's lots of this work going on. But the success that has happened with this peer-led, compassionate approach that's being taken with single parents, we want to, if at all possible, try to duplicate the success and really make an effort to support individuals on that transition.

The new Manitoba Works! program has a co-operative education model that combines essential skills training with paid supported workplace-based skills development, giving, you know, authentic and meaningful opportunities for individuals to develop those skills and become employed, is a really important—an important initiative. Assessment of workplaces is ongoing to determine availability of supports for persons with disabilities, and, of course, it provides support to employers also, and trainees, to ensure that they'll be successful in those workplaces.

The member also asked me about the supports for people that are in transition. I could—I'll zip through that part as quickly as I can. So there are enhanced work incentives which allows all working EIA participants, including participants with disabilities, to keep \$200 of employment earnings per month plus 30 per cent of all earnings over \$200. There's the Rewarding Work health plan which provides extended health benefits for non-insured health services. The Get Started! Benefit which started in February of '09 provides participants who move from EIA to employment with a one-time payment to assist with unexpected costs; enhanced liquid asset exemption levels, which started in January '09—it increased to \$4,000 per person to a family maximum of \$16,000 applied across all EIA case-categories; and the rewarding volunteers benefit, which began, I believe, in February of '09, extra monthly financial support for persons with disabilities on EIA to help with the costs of volunteering. Fifty dollars per month is provided if volunteering between four and seven times per month and \$100 available if volunteering more than eight times per month.

So that gives, I hope, a bit of a flavour for how these programs, a sustainable employment strategy and the new resources will come into play.

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for that, and there's some interesting initiatives there, and I will come back to some of them, I think, to explore them a little further. But I did want to touch a bit further—the minister made reference to the number of people, particularly single moms with children, on benefits and the retraining issues that have been—that existed for quite a while around that. And I know from talking to a number of them as well that, people in this position, that one of the problems is child care. Is there any linkage in what you're proposing to access to child care as well?

**Ms. Oswald:** Without a doubt, we know that, you know, if an individual is receiving income assistance or not and they are in need of child care, we know that it becomes a real challenge for families that really want to secure child care across the board.

So we know that in this budget there's a multi-million dollar investment—I think it's 4.5 million, but please don't quote me on that, I'm not sure I remember, exactly, it's 4.4–4.5 or 5.5 million dollars for expanding child-care spaces broadly, which has been part of a massive effort to expand opportunities for individuals to have licensed child-care spaces.

I can also let the member know that, as part of the single-parent strategy, there is an amendment that is going to be made to a regulation—we're just double-checking whether the reg has been amended as I speak or it's imminently so; for now I will say imminently so—that there will be an amendment to allow for reimbursement of child-care costs paid to family members for participants unable to access subsidized licensed child care because, indeed, I would agree with the member that arguably the most significant issue in transitioning single moms back into the workplace is making sure that the babes are taken care of. So we're going to work to expand capacity but also work to allow for this reimbursement of child-care costs, you know, should family members be involved in taking care of that in supporting the individual to get back to work.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. That would mean in-home—alternative family members would be able to do child care in-home?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, that's correct. And also, I would add that we're going to be supporting, with funding, a unique self-employment program as well, in partnership with the Early Learning and Child Care branch, to support unemployed Manitobans in establishing a licensed home-based daycare as well, which will serve to improve capacity in that regard.

But, again, I wholeheartedly agree that this is a really important question that the member is asking and that the progress in this initiative could be slowed without a doubt if there isn't that kind of access to quality daycare, and so we're taking it very seriously.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, and I thank the minister for that, and I absolutely agree that this is important.

And I'll share with the minister—I had spoken to a mother, an individual, two children at home. They were in child care; she had managed to find a spot. She was back at school. She was in Manitoba Housing. The housing that she lived in, which was—*[interjection]* multi-unit housing, thank you, was—became infested with bedbugs. The child-care facility had a zero tolerance for facilities—for coming from homes with bedbugs, so her children came back to her. She had to quit school, and I thought, this is a one-off; it'll never happen again. And with a little bit of work, we did find her alternate child care, and she is back in school, but she lost the—a term, effectively.

It happened three more times that I'm aware of. So this is a very common occurrence.

**An Honourable Member:** To the same family or different families?

**Mr. Wishart:** No, not same facility—not same anything. It's—so either we have a lot more bedbugs out there than I even thought there was—and I know it's a real problem in many units, whether they be Manitoba Housing or privately owned—or it is a far more common situation than we—any of us, I think—came to realize.

The ones that are supported by you—and I can't ask you Manitoba Housing questions; I'll save that for the appropriate minister there—but the child-care support that you do pay—I guess, actually, that probably goes through Child and Family Services—doesn't it?—that—the actual dollars. But is there any conditions on staying open if—in any situation, or do they have the right to send them home if they have a bedbug issue?

**Ms. Oswald:** First of all, I would say to the member, what I gleaned from what he said before is that he was involved in some advocacy for these families, and I commend you for that. A single mom dealing with kids, trying to get back on a path to success, you want to endeavour to minimize the stresses and so, I think, human to human, that that's a marvellous thing that you worked to help.

Coming from the ministry that I used to hold, certainly, I—you know, I heard lots on the public-health side of things about, you know, everything from lice and bedbugs and how important it is to contain and, you know, public health and safety. I've heard that entire side of it and cannot discount that, and so I have empathy from that point of view.

I'm not able to answer his question directly about does a daycare have the right to do that. I think he would need to ask the Family Services Minister about that. But, broadly, I can say, whatever we can do in terms of empathy for individuals that are faced with those kinds of day-to-day challenges, I think, would be critically important.

The Department of Jobs and the Economy, you know, through Employment Manitoba has 17 individuals; they're called job connection workers, and their specific job, I'm—well, I'm sure they have a list of things that they have to take care of—but one of their specific roles is to try to help to intervene, I suspect, to do what the member may have done with this family to help during those times of pressure and challenge when a regularly scheduled daycare situation might be interrupted or other such challenges that might inhibit the path of that individual to secure skilled training. And it would be my privilege to connect with the—to connect some information with the member after, if there should be situations in future where he could use some assistance with someone who's actually funded to do just this kind of job connection and intervention and provide some assistance.

\* (15:00)

And I was just passed a note so that I could confirm that it was \$5.5 million for child care—one hates for me to leave a million dollars off the table—and the family care regulation has indeed passed.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the minister for that. And I would certainly appreciate the connections to find someone who's being paid to perform this service because not everyone is always

their own best proponent. Some people run short on temper when they shouldn't run short on temper and sometimes they do themselves untold damage in the system—so having someone to help them will certainly help.

Before we entirely leave housing allowance and I just wanted to be—the minister was very accurate with the numbers that she gave, as to the first year. I guess I'm looking for, as we move down the road and I understand that the first area that you'll work on is actually private residences and raising the housing allowance for private residences. And then I assume Manitoba Housing residents will at some point be—also benefit from that, but as long as they're on RGI it's probably no real rush on those. But what will year 2, 3 and 4 look like in terms of the process here or is it in—a process in development?

**Ms. Oswald:** Mr. Chair, so two things on this subject: No. 1, we're going to continue to seek the sage advice of advocates in the community, academics, people with lived experience, to get their advice. That is really—when I have met with individuals, the most powerful message that I have heard is please continue to talk to us and listen to us. I—we have the best advice that we can give because we're living the situation today and can describe for you when you think a program is working beautifully but there are hiccups in it, you know, we can tell you and you can fix them. It was indeed from these advocates that we heard loud and clear that the most substantial move initially needed to be with the single individuals. So it will be very important to me and the department to maintain that dialogue so that we can mold and shape how we go forward.

That's, I suppose, one could argue, a less prescriptive way of doing this; there will also be an analytical element that will take place concerning assessing median market rent increases on an annual basis. That will be, you know, an extremely important part of just raw arithmetic in how we do that, you know, and in the context of the budgets afforded to us, we will move ahead accordingly. But the four-year target to get to 75 per cent is—it's rock solid and that's how we're going to do it.

So it's difficult for me today to prescriptively set out for you what it's going to be year by year with the absence of that annual check on any increases in median market rent, but yes, the—four years is the target for 75 per cent of same.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister, and I appreciate that this is going to be a fairly complex problem to

integrate into the system, but I certainly encourage you to move forward as quickly as you can. What you effectively create by moving the first year on just one sector is a bit of disparity in the system, and I'm hoping that the landlords don't figure this out and start moving people around to take advantage of that. But let's hope that things continue in this vein.

I did want to touch on a couple of other areas and one that the minister herself brought up when she talked about the liquidity limits. I believe I have the terminology correct; \$4,000, was it, per person? One of the problems in EIA—and it probably occurs a little more in rural areas than it does in major urban areas—where people still have their residence, and it may in fact be completely paid for. Sometimes they've inherited or whatever but they can't go on EIA and own property.

So are you now looking at loosening up those rules because we've certainly run into instances where people had to do some strange and wonderful things, including disposing of the property, living on the results of that sale until they ran out of money, and then they could apply for EIA? And that just doesn't seem like a real productive solution because maintaining housing is probably, as we both come to recognize, one of the key first steps in this. Is this another area that the minister might be looking at changing that regulation?

**Ms. Oswald:** Just to go back to the last component for a second, and I blame myself for focusing on the increase of the single individuals. I do want to make clear, of course, that everybody will get an increase. It was the additional amount for those single individuals that we heard from the advocates that needed indeed to be extra because there was some ground to be made up there. But I just wanted to assure the member that everybody, in fact, that's across the board—single, families and so forth—they will see an increase. It'll just be 70 and 50 so everybody, not just those single persons in the first year.

Oh, I was just going to get to the second part about the primary residence then. So I'm informed by my staff that indeed one can in fact still qualify for EIA and own a primary residence. In fact, there are numbers of individuals that do it. It does have to be a primary residence, I'm informed, and so if the member is in contact with individuals that have understood or have been told perhaps incorrectly that you cannot qualify for EIA if you own a home, then we would want to investigate that further because,

you know, my officials inform me that that does not, in fact, disqualify somebody from being eligible for EIA. So I'd be interested in exploring this further. Maybe I'm not quite understanding the member.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. Well, the specific case I ran into, and I'll touch on that first. The individual involved is elderly. He does own a second residence that his disabled daughter lives in that he maintains and looks after. It's in his name simply because she's not capable of making decisions, and, as such, he does not qualify for any EIA benefits because he has a second residence, even though it's not one that he's living in and it's not a revenue-bearing situation.

\* (15:10)

But, just to go back to be really clear, I knew that all benefits were spread for all family sizes, but the increase is for—and I had—I must admit it's a bit hearsay, but I had been told that the private residences—people in EI in private residence will be the first ones to receive this increase in July and that Manitoba Housing would be transitioned in later. Is that correct?

**Ms. Oswald:** Okay, I think I've got this covered. So, going back to the initial point, all households currently receiving EIA shelter and/or RentAid benefits and living in private rent will see an immediate increase in benefits effective this July, July 2014. So what I was trying to clarify for the member that this increase for EIA participants will be \$70 per month for one-person households and \$50 for households with two or more persons. I was concerned that the member thought it was only the singles. As for Manitoba Housing, they are in income-adjusted subsidized housing situations now, so that is not contemplated in this. It is, indeed, those that are receiving or are in circumstances where they're paying private rent.

And on the subject of the case that he has raised with me, certainly my officials do point to the fact that the ownership of the two residences certainly would have an impact on that individual. What I would invite the member to do, particularly in terms of what he's describing to me now, the circumstances where there is an individual with a disability that may, in fact, be in need of EIA also—if there is somehow some confusion on this matter I would be happy to have my officials take a closer look at the case to make sure that there isn't anything untoward happening with the circumstances of this case. What you're describing to me right here is an individual

that's trying to help somebody in his family that's also in need of EIA. So I'd just like folks to take a closer look at it to make sure that everything's right.

**Mr. Wishart:** Well, I thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the minister for that, and I will certainly gather up the information and get it over there. We've had a couple of goes at this in the past and it's always got hung up in the system somewhere, so perhaps we can resolve it this time.

I would like to follow up a little bit more when you talk about the marketability training process—was that correct?—for those that are on disabilities and are on EIA. And I think the minister would certainly agree that making sure having the right supports in place for those with disabilities as they re-enter the workforce, even to a limited degree, is probably going to be a challenge. I just wondered what plan or approach the department might have to have those supports in place. You mentioned that there would be some supports in the workplace, and I would certainly encourage the minister to expand on what she means by that.

**Ms. Oswald:** Again, an excellent question from the member. I wanted to let him know that the marketAbilities Program provides for quite a broad range of education, training and employment supports to assist people with disabilities to become employed. Now, these supports may include technical aids and devices to help that individual be successful. It could include tuition, books, supplies, tutoring and note-taking where appropriate, transportation, wage subsidy and, indeed, it would also include home and workplace modifications that would help facilitate employment if they're just adaptations to the physical space that need to happen. It is possible to potentially access that through the marketAbilities Program.

In addition to the above-noted benefits for persons living with a disability, the department also has provisions for the delivery of programing to support employment preparation, attainment and maintenance for persons living with a disability. The case—this includes, pardon me, case management and vocational counselling which is delivered by staff of the department's community service delivery division, both in the marketAbilities and EIA programs, as well as staff of the designated agencies who administer the marketAbilities Program on behalf of the department for particular disability populations. Now, these—some of these agencies include the CNIB, the Canadian Paraplegic



Association, Society for Manitobans with Disabilities.

The department funds a number of agencies for the delivery of supported employment services as well as a number of other organizations who provide community-based employment readiness and support services for persons living with a disability. The ultimate goal, of course, is to, as I said earlier, really work to ensure that individuals are treated as such, individuals with individual abilities, and to try very hard to match that individual's interests and abilities with a job that's best suited for them. It goes back, I think, to the adage that we want people to always be better off working and be in environments where there are not only opportunities for improved income, but for improved social connectedness and the avoidance of social isolation and all of the kinds of issues that can arise as a result of that.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for that. There's always more pride in having a job, even if it's a part-time job, than there is in sitting around with social assistance being your sole source of income. And I certainly appreciate what the minister's trying to do here effectively, if I might borrow an old term, move the welfare wall which is a complicated issue, but certainly which looks like you're attempting to do.

When you were reading the list there—and I'll have to check Hansard to be sure I got it right—but I didn't hear Canadian Mental Health Association, and yet I know that they're quite active in this area. Is that not one of the agencies you will be working with?

\* (15:20)

**Ms. Oswald:** Thank you for asking that question, because it did enable us to clarify. I misspoke when I said that the CMHA was not funded through us. There is indeed a project that is funded through Jobs and the Economy for single parents who may be living with mental health challenges and issues to provide supports to them to enable them to be able to do the skills training that might be needed to attain a job, or to provide supports to assist in maintaining a job.

So you're quite right. There is funding from my department for CMHA.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. Only those with families, though? Because, as the minister knows, one in five Manitobans and one in five Canadians at some time in their lifetime experience mental health issues, and a number that's, in fact, growing.

And I would say that, of the cases that I've run into, an awful lot of them end up being single-person households because when—if the stability—instability, rather, goes on for a long period of time, they tend to isolate themselves and end up alone. I would certainly encourage the department and the minister to look at ways to deal with that particular problem. Families get alienated in that situation because, frankly, it's a disease that's not well understood at all.

So is it only families or is it all?

**Ms. Oswald:** The specific funding that flows from my department is targeting single parents, but I am informed that there is funding that actually comes through Health specifically designated to support single individuals.

The member's probably going to ask me, why is it coming from two different departments, and I'll save him time and tell him, I do not know. But, in fact, this is the arrangement that has been made with the CMHA and government in terms of providing those supports, because the member speaks, in my view, a very important truth, and that is that, despite the fact that we're living in 2014 and Herculean efforts have been made by the mental health community, by medical advocates in those communities, I would also say by parents of young people living with mental illness, that so much is still very much misunderstood and stigma abounds. And the more that we can speak in the open about the fact that people in very large numbers in our society live with mental illness—and it isn't something that should be shrouded with shame but spoken about openly, because that's the way we're actually going to be able to make progress in our society, in educational institutions, in employment situations, on the street. Until we're able to make progress in that area, all of society suffers.

So I agree with him wholeheartedly and was actually quite thrilled to be watching Clara Hughes and other Olympians as we, you know, just finished watching the Olympics in Sochi. It was really quite front and centre, the dialogue—at least on the Canadian stations, I would say—it was quite front and centre about how mental illness is everywhere, including with our top athletes, and the more that we can speak about it openly, the more that everyone's going to benefit, whether it's a single individual that needs some supports in gaining a job, whether it's families with children that need some supports.

Governments are going to get smarter—governments of all stripes are going to get smarter as

long as we can destigmatize the issue and speak about it more openly. So I agree with you.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for those comments. I don't understand, like she does, why it's in two different departments, and unless it's a new program, it's not in any way linked to retraining and getting them back in the workplace, and so I just wanted to be clear on that.

I applaud your initiative to link as much as possible back into training and getting them back in the workplace, because, I think, for many of these individuals that, frankly, have at one point in their life been contributing—major contributing members of the society and, at this point in life, with mental health issues, are struggling to get back on their feet, the fact that they could get back into the workplace, even on a part-time basis and hold down a job is a major positive factor. And so I think it's important that that aspect be linked into support.

**Ms. Oswald:** I would note for the member that, you know, good co-ordination of these kinds of services is really important. And individuals that might not be eligible per se for funding for support to transition back into work need to be able to be captured within the context of the vision that we have for trying to provide supports for disadvantaged individuals, for sure.

I know that the creation of the skills centre at 111 Lombard, co-locating a number of services for those that are seeking employment, has a number of resources there for individuals, just to help them make that transition back into work.

I was hearing about a case recently of an individual that went through some difficulties, just as the member is describing. Individual had a master's degree—actually, I think it was Ph.D. Brilliant, brilliant young person with his world and his life ahead of him. And things just went terribly wrong. You know, co-occurring mental-health issues and addictions. And what was promising to be, you know, a wonderful life, went astray for, you know, six or seven years. And through a variety of interventions from family and from agencies and so forth, that person is back in the saddle, ready to pursue that promising life. But it can be very difficult to try to explain to a potential employer—even though you have all the skills in the world and a very big brain, with a Ph.D.—where you've been for seven years. You've been off the grid, and that can be extremely challenging.

And part of what happens at the jobs and—I can never get that title right—the jobs and skills employment centre at 111 Lombard is counselling on those very kinds of issues. How to speak to a potential employer about why you've been off the grid for seven years and why they should take a risk on you now.

So the more that we can co-ordinate programs with CMHA and initiatives through my department, I think, better off—the better off individuals will be, to be able to get the best possible counselling and advice on how to make a new start.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister for that. And I know she appreciates the problem here, and I would encourage her to look at expanding the definition there to pick up as many people as possible that are stuck at some level in the system and would certainly like to move forward.

