

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

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 51—The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act**

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Jobs and the Economy, that Bill 51, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Swan:** This bill amends The Legislative Assembly Act respecting mailing privileges for members of the Assembly in accordance with the recommendations made by Commissioner Michael Werier.

Subject to certain conditions, members will be allowed to have addressed and unaddressed letters to their constituents delivered by delivery companies or as inserts to local newspapers. This will help to ensure that non-partisan MLA communications are sent to and received by constituents in a cost-effective manner.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

**Bill 50—The Protection for Temporary Help Workers Act (Worker Recruitment and Protection Act and Employment Standards Code Amended)**

**Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** I move, seconded by the Minister for Jobs and Economy, that Bill 50, The Protection for Temporary Help Workers Act (Worker Recruitment and Protection Act and Employment Standards Code Amended); Loi sur la protection des travailleurs temporaires (modification de la Loi sur le recrutement et la protection des travailleurs et du Code des normes d'emploi), be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Braun:** This legislation will provide protections for vulnerable workers and—that work for temporary agencies and allow them to—the opportunity to seek full-time permanent employment. It provides them the opportunity to have permanent employment after their terms. Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

## PETITIONS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

**Employment and Income Assistance—  
Rental Allowance Increase**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The rental allowance for people on employment and income assistance, EIA, in Manitoba has remained effectively flat for over 20 years, even while the cost of renting a home has increased steadily.

Despite the many calls from the official opposition caucus, individuals and community groups, and despite the fact that the very same recommendation was made in a final report of the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Phoenix Sinclair, the provincial government has failed to protect the most vulnerable Manitobans by refusing to raise the rental allowance portion of employment and income assistance to 75 per cent of median market-rate rents.

Fewer dollars to use for rent forces Manitobans receiving EIA to live in substandard, overcrowded and unsafe conditions.

Fewer dollars available for EIA recipients to rent safe and hygienic housing means increased pressure on food banks, the health-care system and other services, as Manitoba families have to divert money for food and other critical necessities to pay for rent.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Jobs and the Economy to increase the rental allowance for EIA recipients to 75 per cent of median market rent so that EIA recipients can secure clean, safe and affordable housing without sacrificing other necessities such as food and medical expenses.

And this petition is signed by M. Foster, C. Westphal, J. Long and many more fine Manitobans.

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

#### **Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights**

**Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the provincial government broke the law by failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoban families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

And this petition is signed by R. Moir, G. Penner, A. Pruden and many other fine Manitobans.

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote on a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoban families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote on a referendum on increases to the PST.

This petition is submitted on behalf of R. Howard, F. Wilford, J. Lewis and many other fine Manitobans.

#### **Farmland School Tax Rebate—Cap Removal**

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to eliminate the education property tax on farmland.

Through Bill 47, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, the provincial government has instead decided to retain the education tax on farmland, cap the tax credit at \$5,000 and eliminate the credit for out-of-province landowners.

Education tax on farmland is a heavy burden on Manitoba families, limiting farmers' capacities to expand the size of their operations while making them less competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions.

The \$5,000 cap on the rebate imposed by the provincial government does little to ease the burden of high property taxes for Manitoba's farm families.

Bill 47 has yet to be approved by the Legislature, and the capping of education tax credits on farmland constitutes yet another broken promise by this provincial government to Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the \$5,000 cap on education tax rebates on farmland out of fairness and respect for Manitoba farmers.

And this petition is signed by S. Wollman, K. Wollman, B. Waldner and many, many other fine Manitobans.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—  
Effects on Manitoba Economy**

**Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Premier of Manitoba is on record calling the idea of a hike in the PST ridiculous.

Economists calculate the PST hike has cost the average family \$437 more in taxes after only six months.

Seventy-five per cent of small businesses in Manitoba agree that provincial taxes are discouraging them from growing their businesses.

\* (13:40)

The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association estimates that a 1 per cent increase in the PST will result in a loss to the economy of \$42 million and threaten hundreds of jobs in that sector.

Partly due to the PST, overall taxes on new investment in Manitoba recently stood at 26.3 per cent whereas the Alberta rate was 16.2 per cent and the Ontario rate was 17.9 per cent, according to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce are concerned that the PST hike will make an already uncompetitive tax framework even more unattractive to job creators in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the job-killing PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to reject or approve any increases to the PST through a referendum.

This petition is signed by A. Martens, H. Stewart, E. Gudnason and many other fine Manitobans.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—  
Cross-Border Shopping**

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Foxwarren, Roblin and many others.