I'd like to go back a little bit and talk about Manitoba Works!. And we've seen in the past some programs in other departments, I think, like the BUILD program, for instance, that the Housing Department has used.

Is that something that will be transitioned in, or does that remain a completely separate program there? They're very similar in many ways, and so is this part and parcel, or is this a separate program? And where does the funding for this program originate, I guess?

\*(15:30)

**Ms. Oswald:** I can confirm for the member that Manitoba Works! is funded through our department. I would also note that BUILD receives funding through our department also, as does Manitoba Green Retrofits and North End renewal corporation. Certainly, when it comes to BUILD, government works very closely with BUILD and our department works very closely with Housing as well to ensure that opportunities are fulfilled in that regard.

And I would also let the member know that I've spent time with those developing—well, with existing social enterprises, and those seeking to develop a further social enterprise, and they have had plenty of good advice, I believe, as we look at developing a broad strategy for particularly those who have been disadvantaged, entering or re-entering the workforce. They are very passionate voices, indeed, that want to ensure that they are not in any way an afterthought to the process of how individuals can become employed and how they can build up their skills. They want to

be a real centerpiece in us working together to develop these initiatives, and I take their sage advice to heart.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. So we'll end up—you co-fund BUILD and you mentioned the North End project, and I don't think you have the name quite right there, but Manitoba Works! will be focused more on the development of social enterprises. Is that correct?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes. I wouldn't say be focused on social enterprise. It would just be an element of it, and I would let the member know that the other two are North End renewal corporation and Manitoba Green Retrofits.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. I hope I'm becoming clearer on the linkages here because it's been quite a dramatic shift with the creation of this department from other services and moving them here.

So, Manitoba Works! is not solely social enterprises. Where would private industry initiatives that might fit into Manitoba Works!, how would they best fit into this and how would they be approached, because many of them probably need to talk to government, they tend to get a little bit cynical about government coming in the doors and saying I'm from the government; I'm here to help you. And so how will they be approached so that they might be brought into a program that can benefit all?

**Ms. Oswald:** So this is a really important question, as well, that the member raises, so I thank him for it, because this initiative, building a sustainable employment strategy, really is only going to be as good as the participation of industries across our society, you know, whether it's a social enterprise or a private enterprise or what have you. And there are a variety of ways that these connections are made. Of course, we've got 17 sector councils across Manitoba that make up the vast majority of private sector entities. And there is a lot of work that goes on within those contexts, working to make the connections between those that are developing skills and seeking employment and those that are seeking to fill skilled jobs.

We also have 17 employment centres like the one I described at 111 Lombard that not only serves as a really important resource for those that are seeking employment—but I did neglect to mention, so I'm glad that the member raised this issue—but they also serve as a really critical resource for employers

themselves. I heard somebody else refer to these centres as matchmakers. I do think that's oversimplifying it a little bit. But I can understand why they might use that kind of expression, when individuals, whether they're those living with disabilities or entering the workforce for the first time or transitioning from one very good job to another, these employment centres really work hard to create that perfect match. And, if the match right at the outset isn't perfect, they work really hard to assist individuals in gaining the skills that they need in order to create that perfect match, if you will.

And the subtext of that, I believe, is also having frank discussions with employers about trying something new, if they've never employed an individual with a disability ever before, providing employers with the support and the confidence to be able to try for the first time and to be able to offer an ongoing dialogue about how to make the best possible success story out of arrangements that might be, as I say, brand new to these individuals. So through the sector councils—that's one connection point where private industry need not be scared of government, you know, when they come saying, look at what we can do for you. In fact, it's an employer-led dialogue through these employment centres.

I can give you an example, and that is that one of our Manitoba Works! service providers approached Canada Goose. And Canada Goose has an expansion plan with equipment—not engaged in production, due to a lack of skilled workers—and Manitoba Works! is going to endeavour to develop the essential skills and basic industry skills, and then create a perfect match with Canada Goose to be able to, you know, get that production rolling and ensure that individuals have the skills and that the work is safe. But, really, it was through that connection through the Manitoba Works! co-ordinator that this whole connection was made.

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the minister. I'm quite familiar with the sector councils, having been involved in setting up at least two of them for the Ag 'sec'—just two—ag food processing and ag sectors, both of which seem to be working reasonably well. And you're right, they would certainly have the insight, though sometimes they—they'll lack the connection to the industry itself, so that's where they struggle a little bit. But I just wanted to go at one last point here.

\* (15:40)

Going back to the housing allowance and End Poverty Now and their very successful lobby, which I think we all appreciate, they've moved on from housing to living allowances as part of their current lobby. And I just wondered if the minister and her staff, now that she has this responsibility in its—in different departments—more or less in one place now, compared to where it was before—have they done any analysis on—now that we've raised the housing allowance, is the living allowance adequate?

**Ms. Oswald:** Certainly, I've had the great privilege to meet with representatives from End Poverty Now from, I think, a variety of environments. As I said before, those that have been life-long advocates—very splendid individuals, every one. These people have lots and lots of choices of careers they could pursue and jobs that they might undertake, and there's, I think, a really special dedication that these individuals have to ensuring that those that might not be as skilled in advocating for themselves have a voice. And I think that—I hope that there's a very special place for them in there hereafter, because they really are extraordinary human beings.

So meeting with these individuals and those with lived experience, they have offered lots of advice to me. And there's more to come, to be sure, on, certainly, the issue of housing, which we're working very hard in this budget to address. But, looking at, you know, what it is that an individual needs, that Market Basket Measure, and making sure that there's enough to really ensure that people can live a safe, healthy life.

I do think that part of the discussion did tend to focus on the EIA rate singularly, without any acknowledgement of other resources that were available to an individual. And, you know, it was certainly on this point that there was some debate. I'm not sure that it's constructive to disregard other resources that are available. I don't think that we're getting a full and fair discussion of what it is that individuals have been eligible for over time, and focusing on that one number, I don't think, painted a true and fair picture.

Now, having said that, I do think that there's more that we need to be doing. We need to be ensuring that individuals have the resources that they need to be able to transition into work, which I think is why our plan in ensuring that these resources are portable with Manitoba Rent Assist is the key, and it's one that differentiates, you know, our plan from other plans that have been proposed.

You made mention of the welfare wall and not having resources be portable as individuals make what can be a very courageous step to move into work, to take a leap of faith that maybe generations before them never have in their family—we absolutely must ensure that those resources are portable.

So we're going to continue our conversations with the poverty advocates, with those with lived experience, to talk about what is an amount that is appropriate and that doesn't set up what I've heard some people call a poverty trap—'disincentives' people from endeavouring to develop skills and go into work—but that does indeed provide for basic necessities and enable that pathway into work. So these folks, in addition to telling me, just make it easier, there's too many component parts, let's streamline it—I take that to heart. In addition to saying, make it easier, they're going to continue to advise me and I will listen with interest and try to act with speed.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes, I'd like to start on page 38 with the allocation which you have for an organization called Research Manitoba. And I—is this a new organization and what is its structure?

**Ms. Oswald:** I have to begin by saying that after seven years, I don't know how to give an answer to this member that isn't about diabetes, but I shall endeavour to try.

Yes, indeed, Research Manitoba is a new entity. It's a new initiative. It will have as its mandate bringing together the former research entities, including the Manitoba Health Research Council—which, in my view, has been exemplary—all under one umbrella that will be one body responsible for funding, you know, basic research. It's an effort to make a more co-ordinated approach. I can say that the size of the council will be expanded and, of course, will have individuals placed on it from industry and so forth to try to do that which the research community—and if I may be so bold as to use this expression, the innovation community—have called for, and that is a more co-ordinated approach to ensuring that we're doing the best that we possibly can here in Manitoba in terms of really focusing on what it is that we're really good at. I think there are a lot of things that we're really good at, but focusing on that, you know, endeavouring to make us, in research terms, even more competitive across Canada. So, yes, it is new.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Does it include what was in the Manitoba Research and Innovation Fund previously?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, it will.

**Mr. Gerrard:** And so everything that was in the Manitoba innovation's research fund is now moved into Research Manitoba, if I—just to make sure I've got that correct?

\* (15:50)

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, the member is correct. They will—MRIF will all come in under that fund along with MHRC and it will be under the purview of this new council that will be comprised, of course, of experts and professionals and will, you know, certainly seek advice from department. But, rather than a government department administrating the funds and having civil servants administer the funds, on the advice of members of the research community, this—these funds will be distributed, you know, under this council now.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Are there other organizations, groups or funds which have been folded into this as well?

**Ms. Oswald:** I can inform the member that under this umbrella now will be the Manitoba Health—former Manitoba Health Research Council, MRIF and also centre of excellence funding, which came out of, well, Jobs and the Economy, formerly ETT. So that will all be under this umbrella.

And Research Manitoba is one prong in the innovation strategy that was signalled in the budget speech. There will be other component parts of the innovation strategy which we're going to be speaking about in more detail in the coming days, but it does also involve bring your research institutions together to co-ordinate the transfer of innovative Manitoba research into potential business opportunities. It will be a co-ordination of IP. It's also going to involve providing resources tied to performance for Manitoba's business incubators. We're going to work hard to ensure that there isn't an undue duplication of efforts but that there, you know, we create more of an innovation superhighway.

There has been advice from the Premier's Economic Advisory Council and a couple of reports: Braid [*phonetic*] and another Braid [*phonetic*]*—*son of Braid [*phonetic*], I don't know—that made some recommendations concerning how we should go forward and the innovation strategy broadly, which will also include a lot of work with our high schools to ensure that we do a better job of informing our young people about not only what the in-demand, emerging careers are but also what is happening and hot right here in Manitoba now, like interactive

digital media, for example, and making sure that they're very aware of that. The strategy will also involve introducing new young entrepreneur technology grants and improving access to venture capital.

So we'll be talking more and in greater detail about the component parts of the innovation strategy, but, certainly, Research Manitoba, you know, is going to be a real centrepiece in the new strategy that has been created based on, I think, very, very sage advice from many thoughtful Manitobans.

**Mr. Gerrard:** You mentioned the young entrepreneurs technology grants. Will those come from the Research Manitoba funding, or will that be separate?

**Ms. Oswald:** It will be separate, but you're ruining an upcoming announcement I might be doing, but okay.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The—I know that the minister in her previous portfolio had fought for a—dollars for research in—related to multiple sclerosis. Now, is that also folded into this, or is that separate, or what's happened with that?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, that was administered by MHRC from the get-go, so that—it will come over as well.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, so it will be part of the Research Manitoba funding basically? Yes, okay. I just want to get that clarified.

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, the MRHC monies which includes that money will come over in—under the umbrella of Research Manitoba; that's correct.

**Mr. Gerrard:** What's the minister's plan going forward in terms of the multiple sclerosis research activities?

**Ms. Oswald:** I'm not sure I'm supposed to answer that in this department now; I'm getting in all kinds of trouble for answering Health questions in the new role, particularly when these are Jobs and the Economy staff here.

But what I will say broadly—and then get yelled at later by staff and government—is that there certainly has been a lot of work at the Canadian institutes for health research, and, of course, there have been independent bits of work going on around the world on this very issue, specifically, I would say, related to the so-called liberation therapy. And Manitoba, as I was most recently informed—and I may stand to be corrected from the Department of

Health—Manitoba has remained engaged in that process, taking advice from CIHR and Dr. Beaudet, and we'll continue to do that. And MHRC will continue to engage with those partners—CIHR and so forth—with the best determination of a process going forward.

That would also include, I believe—and, again, I may be speaking out of turn here—you know, other research proposals that would come forward that may indeed have nothing to do with the so-called liberation therapy but very much have something to do with assisting those living with multiple sclerosis.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, so just to clarify some aspects of the vision—we're in the Jobs and the Economy; clearly, a significant component of this—maybe an exclusive component—is going to be Jobs and the Economy, but the original vision, I think, for the Manitoba Health Research Council was to balance that with improvements, for example, in Health. So what's the sort of spectrum of the vision here in terms of improvements in—for example, Health—versus creating jobs in the economy?

**Ms. Oswald:** Certainly, the Manitoba Health Research Council always—well, at least in the last number of years—has existed under the former IEM—Innovation, Energy and Mines—and has—had as its mandate, you know, really looking from a health perspective but also the economic development part of that spectrum, and that mandate is not going to change.

Certainly, they have been leaders and visionaries in terms of how they have done peer review of proposals and the very high quality and high level of review that has existed there. Really, that expertise is going to be transferred into the other research entities like, you know, the former MRIF and centre of excellence to really draw upon the expertise of MHRC, making sure that the basic research that's being done across the spectrum is going forward with its best possible chance of, you know, becoming an economic development advantage for Manitoba.

\*(16:00)

**Mr. Gerrard:** I think that's—you know, I get the picture. The—am I understanding it correct that the goal is to use the expertise in peer-review decision making and so on across the whole spectrum of the dollars that are in Research Manitoba? Or—is that essentially what the minister is saying?

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, I think that's a correct assessment.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Now, the minister earlier on was talking about the emphasis on social enterprises. I'm just trying to fit that in with this area of research. How do social enterprises fit in in terms of this area of tech-based research, for example?

**Ms. Oswald:** So, certainly, I'm not seeing a direct connection or automatic partnership, I suppose, between the newly created Research Manitoba and the work that our social enterprises do per se. But certainly, in an overarching view of doing all that we can to support the creation of jobs and the growth of our economy, social enterprise plays a hugely important role, and BUILD would be a really good example of that. I mean, real jobs for individuals who may have had difficulty securing employment for any number of reasons, totally and completely brought on by their own choices, and sometimes totally and completely not brought on by their own choices. And they provide all kinds of support in running and organizing workers in a real business and teaching real business skills and principles to individuals that may have not previously had that kind of experience.

So the work that Research Manitoba, you know, will be supporting will be very much about great ideas getting to market. And one of the vehicles that, you know, might be used along the way might be those engaged in social enterprise. I think that's the connection that I would make. But I wouldn't say that there's an absolutely easy-to-see direct link.

**Mr. Gerrard:** No, I was just, sort of—the minister seemed to imply earlier on that she was going to move the department in the direction of social enterprises, and I just was trying to understand how it applied here. That's—it wasn't a, you know, a difficult or—it was just trying to understand, as the minister is setting the vision and the direction for the department, how the pieces fit together.

**Ms. Oswald:** Right, I think when the member came in, I was speaking with another member about the work that is going on with our sustainable employment strategy and with those that have been traditionally under-represented in the workplace. And, I mean, I've had conversations with those that are running social enterprise, those that are working in social enterprise, and with the chambers of commerce, so there's quite, one would say, you know, a long distance, it would seem, between those two types of groups. But in actual fact, what I'm finding is that we're having the same conversations. And I've had a longer conversation with this—with

Mr. Angus from the Winnipeg chamber, but there is, I believe, an authentic willingness to engage with social enterprise on a variety of projects, procurement and so forth. And I think that actually there can be, in not too far a distance, a real symphony of initiatives going on here rather than the occasional false note that may have been hit in past.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Let me move to page 32. You've got on this the—something over \$13 million for Business Financial Support and I'm just—want—in the, you know, department which the minister is taking over and the direction that she's going, to get a clear understanding of what her vision is in terms of how this money will be allocated, what the criteria will be, what the purpose of this fund is?

**Ms. Oswald:** I'm pleased to inform the member that that particular line relates to the Manitoba industrial opportunities fund, or MIOP, which has been in existence for some years now, '80s, late '80s, '90s, I think. That's what I am told. And, of course, this is support for businesses that may be new to Manitoba or expanding in Manitoba or experiencing some challenges, and it is a secured repayable loan type of financing. So that's what the 13 million is for.

*Mr. Frank Whitehead, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Just a further question, so, just for clarification. This is the—what was the MIOP program is now Business Financial Support line? Is it going to be continued just exactly as the MIOP program was before or will there be a shift in direction under your leadership?

**Ms. Oswald:** I'm informed that it has been described in this way in past—Business Financial Support—and it is intended to continue on in the fashion that it has functioned in past.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, just a point of, again, trying to understand the situation here. There's a little over \$13 million that's in the fund, or budgeted to be spent this year. My understanding that a lot of these loans may be over more than one year so there may be some of those funds already allocated.

Can the minister say, you know, how much of that is actually—this year's \$13 million already been allocated and how much is—still remains to be allocated?

\* (16:10)

**Ms. Oswald:** I learned something. Good question.

So the issue concerning the principal amount for a loan that a business might seek, it actually is written in the context of The Loan Act. And, the \$13 million that is written here, speaks to interest on the loan, and is money that's budgeted to cover any loan loss, which I'm happy to report is not a grievous concern to us. You know, the program has worked quite well, over time. It's—also enables funds, should there be an opportunity—*[interjection]*—to participate in venture capital.

So, if I understood the member's question precisely, it's not an issue of how much of that \$13 million could be loaned out; the principal actually comes under The Loan Act.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, just a brief follow-up.

You mentioned participating in venture capital. Does—I mean, is the minister talking about participating in venture capital as a loan, or as an equity, or both, and do both loan and equity, if that's a different level of participation, come under this line, or are there separate lines for the two?

**Ms. Oswald:** So, if it's specifically concerning a loan, then, as I stated before, that would fall under The Loan Act. If it's concerning equity, it would fall under this line.

And I am informed that, historically, there have been six venture capital funds wherein the Province has engaged, and if there's an opportunity, then these monies are there—an attractive opportunity, I should say—then there is—there are resources available to participate that—in that there. I am informed that there isn't one that is, you know, actively under consideration at this time.

But, certainly, I would go back to what I was saying before, about speaking with those in the innovation and research and development community. It is a theme that developed, or was repeated over and over, and that was access to venture capital. And part of the overarching innovation strategy, of which I've been speaking, does involve improving access to venture capital investment by simplifying, and, indeed, enhancing the existing Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit.

We heard from some individuals that it was a bit cumbersome to make that application and individuals who were not interested in pursuing it. So it will become enhanced, and it'll also be, based on advice from industry, much easier to access, as well.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Just for some precise clarification here, when we're talking about the Business Financial Support line of a little over \$13 million, that is a line that would be used for participation in a venture capital if it were to be—if that were the decision made. Just to make sure that's correct and it's not some other budget line that would be used.

**Ms. Oswald:** Yes, I've forgotten your question—no, I'm kidding, I'm kidding.

It's as simple as that. So I'll do my best.

Thirteen million is indeed the line where there would be resources to entertain, you know, engaging in a venture capital collaboration, a partnership, that's true. Certainly, there are monies in this line that are used to pay the interest on the loans that indeed have been granted, monies get paid to—just simple as can be. So when we make a loan to a company they pay us interest, that in turn actually does get paid to the Department of Finance.

But going back to what I believe was your original question, is this the line where in there would be monies available for venture capital, for us to pursue proposals, yes this is the line. I hope I never have to hear that answer again.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Good. Now one of the initiatives that has been undertaken in the last number of years, which I believe has had some provincial government support is The Eureka Project and just which line would that—budget line would that come under?

**Ms. Oswald:** It's the commercialization support for business line. I had the great privilege of meeting with individuals from The Eureka Project and certainly the work that they are doing is extremely interesting and innovative and exciting.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Thank you.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden):** I want to—my theme of the questions I'm going to have today is basically living along the Saskatchewan border, our riding of Arthur-Virden, along with the riding Riding Mountain and the west side of Dauphin. Being along the Saskatchewan border, we have heard many concerns about the jobs and the economy.

In the comparison the two communities that I live in—one is Virden and the other is Moosomin. Both towns are the same size in comparison; they both have the same economies—which is oil and gas and agriculture—and what I found in the last census is that the town of Virden grew by 3 per cent and while the town Moosomin grew by 13 per cent. And that's

a concern to me because being in business in that community, we've—and I've also campaigned throughout the whole riding of Moosomin, Melita, towns along the border.

\* (16:20)

The concern is, I guess, the unfair playing field that we have. One is the personal tax rate which—the comparison between Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the other thing is the personal exemption. I know that your—this is probably some of the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) questions, but do you have a lot of input when it comes to creating this budget because of jobs and economy?

**Ms. Oswald:** I welcome the member. It's nice to finally have a chance to have a conversation.

I would say that we all are involved in discussions about what it is that we can do to put together a good budget, and so the short answer to that is, sure. I would say that I have a voice in what it is that we do to put together a budget and do our very best to meet the priorities of Manitobans. Certainly, the Manitobans with whom I have spoken, not only on my street but in rural Manitoba as well and in northern Manitoba, also, they have said to me loud and clear that it's critically important that we do everything that we can to ensure that our young people have opportunities, the opportunities to pursue their dreams right here in Manitoba, to get a good education, to be able to afford the homes that they dream to buy, raise their families, have access to daycare and, indeed, those that are involved in business with whom I've had the opportunity to speak to more and more since taking this new role, certainly a very common and top refrain from those individuals is how important it is that we develop even further a skilled workforce.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

At the same time, in speaking to individuals from around Manitoba, what's very important to these families also is that front-line services are protected as much as possible, things that people count on like health care for their elderly parents or access to daycare for young families or really strong quality education for children going through school. So endeavouring to strike that delicate balance while ensuring that front-line services are protected, even during times that are globally economically challenging while at the same time ensuring that we do all that we can to see our economy grow in a strong and steady way, these would be all the kinds



of things that were on my mind as I offered my advice on how to put the budget together.

Certainly, we know that there are numbers of tax reductions, I think some 85 of them that the government has made since coming into office that show that the average Manitoba family will save, you know, roughly \$3,800 this year on income and property taxes, and this is significant. On the business side, of course, we've worked extremely hard to reduce the small business tax down to zero.

The KPMG issued a report today, the Competitiveness Alternatives report, and ranks Winnipeg as—and they were ranking cities not provinces, so that's what I have to go on. But they were ranking Winnipeg as the most competitive city in which to conduct business in North American midwest, that's out of 26 midwestern cities, ahead of Saskatoon, Edmonton, Phoenix, Dallas, Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago. Number 1, and that's a good thing, I believe.

And I also take the member, you know, at his word that he wants his area to be equally competitive, and so he has my commitment to work with him and to listen to his advice and to do the best that we can for people that are living all over Manitoba.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Is your goal to look at the other Prairie provinces and to see, look, if we can do a comparison to the exempt—the personal exemption? Could we—are—is it your goal to try to come close to it?

**Ms. Oswald:** I think it's really important that we're always looking at what our neighbours are doing, and I have no shame about stealing good ideas from other jurisdictions, that's for sure, just as I'm proud to say our neighbours over time haven't had any shame about stealing our good ideas because they—it most definitely is a two-way street, and I think that that's good for all Canadians.

And I think, again, this is about balance, to be sure. I think when we do some comparisons of other jurisdictions across Canada, sometimes there are some pretty salient points that are left out of the discussion. You'll see tax rates compared across jurisdictions with no acknowledgement of the jurisdictions in which health premiums are paid, for example. This is not an insignificant point, and so I think it's really important to look at the whole picture, take advice from, you know, third parties that will take a look at different jurisdictions in terms

of their competitiveness, in terms of affordability and endeavour to build budgets based on, you know, on really solid analyses that are done out there and certainly taking into account good ideas that other jurisdictions have.

So having a tax environment that's affordable for families, protecting universal, publicly funded health care, ensuring that there's access to quality education and keeping right on with working with our partners to ensure that KPMG will come back again next year and say that we're ranking very, very high in terms of competitiveness and low-cost environments in which to do business, I think, again, one has to take a holistic view when making decisions on programming and on tax and what have you.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** So, since we are competitive and we're rated right up there and we—you guys always talk about this global recession that we had; well, North Dakota and South Dakota, Saskatchewan and along with Manitoba, our economies, especially in the west corner of the province, and I'm sure it's all throughout the province, we had probably one of the best—we actually bypassed that whole economic crisis. Actually, our economies grew.

And yet, even with the competitiveness that you have with, say, that Winnipeg had, with other—like Saskatoon and Edmonton that you mentioned, why we are in such a deficit when you consider that our economy, you agree that is growing and that we're very close to the other provinces.

**Ms. Oswald:** I was wondering if the member could share why he thinks that happened.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** I—what happened? [*interjection*]

**Mr. Chairperson:** Honourable Minister.

**Ms. Oswald:** Oh, thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Sorry.

**Ms. Oswald:** I was just wanting to inquire. I mean, I've been through two days now of recession deniers; I thought I'd take a different approach. I thought maybe I would seek to understand, you know, from the member opposite the fact that Manitoba and its diversified economy during what I think Minister Flaherty referred to as the deepest economic challenge to face Canada since the Depression of the 1930s, I wonder if he might, you know, offer some—

**An Honourable Member:** Repeat that. I want to hear that again.

**Ms. Oswald:** —offer—he—one member's asking me to repeat that. Minister Flaherty said—referred to the post-2008 economic collapse as the deepest economic challenge to face Canada since the Depression, but seems to suggest that, you know, Manitoba didn't have any problem during that time. I'm just asking the member why he thinks that is.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Recognizing the honourable member for Tuxedo.

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** I want to thank my colleague from Arthur Virden for his questions, and he is absolutely right in his questioning, and the minister, I mean, she and I had this discussion yesterday. There are so many issues of concern within this portfolio that I think we probably need to move on. I think the minister knows as well that perhaps she'll have some time down the road to ask our members questions, and we'll await that time in two years hence or there or beyond.

\*(16:30)

But I would like to ask the minister if she could—and I do have some questions just around staffing because it's a new department, and I'm not sure if there's maybe some overlap in some of the—with some of the roles of—and responsibilities from some of the staff from the area of Jobs and the Economy under her or maybe Finance or other departments. So I do have some questions surrounding that, as well.

But, first of all, could the minister just indicate what the names are of her political staff and how long they have been employed with her as political staff?

**Ms. Oswald:** I welcome the critic to the floor to answer questions. Did I say answer questions? I certainly didn't mean to answer questions. For, lo, these many years, I've been trying to get them to commit to one thing on the record—one policy, one possible decision—and it is, you know, failure to achieve all duties as assigned in this regard. It's just impossible to be able to get a member of the Conservatives to just take a stand and perhaps provide some insight. It's breathtaking, really.

I can say for the member, though, that I think it's fair to say Jim Flaherty, governments across the world, understood that at a time of profound economic downturn that to take the approach that was offered by members opposite would've had deep and lasting harmful effects to our economy. And the work that was done by Manitobans in partnership with provincial and federal governments to invest in

stimulus and to take very special care with our economy yielded results, but it was extremely hard work.

So, when I ask the members, who again seem to be in denial about the existence of a global economic downturn, I ask with the greatest sincerity what they think would have happened with severe deep cuts all in one year at a time where those kinds of austerity measures were crashing and burning and hurting people. I don't think it's inappropriate for me to ask a question about where it is that they're coming from. You know, it might assist me in understanding their point of view a little bit better, which I can say at present I don't.

Staff in my office—I have a special assistant, Clair Cerilli, and she worked, actually, as my special assistant in Health; she started there in April 2013 and she stayed there until January of 2014 when she joined me in Jobs and the Economy. And she replaced Chris Sanderson, who's now the special assistant for Conservation and Water Stewardship. I think it's tradition to also mention the executive assistant because she counts as political staff even though she works in the constituency, and that's—her name is Sandra Little and she was my executive assistant while I was in Health and began in Jobs and the Economy in October of 2013. Also, Jean-Guy Bourgeois is a special adviser who works with me and also with the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard).

You asked specifically about political staff; is that correct, and others? For now, okay, very good.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I thank the minister for that, and I'm glad that she is as anxious as I am to have her be awarded the opportunity to ask me questions in question period or in Estimates down the road, and I know I'm very much looking forward to that time as well, so—and maybe that time won't be so far in the future. So I welcome that opportunity.

I think, also, if you're looking at what Mr. Flaherty has done federally in the federal Conservative government, is that they're a lot closer to balancing the books of the country than the Province is here in Manitoba, and despite even the fact that the rest of Canada was hit a little bit harder as a result of the global economic downturn in—after the events of 2008, the global economic recession. Canada was hit across the board harder than we were here in Manitoba, and we weren't really hit hard here at all in Manitoba. And that was the point, I believe, that my colleague the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk) was making earlier. And I have made,

and I know my colleague from Morden-Winkler has also made, those points in the Estimates process with the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) as well.

And I think we've made our—I mean, the minister talked about taking a stand. I think we've made our position very clear. I don't think that perhaps she and some of her colleagues understand the questions that we've been asking surrounding jobs and the economy and how that it—how—what kind of a negative impact some of the policies that she and her colleagues have brought forward here in Manitoba, the kind of impacts that it has on the Manitoba economy.

And, in particular, I know my colleague from Arthur-Virden was talking about those towns that are right on the border of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and we know that some of those towns are having difficulty in Manitoba because they're not living in a competitive environment here. It—they can't—it's very difficult for them to compete with neighbouring Saskatchewan towns, and that's very evident in some of the statistics that he shared with us today, and I want to thank him for that. He's been, you know, a very successful business person himself in this province and has created jobs here in this province, and, you know, I welcome his thought and his questions here today. Of the minister, unfortunately, he didn't get much of an answer, which is indicative of, sort of, the way that this NDP government likes to work.

But I would like to get back and ask some questions surrounding her employees within her department. Are there any employees within her department who work for other departments as well?

**Ms. Oswald:** And, again, I'm sure that we're going to continue this ongoing debate about, you know, recession or no recession. I did notice that yesterday when there was some denial about the existence of a recession, I notice in the member's comments today there was an acceptance, it seemed, of an economic downturn, and that's encouraging. I think we're making some progress for sure. I think that we can all live in hope. Next thing you know they'll be actually conceding the point that the Earth is round.

But I would say that Minister Flaherty absolutely rejected the approach that was put forward by the members opposite, and that would be to institute deep cuts all in one year during a really fragile economic time. And I have some empathy for him, actually. I try to imagine Minister Flaherty sitting around that Cabinet table saying, hey, let's run a deficit. I don't imagine that that was a super fun

day for him. I'm going on a limb here; I wouldn't know.

\* (16:40)

I've not spoken to Minister Flaherty, but I just have a feeling—I have a feeling—that that would have been a very challenging conversation. And I commend him for advocating and understanding that protecting the economy, protecting jobs and, by extension, families during a really challenging time was the right thing to do. And, I think that there can be, obviously over time, some challenges that exist between different levels of government. But, in speaking with those, you know, very actively involved in discussions between the federal government and provincial governments who all came together during a very, very challenging time to make the decision to, in partnership, stimulate the economy and ensure the people didn't suffer unduly during a very challenging time. I commend him for that but would note that it does not match the proposal that came from this very member and from her party at that time.

And so she says that, you know, we've been very clear about where we stand, and on this point I would agree that the decision that the members opposite would have made would have been contrary to what Minister Flaherty and the federal government made, what other provincial governments made, and I think would have had really serious long-lasting and damaging effects.

And, again, she speaks about the negative impacts of decisions that we make, and it's, you know—again, I referenced KPMG and their competitiveness report that came out just today, you know, doing an analysis across Canada and the US, and very clearly ranks Winnipeg No. 1 most competitive out of 26 places to do business in the North American midwest. We ranked ahead of 25 midwestern cities—teeny tiny cities, not teeny tiny cities, you know, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Phoenix, Dallas, Fort Worth, Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago; KPMG ranking us No. 1.

And there are a variety of other folks that have come to the floor to—okay—that's—that speaks to—there are a number of different resources that speak to not what the member opposite would refer to—negative impacts—but, in fact, speak to optimism in Manitoba. The Manitoba manufacturers are indeed optimistic. Ron Koslowsky, vice-president of the Manitoba division of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters said, our members are starting to see stronger sales to

the US, 2014 definitely seems to be a year where we're going to see some progress, positive signs and more good news for the industry.

Certainly, we know that even the opposition themselves have been discussing the fact that his own community has an optimism within it. He may be the outlier but certainly there's optimism about all kinds of positive things that are happening within the context of the economy. The Canadian Tire chief technology officer said: Winnipeg's a special place; it has many benefits that we saw. We looked across Canada, we did a national search and our conclusion was Winnipeg is the place to be.

This wouldn't have happened with deep, aggressive cuts at a time when no other government was making that decision.

So we have rejected the negativity and the short-sighted thinking of members opposite. We don't say it always but I will certainly say it today that we were supportive of the partnership with the federal government and the decision to go into deficit to work to stimulate the economy during a really challenging time. Now, I'm going to guess that we're going to have discussions about this going forward and it's likely we're going to disagree on this point but the member can be as negative as she feels she needs to be about Manitoba. I'm optimistic about Manitoba, and I'm optimistic about the fact that people can work together and make difficult decisions during challenging economic times, and they can work to ensure that the Manitoba economy stays steady.

But, to be on the record to say, let's cut a half a billion dollars out of the economy, and have us reject that, and then try to complain because the economy has done reasonably well as a result, it seems backwards to me.

The finance and administration department of our department also works for Labour and Immigration, Mineral Resources, Municipal Government and Jobs and the Economy.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, and I think we've gone from bust hour to now boom hour, according to this minister, who now seems to think that we didn't realize a recession here in Manitoba. Now, all of a sudden, you know, yesterday she was saying there was a big recession here in Manitoba.

But I will challenge the minister that—I mean, the facts do speak for themselves, and we do know that

other provinces across Canada were hit much harder than we were here in Manitoba. As a matter of fact, their economy—the downturns in their economy were significant. There was only one year in Manitoba that realized a slight decline. I believe it was a 0.9 per cent decline in growth in the province of Manitoba, and that was 2009. And that hardly suggests that there is a recession here in Manitoba.

But the member can be—can say whatever she wants to say and say that there was a big recession here in Manitoba. There was a global economic recession, but what I've been trying—*[interjection]*—I've been saying that since—I've been saying that for a long time, but you see, the member just doesn't want to listen. Members opposite don't want to listen to what the facts are. But we—I challenged her yesterday. I said, you tell me, and she couldn't. She didn't answer the question. What year was there a realized, significant downturn in the economy in Manitoba? And she couldn't answer the question because it doesn't exist, okay.

So those are the facts, and the facts speak very clearly. And perhaps someday, she'll understand, you know, the facts, and she'll accept the facts for what they are.

But I do appreciate her answering the question with respect to her staff, and I would appreciate—how does it work in terms of the salary of the staff, and how is it shared between government departments?

\* (16:50)

**Ms. Oswald:** Well, I'd hate to miss an opportunity to talk about the recession a little bit more.

And, again, I'm going to be very careful not to put this in the form of a question, because the hubris oozes all over the table from members opposite, so I'll try to put it in a declarative statement and say I just find it peculiar that the member would suggest—and her colleagues would suggest—that somehow, some way Manitoba sat in isolation of the global economic downturn. Do they think they were force fields, I wonder? Do they think that there's no relationship between what happens in the Manitoba economy and what happens in, you know, with our major trading partners? I just have difficulty comprehending how the members opposite can continue to assert that the entire world can feel the reverberations of a global economic crisis, but somehow these reverberations would stop at the Manitoba borders. It does seem breathtaking to me that the

members opposite would assert that. But, you know, I'm going to keep an open mind and continue to listen to what the members opposite are saying.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday there was no recession. Tuesday, Thursday, ah, maybe, but not crossing the borders of Manitoba. I'm going to continue to seek to understand what the members opposite are in fact thinking, and we'll have to see. But I have to say that I'm inclined to agree with Minister Flaherty when he references the fact that, in fact, there was a global economic downturn.

I can inform the member that the staff that are providing the support of finance and administration are budgeted for in Jobs and the Economy. Mineral Resources does pay back to us \$150,000 for those services, because I am informed that they perform all of those functions for that department. Labour and Immigration and Municipal Government have units that perform some of these functions and the folks in my department provide management support functions and comptrollership.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I'm glad that the minister sees that Manitoba shouldn't be left in a silo and shouldn't be working in this silo-type mentality. I'm wondering if she would then finally see the revelation that perhaps it would be a positive thing to join the New West Partnership with our neighbours and, you know, we have asked questions surrounding that for quite some time now and we've yet to receive answers from this government. But we know that they have refused to be a part of that New West Partnership, but perhaps what the minister is saying today is that maybe—she says that she has an open mind. So maybe she'll keep an open mind when it comes to joining the New West Partnership and to take Manitoba out of that isolationist mentality that it's been under this NDP government.

But back to the staffing questions, I would like to ask the—if the minister could indicate, how do these employees—first of all, could she indicate who these employees are?

**Ms. Oswald:** Certainly, I need to take issue with the—she's going to be shocked—that I need to take issue with a comment that the member made about not putting on the record my feelings about joining into partnerships. I will have her know it was, you know, not a week ago I gave a blockbuster speech in the Chamber on the agreement on internal trade as we were debating this bill. It's a should-not-miss. I mean, go back in the Hansard and read it because I do believe that it does clearly articulate how

important I think it is that we work collectively, and I gave some instructive examples for the member, I think, on why partnerships are important.

But, in the context of the Agreement on Internal Trade and in the context of Manitoba serving as chair on the committee on internal trade, it's never been more clear to me how important it is that we work on breaking down barriers across our nation.

Of course, Manitoba has worked with its western partners on a number of issues in the past but we actually, also, do have relationships and trade with Ontario and with provinces to the east so I absolutely don't have an isolationist standpoint. I, again, am not the one that thinks there are force fields on the border—borders of Manitoba as members opposite do when it comes to the effects of a recession. But I do think that having a pan-Canadian approach to breaking down any barriers that exist on internal trade and doing this across the country will be very good for Manitobans and very good for Canadians.

I can say to the member that you'll see in the book that there—and I'll get the page—where it cites that there are—yes, the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, on page 23, it is listed that there are 31 FTEs that would serve in that unit that would provide support to the other departments as indicated and if the member wants me to get her specific names for those 31s—for those 31, I will endeavour to do so. I think that that's done. I'm not—I'll have to check to see if there are any rules against providing names without consent or whatever, but if I'm allowed to do it I'll share that with the member. But I don't have the list of names in front of me at present.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, if the minister could endeavour to get me the list of those employees that would be helpful. I'm also wondering how is their time shared between their responsibilities between departments. Are there certain hours that they spend in one department over another or how is that time allocation—how is their time allocated?

**Ms. Oswald:** Well, I think the actual and most accurate answer I can give to the member is, it depends. It—there are some core functions that individuals will work on daily, accounts payable and such. There are other supportive functions, you know, concerning budget preparation and so forth that the departments arrange with one another to share the time and dedicate the time as needed so it really is a co-ordinated consultative approach within the department about when individuals are needed

for certain functions. It is working well, having this collaborative approach and also ensuring that the day-to-day gets done for each with some core functions but really it does depend on the project at hand, actually.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** And are they projects that they work on that are shared with the other departments, then?

**Ms. Oswald:** Maybe the member can clarify for me in a moment because I think I'm perhaps not understanding her question. When I say projects, I mean, you know, preparing for Estimates, for example. There would be, you know, work that would be done, you know, sort of, in order that we might be appearing before committee. There would be in putting the budget together, Jobs and the Economy, you know, has I think a broader set of duties that are required by this particular group so there would be more time dedicated in the Jobs and the Economy function—

**Mr. Chairperson:** I regret to say, the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

#### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

\*(14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff):** Order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of Executive Council.

Would the Premier's staff and that of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) please enter the Chamber.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** We were speaking yesterday, when we left off these Estimates, about the effectiveness of the whistle-blower protection act, and one of the statistics that the Auditor General found in her report in surveying members of the civil service was that only 29 per cent felt that they would be protected under the whistle-blower protection act.

Now the premise—I've gone back and I've looked at some of the comments of the now-First Minister, previously the Finance minister, when this legislation was introduced, and at the time that it was introduced it was under his purview, I believe, and he was quite 'boasterous' and proud of the fact that this would provide protection for civil servants, and yet the vast

majority of civil servants don't feel that it provides the protection.

Does he see it as a failure of the act that the people who it's supposed to protect don't feel that they're protected under the act?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Is the member referring to a specific page in the report?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Page 327, I believe is where that statistic falls.

**Mr. Selinger:** First of all, I'm very proud that we were able to introduce The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act in Manitoba, the first time in the history of the province that legislation like that had ever been brought in to the Legislature by any government and passed by any government.

And, clearly, if a certain number of people feel that they won't be protected from reprisals, there's obviously some work to be done to inform them of what the legislation does to protect their interests from reprisals and protect their anonymity when they want to make a report of any potential issues that they think are relative in terms of ethical behaviour under the public interest disclosure and whistle-blower act. So this is something that requires ongoing education of what's going on inside of Manitoba. So it's something that, obviously, there's more work to be done. But it's important to have the legislation, and then it's important to inform people about how the legislation can protect them, not only from reprisals but also in terms of anonymity. And that's one of the reasons the legislation was designed, to allow people to go directly to the Ombudsman if they felt that going to a supervisor or a designated officer would not be something that they were comfortable with.

\*(14:50)

**Mr. Goertzen:** And yet I think the question remains, does he not see the Legislature is not—if the legislation is not having fulfilled what he believed his mandate was—which was to give comfort to civil servants, that they would be protected—I don't think—it seemed like in the surveys, civil servants were aware of the legislation generally. They may not have known exactly how it operated in terms of who to report to, but they were aware that a whistle-blower protection legislation existed, they just didn't think it would protect them. And to me that would seem to be a critical failing of the legislation, because that's exactly what it's intended to do, is to provide that assurance. Does he not feel

that it's—that that is indication of the failing of the legislation to this point?

**Mr. Selinger:** I don't know that I would attribute that to a failure of the legislation. I would suggest that it's part of the ongoing professional development requirements of civil servants that they become aware of the legislation, that they're informed of how the legislation works, how the legislation has protections built into it for them and how they can access and avail themselves to that legislation if they have a concern that they wish to raise. So I don't know that it's necessarily a failure of the legislation, maybe something that's required as part of the professional development and ongoing development of the public service in terms of ongoing education, professional and continuing education in the public service.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yesterday I asked the Premier about a report that was commissioned, an independent review of The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act. And it indicates on page 327—and I pointed that section out him yesterday—that the report was expected to be finalized in February of 2014. Has he had an opportunity over the last 24 hours to find out whether or not that report has been finalized?

**Mr. Selinger:** My understanding is the report is not finalized yet, but that it's being compiled and it's being worked on by a person with legal knowledge and background and experience. And we look forward to that report coming to a conclusion and being made available to us.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Does he have an expectation of when that report—the new date and when it will be finalized?

**Mr. Selinger:** I have not been informed of a specific date by which it'll be finalized, but I'll undertake to find out when the—what time frame the person that's working on the report is operating under.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Does he expect that the report will be made public when it's finalized?

**Mr. Selinger:** I don't believe that there was a commitment to make it public, but certainly the findings of the report may find themselves into recommendations for change or an appreciation of what is good about the report or what other requirements might need to be put in place to give further strength to the report, such as civil service education.

So, when the report comes in, it'll be looked at carefully for what ideas in there can strengthen the role of whistle-blowing or public interest disclosure legislation in the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Why wouldn't the Premier make that report public? He acknowledges that there are challenges, obviously, with the whistle-blower protection act. Civil servants don't feel that they'll be protected by the act. You know, would it not be—he indicated he wanted people to feel comfortable and confident in the act. Wouldn't a step in the right direction on that would be releasing this report when it's finalized?

**Mr. Selinger:** The—at Public Accounts committee when this report is reviewed by the members of the Public Accounts committee, the report will inform how the government could respond to the recommendations in here, and then the government will indicate how they plan to respond to those recommendations and what work is ongoing, and the report will act as advice. It may wind up being advice to Cabinet, in which case it wouldn't be disclosed. So the report will be a helpful piece of information on how we can respond to the issues raised by the Auditor General and how the legislation can be strengthened in terms of public disclosure, accountability and public interest disclosure and whistle-blower protection inside it—in the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I believe, when we were concluding questions yesterday, I'd asked the Premier—because we were talking about how the tone of ethics with—for the civil servants is—service—is ultimately set by the Legislature and, more particular, by the government that deals most directly with the civil service, and he agreed with that, that that tone needed to be set. He wouldn't give me any sort of analysis on how he felt his government was doing in setting the tone on ethics within government. I was disappointed by that. I thought it was a bit of a soft question for the Premier, and he chose not to answer that.

But I raised the point with him about the statistic on page 297 of the Auditor General's report, that only half of those surveyed believed that consequences would actually flow from ethical breaches. And perhaps that's why people might be inclined not to report something they view as a breach of ethical conduct, because they feel, well, there'll be no consequences—not unlike, I suppose, in the justice system. If people don't feel that there's going to be a

consequence for a crime, the reporting rates go down significantly, because they don't see the value in making that report because they don't see a consequence. And we've seen lots of statistics on that when it comes to—whether it's a vandalism or a theft within the criminal system, that people won't report if they don't actually believe that there's any chance of there being consequences from that.

So, along those lines, I was asking the Premier what consequences had flowed to the NDP party when they illegally took more than \$70,000 in election rebates, and I think we ran out of time at that moment. The Premier was about to provide an answer in terms of the consequences that flowed to his party from the violation of that Elections Act.

**Mr. Selinger:** I mean, it is important that ethical policies generate a culture where people want to provide public service at a high standard of ethical conduct, and one of the things, for example, that we've done in health care is we've got critical incident reporting mechanisms. There was a time when the opposition was in government that incidents that occurred in the health-care system were actually hidden, swept under the carpet. Now, when an incident occurs, there's a procedure put in place that it's reviewed and the lessons are learned out of that on how to prevent it in the future.

And I note that the report says, on page 297, that we believe a proactive approach is required to instill a strong ethics program throughout the civil service, especially in times of fiscal restraint to—ensuring that the corporate values and ethics are imbedded within the workplace culture helps to foster and maintain an ethical environment throughout the government.

This is a critical function that deserves focused attention by the Civil Service Commission and by senior leadership in departments, and I would agree with that. That's the point I was making earlier. We need to develop a culture where people can be clear about what things are working and not working and not fear reprisals or punishment that is unwarranted, but it generates an attitude that you can learn from mistakes, you can learn to do things better. And, if there is something that is such an egregious breach an ethical conduct, then, of course, there has to be a proper approach in dealing with that.

And you have seen, within government, when things are clearly, for example, illegal, that consequences are delivered very quickly. But in other situations—and I think there's a gradient of

things that can happen here—you have to have an approach that's proportionate to the issues at hand.

\* (15:00)

So I think these things are important, and I think the Civil Service Commissioner will take the report put by the Auditor General—she will take that report very seriously and work on a variety of appropriate responses in terms of proactive training to prevent incidents from occurring and then appropriate measures in place through HR personnel when specific errors are made or ethical conduct—unethical conduct is discovered and verified.

So it's a question of finding—creating the proper culture to minimize ethic—unethical conduct and, at the same time, where ethical misconduct occurs to make sure that there's a proportionate and appropriate response, always with the underlying objective to ensure a better quality public service.

**Mr. Goertzen:** The minister indicated in his response that he believes that there should be—that people should learn from ethical breaches and then when one ethical breach happens that that's a learning experience to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

I raise the issue about what consequences there were from the illegal election rebate scheme that the Premier was involved with when he ran in 1999 and he didn't answer the question. But then I note that following that his party was also sanctioned for union bundling and had to change a law to stop themselves from doing it again. And then Ms. Wowchuk was found in violation of an election act by handing out government money during a by-election. The Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald), then the minister of Health, was found in violation of an election act for having a news conference during an election. We had the member for—the former minister of Finance and the now minister of mines have to give an apology—well only one of them gave an apology, one was promised to give an apology, only one gave one.

Doesn't seem like there was any learning on the NDP side from that initial breach of ethics in 1999 where I started off? Why is it that the Premier isn't able to ensure that he and his Cabinet and his party learned from these ethical breaches?

**Mr. Selinger:** I would argue the—that the member's not being accurate in what's happened. When errors are discovered or mistakes are made, responsibilities taken, apologies are rendered and new policies are



put in place, which is very different than what we see from the member opposite and the member—his colleagues on the opposite bench. For example, yesterday the member couldn't answer a straight-up question whether or not he received free corporate tickets to professional sporting activities, he just did everything he could to avoid it. He still has the opportunity today to give that answer.

We've seen other incidents in this Legislature, today I reported in the Legislature what occurred with misinformation about the census back in 2001, 2002 and it was not corrected on the record, even though misinformation was put on the record. And we've seen that time and time again that there's never any acceptance of responsibility, there's never a clear answer given to something and it goes back to when they were in office.

It was the same thing with critical—there was no critical incident review process; there was no acceptance of responsibility for vote rigging; there was no acceptance of responsibility for borrowing money without legal authority to build casinos; there was no acceptance of responsibility for having two sets of books when the Auditor General criticized them for that over and over again.

So, you know, we all have a responsibility to improve public service and to improve our accountability and transparency for that, and I believe that on this side of the House when errors are made that there is a learning process that occurs from that and we try to improve the way we do things. And I'm not seeing that displayed by the members opposite, including the member who's asking me questions today.

**Mr. Goertzen:** The Premier seems to have a fixation on how I get to Jets games. I can give him the answer to that if he's that interested in. During the Drive to 13,000, like many people, I had friends and we got together, and we sat down at computers at different places, and we tried to log on to try to get season tickets. Only one of the four of us, I think, who were logging at the time were successful, and we were happy for that. So I became part of a group of Manitobans who had tickets. I was allotted four of those tickets. And I have an invitation for the Premier, I'd be happy for him to join me at a game. It won't be like his normal seats because when I found out where we were sitting, you know, we'd go to the MTS Centre and you—it's on the upper deck, first of all, when—I don't know if he's ever been there but it's on the upper deck—and you walk up the stairs and I

continue to walk and walk and walk until we couldn't walk anymore because we were at the very top row of the MTS Centre. I turned around with the friend that I was at for that game and, in fact, we didn't even have to go left or right because our seats are, like, right in the aisle, so there's nothing in front of us, goes right down to the railing.

And I turned around and I said to my friend, you know, only have four games a year but I'm lucky, lucky that we're here as I looked down at the scoreboard. Now, I was looking down at the scoreboard because we're actually higher than the scoreboard. In fact, if the Premier wants to come to my office at some point, I have a panoramic view of that first game. And I was lucky enough to draw the first game; we had a lottery. And you can see if you take a—I got a small office, but he can gladly come. I'd be happy to have him there—and if you take a magnifying glass, you can see in this panoramic view—if you look really closely, you can see me and my wife at that game, right at the top, the very top of the MTS Centre. I'm sure if we were looking for the Premier in that picture, we'd have to look much lower.

But I'd like to—I'd like him to join me at the game. It's a lot of fun in that upper deck. We sometimes take shots at the opposing goalie, you know, yell their name out loud to try to hex them. We often boo the best player on the opposing team. For that first season, we booed every player on the Phoenix Coyotes team when they first came here.

In fact, you know, that first season the minister's talking about, it's interesting because I really wanted to take my mom to a game. She became a real big Jets fan that first year and had—still is—and had MTS TV package. And I wanted to take her to a game, but because I wasn't in government, I couldn't do what you guys did and just take tickets from Crown corporations. So I was looking and trying to—you know, where could I buy tickets? Well, they're impossible to get unless you're a government minister; then you're down in the front row. And I was, you know, way up there, and I wanted to take my mom there, but she has vertigo. And we're so high up, being the last row in the MTS Centre, I'm serious, she couldn't do it. She couldn't walk up the stairs; she just couldn't do it.

So I did what a lot of people did: I bought tickets for the game in Minneapolis. And I loaded up my family and my mom and my stepfather, and we

drove eight hours—well, seven and a half hours to St. Paul to the arena. I think there was five or six thousand other Winnipeg fans there, also not ministers; they couldn't get tickets from the Crown corporations, so they were all in the same boat that I was, I guess.

And I brought my parents into the game, really, really good game. In fact, we won in a shootout. And the best thing about it is, my mom, her favourite player is Evander Kane, and he scored the winning goal in that shootout in Minnesota that first year.

And I got a picture—and, again, if the Premier wants to join me in my office, there's only room for two of us because it's not much bigger than a broom closet, but there's a picture there on the mantle of my mom and I at the arena in St. Paul after Kane had scored in that shootout, and she kind of turns her back and she's got her Kane jersey on that she'd got for Christmas. And it's one of the proudest pictures I have, and I think I'm going to have that memory for a long time.

And then, you know, we got back into the car and, like a lot of Manitobans who weren't Cabinet ministers and couldn't get free tickets through Crown corporations, we drove back for seven and a half hours and came back home. And that's actually how I got my tickets, and a lot of members are like that.

So I'm willing, because he has such a fascination, to take the Premier—I don't have any more tickets left for this season, but for next year I'll have four more. I'll be in the draw, I'll get four tickets. We can even discuss, if there's a game he really wants to go to, I will try to get that game drawn. And we can go to the MTS Centre and we can climb those stairs together, right to the top of that arena. People probably—you know, he got booed last time he was on the Jumbotron, but he won't—the one thing I guarantee him, where my seats are in that arena, he won't be on the Jumbotron, because we're so high up you can't. You can't get a picture, like, on the Jumbotron in the very top of the arena.

So I don't need to hear lessons from the Premier when he talks about Jets tickets, because I enjoy the fact that I'm at the very top of the arena with the other Jets fans, real good Jets fans, cheering for our team. But I'll invite him, if he's that fascinated about my seats, I will invite him. We'll go together, I'll buy him popcorn—not a beer, I can't do that, I'm from Steinbach—but I'll buy him popcorn, Mr. Chairperson, and we'll have a great game together.

Now, if I can—now that I've satisfied his curiosity, if I can return back to the questions about this.

I want to ask him about the role of the conflict-of-interest officer. I've looked at different jurisdictions, in Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions, and a lot of other jurisdictions allow their conflict-of-interest officer to do an investigation. In Manitoba the conflict-of-interest officer simply gives advice to members of the Legislature. And we're all very, you know, happy, I think, and—with the advice that we're able to get from the conflict-of-interest officer. He does a good job, he has meetings with us and all that, that's all good. But there's no ability for him, or her if it's somebody else in that role in the future, to actually launch an investigation, as far as I understand. Is that something that the Premier would consider is a possible change for the role of the conflict-of-interest officer?

**Mr. Selinger:** I just have to say he actually didn't answer my question whether he received any—whether any—he received any free corporate tickets to hockey games. But—it was an eloquent answer, but it really talked all around the issue. And I'm pleased that he's got four tickets in the draw to the league, but, you know, his entire caucus has never fessed up about what corporate tickets they receive for free to hockey games, and he's still doing that. It's—he's very good at obfuscating and avoiding to answering the question. Simple yes or no, that's all that's required, and that would be very helpful. And, while he's at it, he could answer on behalf of his entire caucus.

\*(15:10)

Now, the ethics commissioner—counsellor in Manitoba never existed when the members opposite were in government. They had 11 years to do it; they didn't do it. We brought it in in Manitoba. It's an important measure that gives—it provides advice to member-elected members of the Legislature, if they wish to avail themselves in that advice.

I'll just wait until we can actually have the chance to give a response. The member opposite seems to be interested in doing other things other than—he asked a question, and I was trying to give him an answer, but clearly, he's not interested in the answer.

I was saying that the ethics commissioner never existed when the members opposite were in office. They didn't see the need for one. They were above being accountable for their ethical behaviour—still are—they've still never apologized for the egregious,

unethical behaviour that they perpetrated on the people of Manitoba. I gave just a few examples of that. I didn't mention senior civil servants being involved in land transactions with members of their own family while the members opposite were in office.

And so there's just so many examples that could be discussed that they just want to ignore and forget all about and never take any responsibility about.

Now, I do want to say, also, that the government did respond to the ethical environment issues that were raised in the Auditor General's report, and those responses are on page 333, and this is the Civil Service Commission's response. I think the member has the report there. I'd just like to draw his attention to that page. They start—333.

They start in the opening paragraph by saying: "the Manitoba government agrees with the findings of the Auditor General in its report on the Manitoba government's framework for an ethical environment. All of the recommendations contained in the report are in various stages of review or implementation within the government. Having a tangible and integrated ethical framework is key to the proper operation of government. Civil servants are held to a higher standard of ethical behaviour, based on their unique position of trust. As the survey of government employees indicates, ethics is a critically important issue that employees care deeply about and recognize as important. It is reassuring that 94 per cent of government employees surveyed perceive ethics and integrity as critical issues and an important part of fulfilling their work."

So I think there's an acknowledgement that an ethical framework is important in doing their job as professionals inside the government.

It goes on to say that, "the existing ethical framework for the Manitoba government is comprised of the following seven key components: leadership, recruitment, orientation, learning and development"—which I've talked about already—"policies and procedures, comptrollership and compliance. Each component ensures civil service employees, including senior management, managers, supervisors and front-line workers understand the shared responsibility for modelling appropriate ethical behaviour, upholding and promoting the principles of the ethical framework and incorporating values and ethics into their work and their departments."

And I have to say, again, for the member opposite, there was no ethical guidelines when they were in office. They now exist.

"All policies, practices and processes developed by the Civil Service Commission and departments reinforce the ethical framework. The requirement to observe these policies is also contained within the collective bargaining agreements, which state that employees are expected to observe standards of behaviour consistent with the employee's function and role as a civil service employee."

And the member would know that in collective bargaining agreements, there are procedures for both grievances and consequences on behalf of employers.

"Compliance measures ensure that allegations of unethical behaviour are taken seriously and investigated to the fullest extent. When necessary, disciplinary measures are applied, including the termination of employment as well as referral to law enforcement agencies for criminal investigations and possible charges. The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act facilitates disclosure and investigation of significant and serious wrongdoing in the civil service, while protecting persons who make disclosures from reprisal."

The existing ethical framework has been effective in ensuring an organizational culture that fosters ethical behaviour by employees, recognizing and preventing potential conflicts of interest and mitigating the risks of losses incurred due to fraud. The existing ethical framework has served the Manitoba government well in ensuring that employees are mindful and respectful of the higher ethical standards to which they are held and they act accordingly.

So, a couple of pages later on, in there, there was—on page 351 in the document—I just wondered if the member wanted to look at page 351. And he will note, then, under 3. Ethical Oversight and Reporting, to the question, I feel comfortable talking to my supervisor/manager about issues—ethical issues which arise within my work environment, 69 said—per cent said they agree or strongly agree. To the question, I believe management would take appropriate corrective action if instances of ethical misconduct were reported to them. Sixty-seven per cent said they agree or strongly agree with that.

So I did want to point those factors out to the member, and just indicate to him that, you know,

67 to 69 per cent of employees felt supervisors would act on ethical issues and would take appropriate and corrective action. So that I think might help inform the discussion we're having today.

**Mr. Goertzen:** The—on page 310 it notes that, as the Auditor General writing in the report, we noted that the procurement administration manual includes a chapter entitled, ethics in procurement, chapter 4, that's the good news, I suppose. However, this chapter is empty providing no information other than subsection headings. Has the Premier been able to determine why it is that that chapter was empty?

**Mr. Selinger:** Sorry, I'm going to have to ask the member what page was he referring to again and the question please.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Sorry, I know the Premier's probably still mulling over my invitation to join me at the very top of the arena.

Page 310, at the—near the bottom just prior to the recommendation, it says, we noted that the procurement administration manual includes a chapter entitled, ethics and procurement, chapter 4. However, this chapter is empty providing no information other than subsection headings. Has he been able to determine why that chapter—it's good to have—I guess it's good to have policies, but when it's just an empty chapter, I'm not sure what you want to do with that?

**Mr. Selinger:** You know, I appreciate the member drawing this to my attention and we'll follow up and find out where that is at, whether that was the whole story and what—and how that—and if it is the whole story, what could be done to be improved. But it's in the context of ethical guidelines for all employees in government, which have been put in place by the Civil Service Commission, and it's in the context of whistle-blower and public disclosure legislation which never existed before. So there is a broader framework that recommends ethical behaviour on behalf of all civil servants whether they're in the procurement area or any area of government for that matter. And there's a law now that gives them protection from reprisal, provides them with anonymity and provides them with several channels of communicating their concerns inside of government about any issues that might arise that they believe are unethical.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I look forward to the Premier's responses to, you know, the blank pages on ethics.

He talks about anonymity, but the Auditor General goes a little further than that and the broader—because the public disclosure act only allows you to—or the whistle-blower act only allows you to report certain things and not specifically ethical behaviour that doesn't reach the bar of criminal behaviour or something that's imminent or a mass misuse of government funds, so the auditor recommends that there actually be an ability to report ethical misconduct in a way that has anonymous disclosure. She talks about a tip line in her report. I don't know that that was a recommendation of hers, but she talked about that as a possibility.

But would the Premier be open to seeing that the act expands so that there could anonymous reporting for things that don't reach the bar of the current whistle-blower protection act?

**Mr. Selinger:** I was wondering, does the member have a specific page or reference he's referring to there.

**Mr. Goertzen:** It's page 325, it's recommendation 14. And it relates to the fact that ethical disclosures can't be reported now. It's too low of a bar for the current whistle-blower protection act?

**Mr. Selinger:** All these recommendations have to be given serious and due consideration by the Civil Service Commissioner and the minister responsible. So we'll take a look at that and see what was meant by that. But I'm not aware of any issue that cannot be raised where there's a concern, and—so.

\* (15:20)

From looking at page 335, recommendation No. 14—that's 10 pages up—and it says there: In addition to the disclosures procedures under The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, the Civil Service Commission develop and implement a process to enable employees to report concerns of ethical misconduct, including anonymous disclosures.

The response is, is that the results of the ethics survey indicated that the vast majority of employees, 84 per cent, are most likely to report ethical misconduct or suspected fraud to their direct supervisor, manager, senior management of the department, union or human resources. Only 5 per cent of employees report that they would like—be likely to report ethical misconduct to the independent offices such as the Ombudsman's office or the office of the Auditor General. This suggests

that the creation of a separate disclosure process is not likely to be used by—utilized by employees.

And then it goes on to say: Management within the Manitoba government recognize the responsibility to take appropriate action to address concerns brought to their attention. If a matter is determined to be outside the scope of the public interest disclosure act, management will review the allegation and, where appropriate, investigate the matter. This process undertaken—is undertaken for both signed and anonymous complaints.

So they've attempted to respond to that and indicate that management will take their concerns seriously, whether reported anonymously or otherwise, and follow up on it.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, there's a couple of points. I mean, earlier in a response, the Premier was saying that the government essentially was accepting the recommendations. This one, it doesn't sound like they're accepting that recommendation at all. But he made the point that he wasn't aware of things that couldn't be disclosed under the whistle-blower protection act.

On three—page 326, the Auditor General outlines, I guess, her understanding of the act. She says: The act is not intended to deal with routine operational or administrative matters; rather, wrongdoing under the act is limited to the following: an act or omission constituting an offence under federal or provincial legislation—so that's something that's breaching the law—an act or omission that creates a specific and 'sustainable' danger—or sorry, substantial danger to the life, health or safety of a person or the environment; gross mismanagement, including mismanagement of public funds or a public asset; and knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing in any of the above.

So it is limited, and I'm surprised that the Premier wasn't aware of that. It was his legislation. I think what she's suggesting is that it either needs to be broadened or there needs to be a way to report things that don't reach these four specific bars in an anonymous way in some other fashion.

**Mr. Selinger:** I appreciate the member referencing that page 326, and where the—what the focus of the act is on acts or omissions constituting an offence under federal or provincial law; an act or omission that creates a specific and substantial danger to the life, health and safety of persons or the environment; gross mismanagement, including mismanagement of

public funds or a public asset; or knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing in any of the above clauses. So that is the focus of the legislation.

But on page 335, which I just read into the record, it does indicate, on the last paragraph there, just before No. 18, that "management within the Manitoba government recognize the responsibility to take appropriate action to address concerns brought to their attention." And so—and I also referenced earlier on that 67 to 69 per cent of people feel they can raise issues with their supervisors or their managers and that they have a measure of confidence that they will be properly addressed and dealt with. So the member is correct. The act focuses its resources on those things that are the most serious, but it also leaves open lots of potential for raising issues with supervisors. It also leaves the door wide open to go to the Ombudsman if necessary. And, by the way, any employees, a member of a union, can also raise issues through their unions as well. And union representatives are there to assist them if they have a concern that they want to have addressed. So it is important to have a variety of channels for people to raise concerns within in order to improve the quality of public service, which is the objective of everybody in public service.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I think the member's—or the minister's corrected himself in terms of his understanding now of the legislation. Not everything can be reported under the legislation. I think that what the Auditor General is saying is that there are certain things that were ethical but that don't reach to the level of these four criteria. Yes, you could report it to a supervisor, as anybody can, but you then don't get the protection of the whistle-blower protection act, which is the point of the legislation. So I think she's indicating that one should look at either lowering the bar, I suppose, and allowing more things to be reported under the act, or providing another means to report, in an anonymous way, for things that don't reach those four criteria.

I'm going to defer in moments to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister). I wanted to just go back to the point that I raised before. And I—so I used the terminology incorrectly, and our deputy clerk pointed this out to me, corrected me, as he often does on many occasions, that it's the commissioner—Conflict of Interest Commissioner, not the conflict of interest officer. And under our legislation, as I understand it, the Conflict of Interest

Commissioner does not have the power to investigate.

In Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions, where there's a violation of conflict of interest found on members of the Legislature, their Conflict of Interest Commissioner can actually launch an investigation and use the power of evidence. So, in Manitoba—and, in fact, this was the recommendation of the Manitoba Law Reform Commission back in 2000—and I know my friend from Minto and I read those recommendations front to back all the time, and in 2000 the Law Reform Commission recommended that a conflict-of-interest commissioner be allowed to investigate issues where he felt that they were serious enough to be investigated.

So it's not a politically loaded question, I'm just asking the Premier whether or not he thinks there'd be merit in expanding the role of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner in Manitoba to allow them to investigate where they feel there has been breaches of the act.

**Mr. Selinger:** And, again, I didn't see that as a recommendation in the Auditor General's report, so I take it that's a separate and independent question, and it can be—go ahead.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, it is; I mean, we're in Executive Council Estimates, not the Auditor General estimates, but, I mean, I get it. I mean, it was a separate issue. The Conflict of Interest Commissioner is not allowed to investigate complaints in Manitoba. We saw this on the issue of the Jets tickets, and I—you know, the invitation remains open. The Premier can join me at the top of the MTS Centre for whatever game I'm lucky enough to draw next year in the four that I'm allocated. But we saw that he—and he referenced the fact he could not do an investigation. He was essentially powerless to investigate that issue. And I'm just—it seems to me that that's different than what most of the provinces have, where their commissioner—or at least some other provinces—can actually do an investigation. Would he support the idea of having a conflict-of-interest commissioner who could actually investigate something?

**Mr. Selinger:** I would like to take that question as one that requires investigation as to what other provinces do and what the measures are in place, which provinces have conflict-of-interest commissioners, what powers and resources they have. But it is important to note that this is the

government that brought in the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. It didn't exist prior to that.

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** So we know that last year in the budget address—last year? No—when did that PST hike come in?

**An Honourable Member:** Not this budget, last one? Last year.

**Mr. Pallister:** Spring of '13, yes. So in the spring of—

**An Honourable Member:** April.

**Mr. Pallister:** April, yes, April—that the Throne Speech spent a great deal of time talking about things other than poor infrastructure as the rationale for raising the PST. Talked about front-line—protecting front-line services, talked about a variety of things. We know the government did a number of announcements over the following few months, most of which—the vast majority of which didn't centre on core infrastructure, but now in the speech from the Throne here—when was that, Kelvin? Was it December or November? November?

**An Honourable Member:** November.

**Mr. Pallister:** November. In November, the government changed its messaging and began to start the process of focusing, now, which is good—focusing is good. Focusing on the PST rationale being to invest in core infrastructure.

The problem that people have—and I just had the chance—as the Premier will, actually, in a couple of weeks, I think—to speak to the heavy construction people, and they were concerned about the credibility of the message on the—they understand the take-offs—or the government's take-offs are really good, nice photo ops and things like that, but it was the landings they were more concerned about, the actual delivery on the promise of investing in core infrastructure is of more concern to them than the announcements they were engaged in helping government make. Certainly, that's their members' concern.

\* (15:30)

So, I guess, I'm asking the Premier, because I know that the government has made—a number of times, has made announcements, not just to the heavy construction industry, but to Manitobans, about its intentions to invest heavily in core infrastructure but hasn't fall through on them. Why would we—why would the people in Manitoba

believe him now when he hasn't, over the last 15 years, made core infrastructure a focus of his government's investments? Why now?

**Mr. Selinger:** I would have to say that I disagree profoundly with the way the Leader of the Opposition has characterized our investments over the last several years in office.

Just right after the budget was announced last year, one of the most significant announcements we made was a \$250-million commitment to building the additional channel out of Lake Manitoba into Lake St. Martin and to take the temporary emergency channel and make it permanent, and all the engineering involved around that. That was a very significant infrastructure announcement.

And I note that over the last time we've been in office our commitment to highways has been very significant inside the province. I think, before the budget of last year, the amount that was being spent on highway budget was in the order of—and maintenance and all the things related to that kind of infrastructure, sewer and water, those kinds of items—it was in the order of about \$700 million. I think, actually higher than \$700 million. So that was dramatically increased over the \$100 million or so that was spent on infrastructure when we came into office.

So infrastructure has been very significant. It's not an accident that the city of Winnipeg has one-in-700-year protection from floods now. That was a major infrastructure investment made while we were in office. It wasn't made while the Leader of the Opposition was in office. And then all the work that was done in southern Manitoba on diking around communities to protect those communities in a permanent way, and all the money that was invested to help communities lift their homes two feet above 1997 levels so that they would be protected in the event of a '97-type of flood occurring again. So there has been very significant money invested in sewer and water infrastructure, road infrastructure, diking infrastructure, flood protection infrastructure during our time in office.

We've always had a very strong focus on core infrastructure, and communities have told us that they appreciate that. They've also said that they wanted to see investments in recreation infrastructure as well. And we've been able to work with many communities on providing money for recreation infrastructure including arenas and community clubs

and things that make a real difference for the quality of life of families in their communities.

So—and I'm not even talking about the investments we've made in schools which are very important sources of core infrastructure in communities as well. It's been about a billion dollars of investment we've put into public schools and post-secondary institutions in Manitoba. We've—we entered into a \$250-million program for the University of Manitoba, for example, on upgrading their infrastructure out there. When we came into office the engineering building, the roof was leaking. Now we have a new engineering building. We have a new student residence out there. We have a new art lab which brings together people on computer-aided design, fine arts, architecture, all of those people that do graphic design, et cetera. The amount of facilities—it's been a transformation at the university in terms of the facilities.

Similarly, we've made very major investments in university infrastructure in Brandon, and University College of the North didn't exist before we came into office and now we have campuses in a variety of communities so people can go to school close to home, where they live. Seeing major investments in The Pas and Thompson in post-secondary institutions, so I have to profoundly disagree with the member opposite that we haven't invested in core infrastructure which makes a big difference to people's lives. He's unfortunately missed all those budgets and hasn't paid attention to what we've been doing.

**Mr. Pallister:** Well, I get the petulance of the Premier, I understand he feels he's under stress and everything, but I was just referencing—actually, it's understandable that he would, given the amazing exponential growth in revenues that he's been able to work with. It's been a wonderfully prosperous time in the province of Manitoba over the last 15 years, and I think that's great. I'm happy about that and I'm happy that the Premier's happy about the investments that he's been making. I think he should feel happy about that too.

I'm also sure he recognizes, because I'm sure he's talked to Bob Rae, the challenges of governing during a recession and with a fraction as much revenue, and he probably has had that conversation. If he hasn't, I'd suggest he do that, because he'd learn that it's a challenge to deal with declining revenues, and he referenced that yesterday in the House. appreciate the fact he did reference that, and it's

good to know that he remembers those days somewhat accurately. The fact is that the government has had a lot more money, do it's had a lot more money to spend. And it's also had the advantage of having a low interest rate climate to work with, which is a wonderful thing.

Every householder in Manitoba understands that if they've had their mortgage renew and they had a mortgage like I had, a lot of people had back in the '70s and '80s when interest rates were considerably higher. My first one was 17.5 for five years locked in and I thought I was smart and the rate went up, but 17.5 per cent interest, that's tough to deal with. A lot of small businesses, farm families, Manitoba families remember those times, and they aren't fooled when the Premier says that debt's not a problem. They're concerned what'll happen if interest rates start to rise again with all the additional debt that he's accumulating.

But my question centred on the issue of infrastructure investment and I guess the question was how is it believable that government has made, the Premier and his Infrastructure Minister in particular, have made a lot of bold assertions about what they do with additional revenues. They raised the gas tax and promised that \$2 for every one they raised would go into infrastructure and then proceeded to reduce their spending on infrastructure. So I think Manitobans would be wise to be, not cynical, Mr. Chairman, but skeptical of the promises that they're hearing.

Now that being said, maybe the Premier could explain why, of all the departments of government since he became Premier, only one has underspent and that one has been Infrastructure. Maybe he could explain if his commitment was genuine, why that is the case. Why would he underspend in the category of infrastructure if that was such a key priority in his mind?

**Mr. Selinger:** I would have to say to the member opposite, again, he has to look at the increase over our time in office in infrastructure spending and it has been increasing on a regular basis. And there are in every year things, projects that do not materialize as rapidly as people might have thought for a variety of reasons. Weather conditions is one of the dominant factors, but that money continues to be moved into those key projects as time goes along. As they are able to deliver those projects, they do.

We've undertaken some very complex projects coming out of the '11 flood for example. The Lake

St. Martin, Lake Manitoba channels, for example, require very extensive engineering consultations under section 35 of the Constitution Act, but they're long-term investments in the future prosperity and future security of those communities which I believe will lead to a future renaissance of the economy in the Interlake as people have greater certainty about what level of flood protection they have, and that will increase their ability to make key investments out there, whether it's around the lake or in communities that could be potentially flooded so.

These projects take time. We've shown in our five-year plan which I hope the member has a copy of which was released just before the budget, the Five-Year Plan to Build a Stronger Manitoba. We show that there's a ramp-up of infrastructure spending as we go along and that as that money ramps up, the year-over-year investments will increase, and this is an enormous undertaking but it's an undertaking that's very timely, at a time of global economic fragility and a slower recovery in the global economy than anybody predicted.

These infrastructure investments will not only generate 58,900 jobs in the short term and about a \$6 billion lift in the economy, but they'll provide the kinds of assets which will increase productivity for businesses in the long term and productivity for communities and individuals as well. So there is a ramp-up component to it. There always is a certain amount of lapse every year, but the department has continued to find ways to increase expenditure and put more money into critical infrastructure all across this province.

I travel in the province pretty extensively and I've had lots of people tell me the roads are—not only in some parts of Manitoba where they had been neglected for decades, are now improved. There's other parts of the province where roads have improved but they want to see further improvements, given the amount of economic activity going on there. And so we're looking at a variety of different projects all across Manitoba that will make a difference.

Some of the key ones are Highway 75, Highway No. 10, Highway No. 59, the Perimeter and the link-ups between the Perimeter and Highway 75—some of the interchanges there, the Perimeter on the northeast side of the city and some of the requirements for improvements there. So there's a number of very significant projects which are going to be moving forward and that's just on the road side



in Manitoba. And then, if he wishes, I can elaborate on things in other areas of critical infrastructure that we're doing as well.

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Pallister:** I don't think the Premier needs me to encourage him to elaborate. I'm sure he'll elaborate on his own.

But I asked him, again, why people should believe him when he actually spends so much less than he promises. The reality, of course, of having more money is that you can spend more money. I think everybody gets that reality. But the question of the credibility of this government when they promise to spend more on infrastructure and when they actually spend less than they promise year after year, is one that I'm raising now.

So the Premier can trumpet the projects, and I'm sure he doesn't need any encouragement to do so, that's fine, but my question is the believability here.

In 2009-10, the budget for infrastructure the government put forward, the promise that they would spend on infrastructure, was \$1.6 billion. And the reality was although they overspent in virtually every other department of government, on that department they underspent by 27 per cent. So I'm curious as to why that's the case. You make a promise to spend \$1.6 billion on infrastructure. You tell people it's a priority, a \$1.6-billion priority in your budget. This is the first year as a premier, I understand; as a rookie premier, maybe he didn't mean it or maybe he wasn't sure, maybe it was just some excuses to why it didn't go down the way he thought, I get that. But he was Finance minister before, so he should have come in some knowledge or some ability to project more realistically than this. I mean, to be off by 27 per cent, that's quite a whack of being off. So, missed it by quite a bit.

So, again, I—you know, 2009-2010, this same spiel about caring about infrastructure and investing in it was out there. The budget came down, 1.622 was the promised amount that would go into infrastructure capital, and then 1.183 is what happens. There's \$439 million less than we thought, I guess, and that the government said they cared, but they didn't care as much. So that 27 per cent, \$439 million, went into something else, because it didn't go in the balance of the books; it sure didn't go into lowering taxes.

So, again, I ask the Premier, why? Why be making a statement that you care about infrastructure

in 2009-10 to that degree, and then be off by 27 per cent? How do you expect that your credibility's not going to suffer when you're off by that big of an amount?

**Mr. Selinger:** Well, I like to table a document for the member opposite. How many do you require? Three?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**Mr. Selinger:** Yes, okay. So I'll put those out there. I didn't keep a copy for myself, but I can remember the general trends and—as I provide it.

But it shows in the trend in infrastructure spending from the '80s through the '90s into the current decade and now, up 'til about 2010. And if the Leader of the Opposition looks at that, he can see that for many years there, when he was in office, infrastructure spending was actually flat. It would decline some years, up a little bit the next, but essentially the trend line was flat. And that was at time when you raised gas tax. Raised gas tax, reduced the amount of money that you spent on highways. Where's the credibility in that?

And so what we've done, you can see that in that chart there's a—every year there's a growth in infrastructure spending. And in the last couple of years there, there's some years when it's a little bit lower than the previous year, but overall the trend is higher, that's my point.

So you're going to have variations from year to year. And any time you have a statistical analysis or a view of spending or any kind of other data set, there's usually a line that goes through it that shows the overall trend, even though there are year-to-year variances. And the overall trend here is dramatically up in terms of infrastructure spending, and very significant projects have been undertaken. I illustrated a couple of them to the member, such as the floodway.

But in 2013—in Budget 2013, for example, there was a record \$622-million investment in provincial highways and bridges, including improvements to passing lanes on Provincial Trunk Highway No. 10 between Brandon and Minnedosa; Highway No. 1 between Portage la Prairie and PTH 16; PTH 6 north of Sasagiu Rapids; the completion of CentrePort Canada Way, a very significant project which we did with the federal government, and I was pleased to open it with the Prime Minister; Victoria Avenue in Brandon; the interchange of Highway No. 1 at the

east Perimeter; work on the east-side road; and a number of flood-related projects—so.

I do have a copy now. You can see the overall trend line is up, since we've been in office, starting in '99. And we are, with this five-year plan, now heading into a \$5.5-billion program over the next five years. There will be ramp up. There will be unexpected delays for a variety of reasons. For example, this year the spring is very late. The member knows the spring's very late. It could be the result of a polar vortex or the member of Steinbach may want to take responsibility for it. Because I know he's always—I know he's usually happy to step up and take responsibility for things. We've seen that many times already. But there will be variations on an annual basis.

But, when you look at the five-year plan on page 12, you see that there's a pattern of increasing investment in infrastructure. And I have to tell the member opposite some of these projects are very complex and require very complex decisions to be made and the co-operation of other levels of government, to make sure these projects can be undertaken, and we don't necessarily have control over all the variables in that. But we will work assiduously with other levels of government and with the contracting community to maximize the investment of these dollars in Manitoba to be there when the federal government wants to identify where they want to go with the Building Canada Fund and work with them on that and to work with municipalities, and we'll find a way to move forward on all of these projects.

But will there be some issues that arise that are unforeseen as we move along? For sure. Will there be some bumps on the road? For sure. But the roads overall will have less bumps in them. They'll be better roads. They'll be faster, safer, more useful and productive roads in Manitoba. And then we'll invest in flood protection, as well. We'll invest in sewer and water throughout Manitoba, as well, where I know there's a very significant need for that, and we'll continue to find a way to invest in health-care facilities throughout Manitoba, rural and northern Manitoba, as well as in the city of Winnipeg, and education facilities because we know those are critical investments for the long term. And the member will know that we're doing things like science labs that are 40 years out of date in some cases. And we're upgrading the shops in schools, where people can get trades and skills that will allow

them to do the good jobs that are available in Manitoba.

So we'll find practical ways to make sure that these investments generate more good jobs for young people and steady economic growth within the province.

**Mr. Pallister:** Yes, I thank the member for, you know, this wonderful illustration, which actually demonstrates very little, because it's—shows proportional increases in spending on infrastructure, proportional to increases in revenue, proportional to increases in equalization, proportional to increases in transfers and so on of other kinds.

So, for example, the Premier claims credit for spending more, but in actual fact, proportionally, in 1992—he used that in the chart, so I'll just reference that—revenues increased from then 'til '9 by two and a half times, like 250 per cent higher. So the revenues—the total revenue in 2009, about \$13 billion, was less than five in '92. So, I mean, what we're talking about, let's get serious, what we're talking about is the government taking credit for spending more money, which it has. I get it. You know, the government's got more revenue from tax dollars coming in.

Equalization payments, which went down, of course, in—under—as the Premier knows, thanks to the federal Liberals' decision, went down significantly, as did transfers in the mid-'90s. So when he speaks about infrastructure investments being relatively flat, well, I wish. I wish our federal support had been relatively flat. It wasn't flat; it declined and, in spite of that, infrastructure investments continue to be made. The Premier talks about making improvements since then. Of course, that's understandable. I mean, good for the government for making improvements, but let's recognize and give credit where credit's due. The revenue flows have increased remarkably, that's great, that's good for the province, and the government's made sure by hiking taxes in recent months that it's going to have higher revenue growth than every other Canadian province, and that's nice for the government—not so nice for Manitobans.

\* (15:50)

But, again, my question was: Why make a promise and then—of putting four into infrastructure and then put three? And I ask him again: Why is he off so much on that prediction on infrastructure? And I use the example of 2009 again, because it's a real one and his first year, I believe, as Premier, promised

to spend \$1.6 billion—spent less than one-point-two. Every \$4 he said he was going to put into infrastructure, only three went in. The other dollar didn't disappear. It didn't go to pay down debt—didn't go to lower taxes, didn't reduce his deficit; he spent it on something else.

So something else mattered more than infrastructure. Now he's asking Manitobans to believe this PST hike's all about core infrastructure and, by gosh, we're going to put it in there, but he didn't put it in there before.

So I want to ask him again: Why did he spend 27 per cent less on infrastructure in 2009 than he promised to spend?

Maybe the member behind him has an answer for that. Maybe she'd like to take the question, I'm not sure. I notice she's chirping over there.

**Mr. Selinger:** Unfortunate the member didn't listen to my answers previously where I pointed out to them there's been a very significant increase in infrastructure spending.

I don't know if the member opposite has his budget papers with him. I'm wondering if he does.

**An Honourable Member:** No, it's okay, go ahead.

**Mr. Selinger:** The member—if the member took the time to read the budget papers, with respect to transfers, he makes the point that transfers have gone up, but, in fact, on a per capita basis, Manitoba's transfers since '9-10 have gone down 5.7 per cent. That's indicated in the budget papers on page D2, if he's interested in reading that. So at a time when per capita transfers have gone down, Manitoba's increased—spending on infrastructure has gone up, and that's the salient point here.

With our own revenues, we've made an increasing commitment to infrastructure spending in Manitoba, not only in roads and sewer and water but also in schools and hospitals and personal-care homes and other things that look after people, provide better care for people, provide opportunities for people to get skills and a good education and also provide good infrastructure that allows us to move goods and services to market, allows people to get better access in their local communities, allows for health and ambulance services to be more effective on the ground. So at a time when per capita transfers are going down, you've seen record investments in the province, which has been a real boost to the economy.

And I've—as I've indicated in the five-year, infrastructure spending—core infrastructure report, on page 12 we show a plan for how we're going to spend the five and a half billion dollars going forward. And there is a ramp-up period and there is a period when, in the first year, the commitment shows that the money won't be fully there for it to meet the entire commitment in '13-14, but as we move forward that the money that's invested will exceed the commitment and we'll reach that \$5.5-billion goal.

Now, there will be unforeseen challenges as we move along. There is no guarantee that everything will work out exactly as what people wished for, but these long-term commitments to infrastructure will have long-term benefits to the people of Manitoba, and places like Brandon will have long-term flood protection. Homes in the Assiniboine valley will have long-term dike protection. For example, in communities like Melita and Souris, some of the dikes that have been put in place out there are being made permanent for the permanent protection of those communities, and we're doing that in other communities inside of Manitoba as well. And I know there's some communities in the Interlake, for example, that need permanent dikes put in place there and we're going to act on that. And the channel coming out of Lake Manitoba, as well as the emergency channel being made permanent, are going to be important long-term investments.

And Highway 75, there will be very significant work started this year, but one of the big challenges there, one of the big engineering challenges, is to figure out how to lift Highway 75 to interstate levels, particularly around Morris, Manitoba, where, as we know, there's the Morris River, and the town's interested in maintaining access to the town for commercial purposes but also wants better flood protection. So it's a very complex engineering problem for which we have dedicated resources to work on that and we'll be doing community consultations, and as people come together and consider the options and choices, we'll come up with a package of recommendations that will allow us to move forward on that project.

But you need early planning on that, you need early consultation, and then you need the ability to follow through on it, and the five-year plan allows us to do all of those things. But I want to make sure that we get moving on these projects even though some of them will take time to get in place and all the

approvals to be done, environmental approvals in some cases, section 35 consultation requirements.

But it's a bold vision for the future of Manitoba that I believe will bring long-term prosperity to the province as well as many short-term benefits in terms of employment and steady growth in the economy at a time when the Canadian economy is starting to slow down and the global economy is starting to slow down.

**Mr. Pallister:** Well, having a five-year plan never ensured anything except that you have a five-year plan. It'd be the implementation of the plan that would be the key, and the government hasn't implemented its budget plans on infrastructure for years, so it's not believable. And posting another unbelievable plan on top of four defaults—serious defaults—on a commitment made in a budget—and I'm citing Public Accounts data—is hardly the way to convince anybody of anything.

I mean, the government underinvested in infrastructure by 27 per cent, the Premier refuses to address the reasons for it. I'm simply asking him why did he not—you know, he's talked about the vagaries and the possibilities and the variabilities, and I'd like to hear him tell us about what those are. Why is it that he makes a promise to spend \$1.622 billion on infrastructure in the '09-10 budget, and then he spends 27 per cent less when he's able to overspend every other department of government? I think it'd be pretty interesting for people who care about infrastructure—as we do on this side of the House—and especially core infrastructure investment, to understand why it is that the government has refused to invest the money it promises to invest in infrastructure, in infrastructure. Just curious about that. And I'd like the Premier to maybe spell out a couple of reasons why—just, you know, what these vagaries were that caused him to miss out on that target by a whopping \$439 million in 2009-10 fiscal.

And, you know, while he's talking about how hard done by he is in terms of federal transfers, let's note that in 2009 those total transfers were \$3.8 billion. And, you know, they were 40 per cent as much in the—in early '90s that he cites in his graphs. So, in fact, proportionally, there was more money, as a percentage of the budget, that went into core infrastructure in the early '90s than there was in 2009-10.

So, again, let the Premier give us the reasons why he missed by a whopping margin—more than every other department, more than any other

province we can find—how he could miss by 27 per cent on an infrastructure commitment and then tell the people of Manitoba he's committed to infrastructure today, and have them actually believe him. Maybe he could explain that.

**Mr. Selinger:** Not only have I answered the question in previous responses, but it's very clear that the Leader of the Opposition hasn't taken the time to listen to them. And if he looked at the graph, he would see the dramatic increase in infrastructure spending in Manitoba during the time we've been in office, compared to the absolute flat infrastructure spending when he was in office, even though they raised more gas tax revenues. The only member in this House—who was a member of Cabinet at that time—raised revenues for gas tax and cut highway budget. That was his record; not very impressive, I might say, in terms of infrastructure commitments.

The Leader of the Opposition was one that wanted to halt the floodway being built in southern Manitoba and around the city of Winnipeg. We built it; he wanted to stop it. And we built it and we brought it in on time and under budget. And then the additional resources that were remaining, the \$38 million in partnership with the federal government, we've invested them in further flood protection in Manitoba in places like Melita and Souris and Brandon and Duck Bay, and East and West St. Paul, as well as places like St. Clements, so—Waterhen, as well. So there's been very significant follow-through and very significant results to the infrastructure investments we've made.

But, as I said earlier, there are always, every year, unforeseen challenges, but as those challenges are addressed, the money is invested in infrastructure and will continue to be invested in infrastructure as we've indicated in the five-year plan.

Never seen a five-year plan from the members opposite for anything in Manitoba other than cuts, and all we're hearing today is a further demand for cuts. And now the member seems to be concerned about spending, but what we've really heard from him is he wants across-the-board cuts, so I don't see any commitment from infrastructure on the other side of the House.

I think we have seen very significant progress on infrastructure investment in Manitoba during our time in office, and we will see even more progress on it as we move forward in the future. And there will be unforeseen challenges that come forward.

\* (16:00)

CentrePort never existed under the members opposite, and now we have CentrePort and we have CentrePort way that's been opened up. I think the project was identified in 2009 and opened up early 2014. So that project was conceived—very significant project, about a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar investment, with federal and provincial money put into it, but a very significant investment in opening up more activity, more opportunities for business in Manitoba, more opportunities for the foreign trade zone to take hold. Many businesses have invested out there, expanded their facilities, built new facilities. New businesses have come to Manitoba and located in that area. And now, as part of our overall strategic plan in infrastructure, we're going to strengthen the connective tissue to CentrePort way—to CentrePort, to CentrePort way, to the Perimeter Highway, to the interchange with Highway 75—major investments in Highway 75, major investments with the Headingley bypass, a very complex project which will take a lot of work.

But all these things will provide real opportunities for Manitoba to continue to be a transportation hub for goods and services in and out of North America over the next several decades. And it's a real opportunity for Manitobans to have a vision like that and then to follow through on it and execute it. And, again, this is part of our overall plan. We've seen no plan from the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Pallister:** Well, it's interesting that the Premier isn't answering the question. It's informative, because I've given him the opportunity on several occasions to address the reasons that he's been so remarkably far off on his infrastructure commitments and broken his promises to people of the province by so significant an amount in the 2009 and '10 fiscal year, that he was off by 20—a full 27 per cent on his budgetary commitment, that he did not keep his promise. And he refuses to give reasons as to why that would be the case. And I'm giving him the opportunity to give such reasons.

So I gather that in his absence of a response, simply put, infrastructure wasn't as big a deal to him as he pretended it was when he put the budget out. In fact, based on reality, not on five-year plans or pen-to-paper-ink promises that the Premier is fond of making, or five- or 10- or seven- or eight-year plans with numbers in a book, the reality is when it came time to put the shovel in the ground, he missed a quarter of the time. When it came time to make the

improvements to infrastructure that he promised he would make, he missed a quarter of the time. Not a little bit, a lot: 27 per cent of the time. And he refuses to put a reason down, so I guess the reason, I'll have to surmise, is that he doesn't think infrastructure—didn't think infrastructure was important in 2009-10 and he spent the money on a bunch of other things.

Now, you know, let's compare. I mean, in 2009-10, the ability of our neighbouring province to the west to keep its promise, in 2009-10, how much was the government of Saskatchewan off on its budgeted item, on its budgeted line? Was it off 27 per cent? No. Was it off 20? No. How about—maybe it overspent? Maybe it overspent—the government, you know, this government, this Premier likes to overspend, so maybe? No, didn't overspend, no.

Spent—they spent right on the line they said they would. They budgeted and they were not off by more than zero per cent. They were right on the line. Now, if Saskatchewan can do that, how come Manitoba, under this Premier, is off by 27 per cent?

I'm simply asking the Premier to outline his reasons for missing the target on infrastructure in 2009-10 by that significant an amount. And if, you know, rather than the, you know, the diatribes and the list of projects, which we can get out of his previous five-year plan, or we can get out of the previous premier's 10-year plan, or we can get out of any number of documents—the government's promised to do a number of things, and re-promised, and re-re-re-promised. That doesn't change a thing. The issue here is whether they're believable on their commitment to spend the PST revenue on core infrastructure. That's what their new commitment is, as of the Throne Speech in November. Are they believable on it or are they not? And if you're off by 27 per cent, and you can't give a reason as to why, I'd suggest that you're not very believable.

**Mr. Selinger:** Clearly, the member hasn't heard my answers that I've put on the record and doesn't want to hear them. You have to actually want to hear something if you're going to understand it. But that would interfere with your diatribe.

Look, I've made it clear and I gave an example earlier today. Some budgets come in on time and under budget. One of them was the floodway. Does the member opposite think it's a bad thing that we were able to achieve one-in-700-year protection on time and save \$37 million that we were able to

reallocate to other flood protection works in Manitoba? If he does, let him say so. It wouldn't surprise me, because he wanted to halt the project in the first place, which would have driven up the cost when it eventually had to be done.

Some projects, and I said this earlier, are complex and take a long time to design and work on, and there's very significant consultation requirements under the Constitution and very significant requirements to deal with other levels of government in order to bring all the pieces together to do them. They're still important projects. They still have to be done. The member didn't hear me answer that, so I'll put it on the record again.

For 2013-14 budget forecast investing \$1.799 billion on infrastructure, and we're now projecting investing \$1.5 billion. That is under what was forecast, but it's still \$250 million more than the actual investment in the previous year. So it makes my point that infrastructure investment continues to improve and strengthen and make a real difference in the province.

In 2001 and '2 the budget was \$426 million; in 2013-14, it's projected to be \$1.5 billion. That makes my point. It's tripled since 2001 and 2002. The member may not like the trend line, but the trend line is inescapably accurate that it's going up every year.

**Mr. Pallister:** What's going up is the Premier's projections. That's all that's going up. What about 2000? We know he missed his targets and broke his promise by 27 per cent in 2009-10, and I encourage him to listen to the question this time and actually endeavour to give an honest response. I'll give him another chance here. Let's talk about 2010-11.

In 2010-11, the budget stated and the budget is a promise, and I grant you budget is a projection. So I grant you there's a possibility that with this government in particular they might miss their projected numbers, I get that and I accept that, but the reality is the government promised, in this category of infrastructure capital asset spending that they would spend \$1.798 billion and they spent less than \$1.3. That's a \$499-million miss. That's a lot of striking out, and that follows the direct failure the year before to invest in infrastructure in the manner projected by 27 per cent the year before, by 28 per cent the next year. Back-to-back whopper misses.

However, spending in other departments exceeded estimates. It's a consistent trend of this government to exceed their spending estimates, but

the reality is when it comes to the issue now before us, the issue of the legitimacy or the validity of the Premier's claim that he would actually keep his word and now suddenly, as a changed man, invest in infrastructure in a manner in which he states he intends to when he hasn't lived by it and hasn't done it in the past, I think raises honest concerns. And there's a lot of concern out there that the sincerity of this Premier and this government in terms of this commitment is not real and that, rather, this is just an attempt to sell Manitobans on another tax hike.

So I repeat, under by 27 per cent in 2009 and '10; under by 28 per cent, the year after. Can the Premier explain how it is possible that under his management in a government where spending so typically exceeds projections, he could be under by over \$900 million total in back-to-back years on his commitment to invest in infrastructure.

**Mr. Selinger:** Clearly, the member didn't hear my last answer where I gave him an explanation for that and a response to that.

And the Leader of the Opposition likes to talk about credibility. He's the one that actually raised taxes for gasoline in the 1990s at the same time as he cut the highways budget. Where's the credibility on commitment to infrastructure when he does things like that?

Many school projects were cancelled. The entire Health capital budget, half a billion dollars was cancelled in one year after the 1995 election. Where was his commitment to infrastructure there? When you cancel the entire health-care capital budget, that is a dramatic reversal of what you led people to expect in the election of 1995, and I'm not even talking about the vote rigging that occurred during that election as well. I'm talking about infrastructure spending.

\*(16:10)

So it's pretty hard to listen to the sanctimony from the member opposite, given the track record of underspending and cancelling infrastructure projects while he was in office. It strains credibility, even for those that are the most convinced that they're right. But, you know, that would require you to look at the facts and to look in the mirror and see what's really going on.

So, as I indicated earlier, and I'm going to give this example again, we came in on time and met the objective of one-in-700-year protection on the floodway and, at the same time, underspent the

overall budget by \$37 million and then worked with the federal government to identify how that money could be reinvested to the benefit of Manitobans in other forms of flood protection in the province. Thirty-seven million, and we've now rolled that announcement out, and that money will be allocated to flood protection in a variety of other communities in Manitoba, which I've already put on the record.

It's not a bad thing to meet your objective of the level of protection you're trying to achieve and, at the same time, deliver it on time and come in under budget. If the member has any problems with that approach, let him speak now, particularly when he wanted to delay the project and hold the project up.

Other projects are very complex, and they're going to take some time to ramp up. But, even while those more complex projects are taking time to ramp up, there are other things that can be done. Highways can be improved, and they will be, and many things can be done in the short term while the more complex projects are being worked on.

So there will be a very significant investment, and previous years show, if the member takes, as I indicated earlier to the member, that in '013-14, even though the budget forecasts spending of \$1.799 billion, it came in less than that at \$1.5 billion, which was still \$250 million more than the previous year's spending on infrastructure, and that, just to put things in perspective, that \$1.5 billion is three times what it was in 2001 and 2002.

So the trend line is clear; there's been an increase in spending. Clearly, there has been some years when projects needed to be rolled over; further work needed to be done. But the overall trend line is clear, and the spending is verified. It's not just spending; it's investments in infrastructure, which have made a real difference in communities.

When I was in Morris, Manitoba, for example, after the '11 flood, we repaved the entire Main Street of Morris, Manitoba, and redid all the sidewalks—very visible evidence of infrastructure improvements that I know the city councillors were very pleased by and the residents of the community were very pleased by. It didn't happen after the '97 flood. We didn't see any investment to that extent out there with respect to the town of Morris, or of Manitoba. But we did do it after the '11 flood, and now we're working on them with a long-term solution on how to lift and strengthen Highway 75 to meet interstate standards. That is a more complex problem, but we're not waiting for the Building Canada Fund to be

announced necessarily in terms of specifics. We're moving on that right now.

There will be very significant investments on Highway 75 this summer as we work on the very complex engineering challenge of how to ensure that we can achieve interstate standards for the piece of road around Morris, Manitoba, and we're doing it in consultation with the community, the Town of Morris, and the municipality of Morris and the communities around there, because we want to make sure the solution is one that optimizes the benefits for the people in that region, not just the people of Morris town, but also the people on Morris municipality. And I'm very pleased to say that the reeves and mayors out there are very engaged in this process and have a lot of good ideas and leadership to provide on doing it. But they're confident that that project will come to fruition because they saw the results after the 2011 flood. They saw their Main Street paved. They saw their sidewalks improved. They saw their drainage from rainwater improve. They saw all these things materialize in a very practical and concrete way in that community.

So the member may be—the member may be skeptical, if not cynical, although—the tone that he projects is very cynical, sarcastic, but he may just be skeptical, and we will continue to build roads in Manitoba. We will continue to build schools in Manitoba. We will continue to build personal care homes in Manitoba, so—and those—and hospitals in Manitoba. And I can only say that the leader himself, when he was in other venues, said very positive things about the province of Manitoba based on many of the investments that have been made by this government in partnership with our communities and the private sector. The leader said on February 28, 2014, we believe very strongly our province is on the way back up, and we want to be part of that.

I wish they would be part of that. I wish they'd vote for the budget once in a while. I wish they'd support our infrastructure program. I wish they'd support investing in greater protection for communities from floods. But they haven't supported that. They've voted against it every single time.

**Mr. Pallister:** Well, a budget that contains a broken-promise tax hike based on a vow the Premier and his colleagues all made doesn't deserve to be supported by any thoughtful person.

And the Premier speaks about making investments. I'm not disputing that the government's

making investments, and I have long believed and have advocated for a long time, as has, I know, to be fair, the member from Thompson, advocated for infrastructure investment in core infrastructure. And I respect that.

My questions don't centre or question on the nature of investing in core infrastructure; they question the credibility of a Premier who has not kept his commitments under his budgetary lines, not even close, and who refuses to address that reality, and now proceeds to make promises about building and growing. That's fine, those are fine general vagaries; those are fine words to put on the record but the reality is something that the Premier needs to address. And that reality is the lack of credibility on keeping those promises. All those words were spoken before by this Premier, all of them. All these commitments have been made by this Premier before, all of them. In fact, many of the projects he's alluded to even today are previously announced projects. So the reality is that the Premier's refused to address, again and again, the reasons why, of all government departments, this one is the one that has been underspent and not just in 2009-10, by \$439 million, or 27 per cent of the commitment, and not just in 2010-11, again, back-to-back years, when the commitment was not met to the tune of 28 per cent less spending in real infrastructure capital than was the commitment in the budget.

So, again, you know, the Premier made these statements. The budget documents made these commitments as well. In those years, those commitments were not met, not even remotely, in fact, met. And, again, the Premier refuses to address the reasons why that is the case.

Now, you know, to take a look, I did compare the ability of the government to the west of us to meet its commitments because I'm disappointed that the Premier would put on the record or imply that other provincial governments aren't meeting their commitments, so it's okay for him not to. In 2009 and '10, I mentioned previously the commitment next door that was made in their budget, rightly or wrongly, not enough, too much, you can argue about that, but the question is the credibility of being able to meet your commitments.

Integrity, I think, is best defined as doing what you promised to do. And I know—and I'm genuinely I'm trying to give the Premier the benefit of the doubt here, to put on the record, what the reasons are that he wasn't able to fulfill these commitments because

that would speak in his defence, and he refuses to take the opportunity to do so.

When we compare the 2009-10 numbers to Saskatchewan to the west, this government, this Premier underspent by 27 per cent, and Saskatchewan hit their target right on the nose. In 2010 and '11, this government underspent by 28 per cent, or \$499 million. They took that money that they promised to spend on infrastructure and they spent it on something else, and now they're trying to tell the people of Manitoba that core infrastructure's their top priority, best—most important thing. That's where all the money is going to go and look at this sheet of paper that we promised to spend this money on, but they never did it. They didn't do it in 2009-10, didn't do it 2010-11.

How'd Saskatchewan do? Were they under by 25 per cent even? No. Over by 10? No. Right on. Spent the same amount of money they promised they'd spend on infrastructure. Actually, kept their promised that they made in their budget document and did what they said they would do.

I'm asking the Premier again: Why miss your targets to the tune of over \$900 million in just two fiscal years, and then expect Manitobans to believe that you're going to keep your word now? I'd like him to try again.

\*(16:20)

**Mr. Selinger:** It would be really helpful if the member opposite would try to listen—seems to be a real deficit on his part. He's good at making sanctimonious statements, but he's very poor at listening to answers. And he's—but he is quite good at recycling the same question over and over again, and it's tedious and repetitive, but I, once again, will give a chance to understand what we're saying here.

First of all, on the issue of credibility and believability, this is a member who raised this gas tax and cut highways spending. This is member who ran in 1995, with a very fulsome health-care capital budget and then right after the election cancelled the entire budget. Where's the credibility there? Where's the commitment to infrastructure? And a very low spending record, I think—I'll have to check the number on it, but I think it was in the order of \$35 million a year or less on schools capital, a number so paltry that you couldn't build new schools during that period of time. But we'll check what the capital spending on public schools was during the '90s on an annual basis. We'll try to get that number



for the member, but I remember it being abysmally low and really didn't provide for repairs to school, even basic repairs of schools.

So, you know, when it comes to credibility the Leader of the Opposition has none in terms of his track record on infrastructure. It was, in fact, reductions in capital spending on highways even though revenues were increased; that's the credibility of his position. And it was a complete cancellation of health-care capital right after the '95 election. So that's the record that he brings to the table—not impressive to say the least.

Now I indicated to the member opposite, in 2013-14, the capital budget was projected at \$1.799 billion and now it's being projected at \$1.5 billion. It is true: it's less than what was actually projected in the 'buzzet'—budget, but it is also true that it's \$250 million more than the previous year's infrastructure spending. So it's an increase and, as a matter of fact, it's triple what it was in '01-02. So the money went up on a year-over-year basis and it tripled since '01-02.

And I also indicated—and he hasn't listened to this yet, and I'm not wildly optimistic that he will listen in the future, but, you know, it'll give a chance to recycle his question again—some projects came in in under budget even though they have chained—obtained their objective—one-in-700-year protection was provided for the floodway, but it came in \$37 million under budget. I know the member opposite thinks right now that that's a bad thing. We think it was a good thing to achieve the objective as efficiently as possible and to free up resources for investments in other flood protection in Manitoba, places like Melita, places like Souris, places like Brandon, places like Waterhen, places like Duck Bay, communities like St. Clements, East and West St. Paul; all of those communities benefited by meeting the objective as efficiently as possible.

It is also true that some of these big infrastructure projects are very complex in the engineering requirements, and they're going to take time and consultation and careful thought as to the best way that those projects can be brought into play. And there's going to need to be a very dedicated approach to doing that, which will be undertaken by the engineers that we engage to do that. And—but those projects, because they're complex, are important. They will address important issues; for example, how to bring the community—the road close to Morris, Manitoba, to interstate standards. It's

complicated by the fact that there's the Morris River there. It's complicated by the fact that the community wants to make sure that the roadway continues to provide access to the commercial businesses in the town but still wants interstate protection, so—and it's also complicated by the fact that you have to develop that road in such a way that it doesn't create secondary flooding in the communities around it. So we want to make sure that all of those objectives can be brought into appropriate focus and balance as they identify the technical solution going forward and consult with the community and give them a chance to have input into that, because that is a valuable part of the process.

So I've provided the explanation to the member. Whether the member heard it is entirely up to him, but it's not the first time I've provided it, may not the last time I've provided it, but I've provided that explanation to him on several times now in front of the Legislature. And we'll see if he can recycle his questions again or maybe come up with some material.

**Mr. Pallister:** Thank the Premier for his 'childish' petulance. I really do; I appreciate it very much, because he has just summed up right there that his answer to breaking his promise, his budgetary commitment on investing in infrastructure, is that it's complicated. And I really appreciate that. I'm glad that he's put that on the record, because, I guess, he's implying it's not complicated in other provinces that keep their promises, and that's an interesting observation.

Twenty-seven per cent off in 2009 and '10, 27 per cent under his commitments—his budgetary commitments, but now he says he really, really means it. In 2010-11, he was 28 per cent under budget, and, again, he repeats his same answer and his petulant comments, and says, by golly, I'm not listening, but I got the numbers in front of me, and he has failed to respond except to say it's complicated. He's now added to the abysmal inability that he possesses and demonstrates to defend this failure and this lack of commitment on investing in infrastructure.

So let's look at 2011-12 fiscal year, because the details do matter. Budgets do matter. You put out a budget and it's an indication of what your priorities are. This government put out a budget in 2011 and '12. What did it say? It said we are going to invest \$1.794 billion in infrastructure. How did they do? In that year, in that fiscal year, they invested not

\$1.794 million–billion, but rather, 1.328. The Premier talks about investing more than in the '90s. Well, a Kit Kat bar was a dime in the '90s.

The reality is, revenue flows to the government of Manitoba in the '90s were significantly less, fractionally what they are today. The reality is, they were—in fact, they were two and a half times higher in this year when the Premier couldn't make his commitment, 2009-10, than they were in '92. They were—equalization payments were double to the Premier. Equalization payments were double what they were in—back in '92. Canada Health and Social Transfers, which actually, in fact, along with equalization, declined over the following five years, between '92 and '97, as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) knows full well, the Premier may not, declined for five years. They did not decline during this Premier's administration, except last year. The only reason they declined is the—[interjection]—as the transport minister chirps in his seat understands—the only reason they declined is because of the record-setting investment of the federal government in Building Canada Fund.

And so, you know, the Premier likes to claim he's hard done by, because his total transfers—total federal transfers are down in '13. Well, at that low level, they are still fully two and a half times what they were in the year he cited, in the early '90s.

So, yes, the Premier's taking a lot of credit for spending more taxpayers' money, but there's a heck of a lot more of it coming from Ottawa than there's ever been. And the reality is, he's trying to get credit from the same people he likes to blame every chance he gets. It's very funny.

Now, the issue at hand here is how you can make a promise, and I'd like the government—member opposite to explain this, make a promise to spend \$4 in infrastructure in 2009 right through 'til 2013 and spend less than three. How can you do that over that four-year period? If you really value infrastructure, that's a 27 per cent difference. And that 27 per cent translates into almost \$1.9 billion that didn't go into infrastructure that you said was going to go into infrastructure. Meanwhile, our neighbours in Ontario missed by 3 per cent. Our neighbour in Saskatchewan missed their commitment by 1, in total, over that four-year period. So what's the reason that this government has such a hard time keeping its word when other governments, in other jurisdictions, governed by other political parties, seem to be able to keep theirs? Why is it this

government can't keep its commitments to infrastructure as made by its budgetary documents? Why is that?

**Mr. Selinger:** So the member has not disappointed me. He's asked the same question once again. He's only got one question, obviously, and he's just going to keep recycling it regardless of the answer that is provided to him. So in his never-ending sanctimony, he continues to pursue whether or not there's been an increase in infrastructure spending. And I provided to him several times the reality was that infrastructure spending has gone up. I provided him a chart that shows that. I've indicated that there are variations from year to year, but the overall trend line is with a dramatic increase of overall spending on infrastructure.

\* (16:30)

#### Point of Order

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

**Mr. Pallister:** Actually, the Premier just put some false information on the record again. I mean, he's put on the record that he indicated that spending's up in infrastructure and he gave me a document that shows it's down. So is up down and down up for this Premier now or what? Maybe he could explain that. [interjection] It's your chart. Maybe you want to have a go at it.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition does not have a point order. It is a dispute over the facts.

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**Mr. Chairperson:** And I believe the Premier had the floor—was in the midst of his response, so the honourable First Minister.

**Mr. Selinger:** The member doesn't even understand the English language.

I indicated to him there were variations on it year by year over—in terms of the infrastructure spending, but the overall trend line was up. I may—I put that on the record several times. He just doesn't even understand common English language when we explain something, but we'll keep trying, Mr. Speaker, and that's why I put the information out here.

There is going to be annual year-to-year variations for a variety of reasons. He says there wasn't an explanation for that. I indicated to him

there was an explanation for that. Some years it's impacted by weather. Some years it's impacted by late construction starts. This year may be a challenge. Tenders are out earlier than ever this year, but we're seeing a very late spring; that's going to impact on the ability to do some projects.

We have said in our five-year plan where there are unforeseen circumstances, beyond the control of contractors and even state-of-the-art tendering practice, that we will take the money and move it forward and make sure that it gets allocated to important infrastructure projects going forward.

And, even again, as I give him the answer, he's not listening. Not a surprise—not a surprise, Mr. Speaker. You can't learn if you don't want to listen, and the reality is that he clearly does not want to listen. He wants to just continue recycling his question over and over again. So I've also put on the record, on more than one occasion here, that the amount of money has tripled in infrastructure spending since 2001 and 2002, and he doesn't want to hear that as well. But that is, in fact, the reality.

Now I did point out to them, and I was very frank about this, but that didn't seem to be something that he was willing to understand, that the budget in '13-14 projected about 1.79 billion in expenditure; in fact, it came in less. It's probably going to come in less than that at about 1.5 billion, but that is still a quarter of a billion dollars more than the previous year. So the trend line is clear that there's an increase in infrastructure spending. And, in the five-year plan, we also make it clear that if for any reason the ability to meet the budget target is impaired by, for example, a late spring or bad weather or other unforeseen circumstances, that the money will be rolled over into future years and we will continue to mount a more aggressive program to ensure that the infrastructure money gets spent.

And this is something that is greatly appreciated by the construction community. The heavy construction folks have said they appreciate that approach. In fact, they asked us to take that approach, and they said that they think that approach will allow them to do better planning. It will allow them to mount the workforce and equipment necessary to take advantage of the early tendering process, and it will allow them to do a good job in meeting these targets. But they themselves recognize that there could be variations for factors beyond their control. So the chief spokesperson for the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association has said the

five-year plan is focused, it is transparent, it is dedicated, and it is accountable. This is a long-term plan with a focus on core infrastructure investments that will grow our economy, harnessing infrastructure as that key growth ingredient—the first of its kind in Canada by any provincial government. He also noted the predictable multi-year plan means we will be able to extend the length of the construction season by a month or more.

I hope that's true. We are seeing a very late spring, as we did last year in the province of Manitoba, and that will create some challenges. But we will do everything we can to get those projects moving forward, and I'm sure the heavy construction industry will do everything they can to move those projects forward. And, if in the event that there's some unforeseen barrier that is insurmountable, the money will be moved into future years, and we'll continue to ramp up the overall trend line to increased infrastructure spending, as indicated by the chart and misinterpreted and misunderstood by the Leader of the Opposition. It's unfortunate that he continues to do that, but I'm not going to be surprised if he persists in that misinformation.

What have other leaders in Manitoba have said about the plan and the program? The president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities has said that the successful round tables that were held this past year around the province shows that today's announcement, the Province has been listening to our members and to municipalities. As a municipal councillor, I know, first-hand, that investment in infrastructure is a boost to our local economy and additional jobs in our local economies to make our municipalities a better place to live.

What has the mayor of Winnipeg said with respect to the \$250-million program over five years for roads? And this money will be in the hands of the City of Winnipeg. They'll be completely in charge of that. He says, that's a major step. I applaud the provincial government, and we're going to get to work with that money right now.

You know, there are some very significant challenges in Winnipeg with respect to infrastructure. The mayor is appreciative of getting these resources. He may find similar challenges with a late spring as well, and we know that he has some very significant challenges with respect to frozen water pipes in the city as well.

But we have made this big commitment on infrastructure, and we're moving forward on it.

And, as I said, the Leader of the Opposition wanted to halt the floodway project. The floodway project has been completed to one-in-700-year protection, on time and under budget. And he still hasn't explained to us, what is the matter with that, when you can actually achieve efficiencies, deliver the intended outcome, and do it on time and then use those additional resources that have been freed up because of the efficiencies to invest in other flood protection throughout Manitoba. He still hasn't indicated why he has a problem with that.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition, I just want to interject for a moment here to point out my responsibility here is to maintain decorum. And this is a form of question-and-answer period, but this is not question period. And I would very much appreciate if questions could be put and then people would respectfully listen instead of interjecting back and forth.

And I'm speaking to both sides. I would just like to maintain a quiet, peaceful, respectful atmosphere in here, and I ask for the co-operation of all members of the Legislature for this.

On that note, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Pallister:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I accept your admonition, and I'll endeavour to do better.

Now, on this broken promise over four years, the Premier's now added some information, finally, and I appreciate him doing that. It took quite a while, but he did add some.

First—and he persisted for quite a while to say it was complicated, but he didn't explain why. Now he's added the vagaries of late springs could be the reason that the government wasn't able to keep its word—or weather issues could complicate things. And I get that, actually. I got quite a few friends in the construction industry and they've taught me a lot. And I get that, and I appreciate the Premier putting that on the record, because I think that's a very legitimate point. So I want to say that, and I'm trying to accept your suggestion here, Mr. Chair.

So, if the weather and late springs was the reason why the government was under by 27 per cent, let the Premier say that. I don't mind him saying that, and I would accept that, quite frankly, if that was the reason.

Maybe he'd like to elaborate. Was that the reason or were there other reasons why the government was

under by, again, \$1.9 billion between 2009 fiscal, 2012-13 fiscal? Was it bad weather in that construction period, or was it late springs all the time, or what happened there? Were those the reasons—the reasons the Premier alluded to in a general sense? Was that the reason that the government was so far off on its projections?

**Mr. Selinger:** Again, I think the member hasn't heard my previous responses, and it's unfortunate that he hasn't listened to them. It takes a long time to make a breakthrough, but we'll keep trying.

Overall spending has shown a trend line of going up for infrastructure, triple what it was in '01-02. Very significant projects have been delivered on time and under budget. That was one of the reasons I gave, that sometimes you get underspending because you've actually been able to achieve efficiencies. I put that on the record about six times. I don't know what's complicated about that explanation that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand that. Maybe he's just in denial because he didn't want the project to proceed in the first place. That's very unfortunate.

\*(16:40)

I've also indicated that some projects are—have complexities. He seems to have acknowledged that there's at least one factor in complexity; that may be weather from time to time. And that's helpful as well. I think that's a rare moment of breakthrough here in terms of understanding.

The reality is that the overall trend line has gone up. The overall amount of resources dedicated to infrastructure has increased even at a time when federal transfer payments to Manitoba have gone down on a per capita basis that have been flat otherwise, and that shows very significant within the province with its own resources to increase spending on infrastructure.

And it's not just restricted to highways. It's not. It includes flood protection. It includes sewer and water. It includes spending on health-care facilities. It includes spending on public schools and it includes investments in post-secondary education, all of which make a very significant difference to the long-term capacity of Manitobans to have a stronger economy, to have a steadily growing economy, which we have. We've had a good economy in Manitoba over the last several years, and some of the—in some small part that has been due to these infrastructure investments and the partnerships we've

had with many sectors of the community in Manitoba to invest in things, whether it's health facilities or housing facilities or school facilities. All of those things have made a very significant difference in economic growth in Manitoba even if revenues from other levels of government have been flat or declining on a per capita basis.

The reality is that we've been able to have a program that has not only strengthened infrastructure, but has provided a very successful program for the future prosperity of Manitoba. And it's not just the infrastructure program in terms of roads. It's also a major commitment to a skills agenda inside of Manitoba as well. We've seen one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada at the same time as we've had one of the highest participation rates in the economy. But we've also seen a growing demand for skilled labour, and we've indicated that we want to increase the number of skilled workers in this province by 75,000 people going forward, which is why we've worked very closely with employers through sector councils and through a variety of other partnerships and why we saw in this budget a further strengthening of apprenticeship support in Manitoba.

And I was pleased to be at an announcement the other day with some of the people in the building trades, and employers, as well as the trade unions, and they're very pleased with what we're doing on apprenticeship investments in Manitoba. The \$5,000 apprenticeship across all levels of apprenticeship is greatly appreciated. The \$1,000 bonus for new employers to take on an apprenticeship for the first time was very well received by the employers as well as the trade unions that are involved in the construction sector. And we saw young people there that are getting the benefit of these investments and saying that they're really excited about working in this province and working on these projects.

And I hear these stories on a regular basis that they know that the kinds of investments we're making are generating very significant employment for themselves and for other people in Manitoba, which makes a big difference in their ability to provide for their families and to put down roots and to stay and live inside of Manitoba. So this is part of the overall plan, is to have a skills agenda that trains more people, to have an infrastructure plan that keeps the economy growing steadily to continue to leverage investment from other sectors of the community as well as other levels of government.

But all of those things come together to create steady economic growth, and the member knows that, but he has no plan of his own that he's put forward. Well, actually he does. The plan he's put forward has been to have across-the-board cuts in services and investment inside of Manitoba. That has been his plan and that plan wouldn't generate steady economic growth or jobs for Manitobans and it certainly would not increase investments in infrastructure, and that was his record when he was in office in the '90s.

When he was in office in the '90s, he raised gas taxes and cut the highway budget. He ran in the '95 election and then immediately after that election cancelled health-care capital inside of Manitoba, which put the health-care sector into a very precarious position in terms of providing for people that really needed that support in terms of personal care homes, for example, or hospital improvements. They announced the Brandon hospital I think it was at least nine times and never actually started the hospital.

We came into office and we built the new hospital. Big difference between announcing and not doing anything, coming into office and actually building it. Same thing happened—

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

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

**Mr. Selinger:** Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and I just want to read into the record some of the capital projects that were completed last year that were nominated for awards.

**An Honourable Member:** Do you have enough time?

**Mr. Selinger:** Well, I don't know; it's several pages here, but I'll try to get through it.

There was grading projects on Provincial Trunk Highway No. 6 in the vicinity of Woodlands, tender No. 6325, and I do emphasize the word tender. River East Construction Ltd. was nominated for award in the south central region. In the southwestern region Tri-Wave Construction Ltd. did a project they completed on PTH No. 110 by the Assiniboine River close to Highway No. 1, tender No. 6233. They were nominated for award on grading.

On paving, we have several nominees for awards. Mulder Construction & Materials Ltd., for a project they did on Highway No. 1, one kilometre

west of Highway No. 16 to the west of junction of PTH 1A, tender No. 6298. They were a nominee.

The Nelson River Construction Company was nominated for a project in the south central region, tender No. 6168, PTH 16, two and a half kilometres west of PTH 34 to PTH No. 50.

Mulder Construction was nominated a second time for a project on PTH No. 21 at the south junction of PTH 3 to three and a half kilometres west of the south junction of PTH 3, tender No. 6341.

Another nomination for Nelson River Construction for Provincial Trunk Highway No. 10, 19.8 kilometres south to Overflowing River, tender No. 6289 in the west central region. I know the members don't want to listen to this, but these are important. These are projects that were completed, tendered, and nominated for awards, very significant improvements in the infrastructure in Manitoba.

A third nomination for Mulder Construction & Materials Ltd. on PTH No. 10, Overflowing River, to 10 kilometres south of PTH No. 60, tender No. 6237, in the west central region.

Some projects that were nominated for excellence in infrastructure in the urban works category: Borland Construction, for PR 243 in Rhineland, four kilometres east of PTH 32 to 1.4 kilometres north of provincial road 521, tender No. 6309, in the south central region.

Maple Leaf Construction, a very well-known company in Manitoba, PTH No.—they were nominated for a project of urban works on provincial trunk highway 1A in the city of Portage la Prairie, 3rd Street NW, to east of Stevens Avenue, in tender No. 6293, in the south central region.

Then Zenith or Zenith Paving was nominated for a project on intersection improvements in Brandon, provincial—PR 610, Richmond Avenue at 17th Street 'eath'—East, tender No. 6337, in the southwestern region.

There were some special projects that were nominated for awards as well: JKW Construction Ltd., for intersection improvements on Provincial Trunk Highway 3, at Provincial Trunk Highway 23, tender No. 6319. I think the member might be getting the trend here of all these very important infrastructure improvements that have been made in Manitoba.

Another nominee for a special project was Russell Ready-Mix, a grade restoration sub-surface drainage project—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. Members have 10 minutes maximum to put questions and put—reply to them. The Premier has now reached the 10-minute time limit. I turn the floor over to the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Pallister:** Pretty good, I think, because that's the first time that we got gavelled, either of us, for going the full length, so I appreciate that, and I think that that's quite legitimate, reading those names of those excellent Manitoba companies into the record.

\* (16:50)

So I thought that was a good use of time, and I'm not going to accuse the Premier of stalling, because I think those are great companies with great people working in them. And it's too bad they have to go to court to actually sue for the right to not be forced to unionize by this government. It's a real shame.

Some of those same companies he mentioned are forced—have been forced by this government's practice of forcing union contributions by construction companies, to go to court under the auspices—I think it's called merit contractors—to try to get the right, if you can believe it, to have their Manitoba citizens that they employ not be forced to pay union dues against their will. Manitoba people, you know, who work here and live here and who contribute to their communities and pay taxes here, forced by this government's practices to pay union dues to unions they don't belong to and don't want to support.

That's unbelievable, but it's good the Premier put those companies' names on record because he's quite right, those are good companies, Manitoba success stories, and they employ great people. And I appreciate him reading those names into the record.

As far as the keeping of commitments, he need look no further than the member he's approaching right now as he ignores my comments, the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), who can tell him about the dangers of not keeping a commitment on constructing a hospital. Going out in 2000—what year was that? Was it '05 or '06. It's so long ago. They went out and promised to build a hospital and then they didn't build the hospital. They didn't build it at all, but then they went out before the 2011 election and they put the piles in the ground. There are piles down; there's some piles down in the ground in

Selkirk now with snow on them. And the people in Selkirk call it Stonehenge, actually. It's not a hospital that you'd go to. You wouldn't enjoy being in there, because there's no building or anything. Just a promise and some piles in the ground, that's all, after all these many years and the Premier speaks about keeping commitments and making promises and all kinds of things, but he can't keep them.

And so those same companies he just read into the record that do great work were promised there'd be so much work that they wouldn't have any spare time at all. And that was back—to be fair, that was his predecessor that went out and told the Infrastructure minister to send that message out to all those companies. And that message went out, back in about '06 and '07, told Maple Leaf and Borland and all the Manitoba heavy members that they were going to have so much work they'd better just stock up and they did. And they didn't have the work and they ended up decommissioning asphalt plants and ended up with over-investing in capital assets they couldn't make use of.

So the Premier has a history, and his government has a history, of telling people they're going to do things they don't do and they did that. And this Premier's done it every year since he came in to the tune of, as I said before, \$1.9 billion budgeted which did not go into infrastructure and, although, he's talked about bad weather and late spring and complications, I think they get those in Saskatchewan, too, and Saskatchewan kept its word. They get those in Ontario, too, and, by golly, you know, Ontario kept its word, but not this government. Uh-huh, they're going to, you know, tell you that it's weather is the reason they can't keep their word, or late springs. But, I don't think so. I don't think so. And I don't think that the members of the heavy construction industry think so either and they're going to be very, very careful about investing their hard-earned dollars back into capital when, and until, they see the actual commitment of this Premier to keep his word. So he's made some promises but that's not new, keeping them might be new.

Now, in respect of the attitude of small business towards this government that's never been clearer. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a significant poll which they released in February of 2014, in which they asked their members, their small-business members from all across the province, what they thought about this provincial government. And I'll just read you—read you these

comments and I encourage the Premier to listen because this is an entirely new question which he might want to refer—reference in his response here. It says, Manitoba dead last in provincial government vision for small business survey. Provincial governments make frequent references to the importance of the small business sector and their initiatives to support it, yet a CFIB survey of small business owners from across Canada reveal substantial differences in how premiers and provincial governments are perceived for their understanding and support of small business. Manitoba small businesses say the provincial government is far from living up to its talk of supporting small business. In fact, the Manitoba government was last in almost all indicators when business owners rated their governments.

Now, I know the Premier is sensitive and he's expressed that in many ways today, and I want him to know I'm on his side. I want him to know that. And I want him to know that I'm very supportive of him and I do hope that he would take these questions seriously. These are observations of Manitoba small-business people from all around our province who are members of this organization, and they are not showing faith or confidence in this government.

So I'll just share with him some of these questions, and, rather than going through them one at a time because I know he would then say I was repeating my questions, I'll read them all if I have sufficient time into the record, and then the Premier could perhaps take some notes and respond to them as he'd like.

The first question was how confident are you that your provincial government has a vision that supports small business, and the confidence level here wasn't good. We were last; Saskatchewan first, then BC, Alberta. So our other western neighbours who we should co-operate with—the New West of our country—but we aren't under this government—they were ranked very, very highly.

How likely would you be to recommend starting a business in your province? And this is an important one because it is our small business that, as the government's fond of saying, is our engine of growth, and it is important. And I think it's more important than ever to show that, not just say it. In—how likely would you be to recommend starting a business in your province? We were last. Again, Saskatchewan was first, Alberta, then Newfoundland, then BC; we were last on that one.

On—let's see, what should your provincial government focus on—this is good to give it some guidance, I think, to the government—what should your provincial government focus on to help your business thrive? And the top response was reduce the tax burden and it—the summary statement said in Manitoba small businesses clearly want the provincial government to focus on reducing the tax burden and then it references red tape as well. So that was—and marketing the province was another common response, but reducing the tax burden was referenced by 88 per cent of the responses. That's very high.

Provincial taxes discourage me from growing my business; percentage who agree in Manitoba was 75 per cent, which was the highest of any Canadian province. These—this is a national survey, I shouldn't have referenced it's just Manitoba, but I mean the—what I meant to say is that the Manitoba respondents to the survey represent small business; it is people from all across Canada that were participating in this national survey.

In any case, provincial taxes discourage me from growing my business, and 75 per cent agreed in Manitoba. That was the worst ranking. The lowest response to that one was in Saskatchewan at 29 per cent, Alberta 35, BC 53 per cent, those were the best three.

The comment on that one was Manitoba has the unfortunate distinction of leading the country when it comes to provincial taxes which discourage small business from growing, and this is a troubling statistic when one considers the impact this will have on jobs in the provincial economy going forward.

Then it says—and this is good news for the Premier—it says: My premier understands the realities

of running a small business. And the top response there was Saskatchewan again, 52, so Brad Wall will be happy with this survey, for sure; BC at 21, so Christy Clark be okay with it, and then it went to—after that it went to PEI at 11 per cent and—but Manitoba wasn't last on this one. Manitoba was tied for last with Ontario and Nova Scotia. So about one seventeenth as many people believe—in this survey, one seventeenth as many believe in the statement that this Premier understands the realities of running a small business as believe that the premier of Saskatchewan does.

One of the areas where Manitoba—and this is the commentary on this one—one of the areas where Manitoba is truly lacking is leadership on having a vision to support small business. But it—and it does reference that Manitoba isn't last—it says Manitoba tied Nova Scotia and Ontario with the lowest number of small businesses believing their premier understands the realities of running a small business. So this would be a cause of concern, I'm sure, for the premiers of those jurisdictions as well to not—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please.

The Leader of the Opposition has now reached his 10 minute maximum.

**Mr. Selinger:** The member opposite indicated earlier that he thought it was—

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

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Wednesday, March 26, 2014**

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