(2) Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate is 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

(3) The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

(4) The differential in tax rates create a disincentive for Manitoban consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to the—Manitoba's provincial borders.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoban consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

And this petition has been signed by W. Friesen, C. Doehl, B. Neufeld and many, many more fine Manitobans.

### Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoba families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

This petition is signed by S. Greaves, B. Friesen, C. McDougall and many more fine Manitobans.

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to table the 2013 Workers Compensation Board annual report, the 2013 annual report of the workers' compensation Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel and the Workers Compensation Board five-year plan for the years 2014 to 2018.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further tabling of reports?

Seeing none, we'll move on to ministerial statements?

### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Speaker:** I have no guests to introduce at this time, so we'll proceed directly to oral questions.

### Contract Tendering Process Auditor General's Report

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** In her recent annual report to the Legislature, the Auditor General found that there was over a quarter of a billion dollars in untendered contracts issued during her 18-month period, and, Mr. Speaker, this doesn't even include the \$159-million untendered contract with STARS.

She also noted that these untendered contracts came with an increased risk of impropriety, or to use a different word, Mr. Speaker, an increased likelihood of corruption.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier inform the House how much of that quarter of a billion dollars was spent improperly?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, we do take the Auditor General's report seriously and we appreciate the advice she's given us, and we will certainly be looking at the recommendations they have with respect to untendered contracts.

There are specific policies in place which allow for various forms of sole-sourcing of contracts during periods when another service may not be immediately available and the service is needed for emergency purposes or continuity purposes. So there was a policy rationale for the STARS service to be brought to Manitoba and to be continued in Manitoba at a time of flood recovery within this province.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we know the Auditor General wants to ensure good value for public money. We do too, while ensuring Manitobans have the services they need when they need them.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, the Premier once again did not answer the question, so I'll answer it for him, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General found that half of the NDP's untendered contracts did not meet the criteria that would have allowed the government to award the contract without a competitive bidding process. According to her findings, many of these contracts were awarded without any competing bids simply because they were, quote unquote, favoured by the department. She noted also, and I quote, that Manitoba citizens may not have received the best value, end quote.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier believe that Manitobans receive the best value when the NDP

government awards contracts to people and businesses because they are favoured?

**Mr. Selinger:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would just ask the member asking the question to bear in mind that it was this government that improved the scope of responsibility for the Auditor General. We were the ones that gave the Auditor General the ability to look at value-for-the-money audits because we recognize that that kind of advice can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery and services of government.

Sole-sourced contracts can be awarded where they will provide for continuity of service or provide for an immediate need. Where the Auditor General feels there is insufficient documentation or improper justification, that will be taken into account in any future policies that we develop.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Speaker, untendered contracts are required to be disclosed to the public and for a very good reason.

But the Auditor General found that the NDP isn't even disclosing all of their untendered contracts to their favourite suppliers. She sampled 60 contracts and discovered that 23 of these contracts were, in fact, untendered, Mr. Speaker, and of those 23 untendered contracts, half of them weren't disclosed in the public database as required by law.

Why did they break the law again?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the kind of advice which we think will be valuable in informing government on how to improve the delivery of services. And there is improvements that can be made, as was identified by the Auditor General, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

We're going to take the recommendations seriously. We're going to continue to ensure that we have a proper balance in terms of accountability. That's why we gave the additional powers to the Auditor General to do this kind of work and that's why we take the advice seriously. And I'm sure that our public service will be following up on it because we will ask them to do that.

\*(13:50)

### **PST Increase Recreational Activities**

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** Mr. Speaker, recreation activities are the backbone in small communities. Volunteers donate time and energy to

ensure that these activities continue at a minimal cost.

The communities of Arborg and Bifrost have had their costs skyrocketed thanks to the spenDP. A 14 per cent increase in the PST equals almost \$17,000 more in costs a year alone.

Mr. Speaker, the spenDP broke the law and didn't call a referendum, and now the fallout is clear. Recreation activities in Manitoba are suffering financially due to the illegal tax grab.

Why did they want to shut down recreation in Manitoba?

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** You know what, Mr. Speaker, you know, I—first off, I find it very ironic that the member opposite would get up and ask any question about Arborg after the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) this morning got up and criticized our investment on Highway 68, saying it's a highway that nobody travelled on.

I'd like to ask on the record—and I know it's a rhetorical question; we're in government, we can't—members opposite—but I'd like to ask, will the member from Midland, will the member asking this question, apologize for insulting the people from the Interlake?

**Mr. Graydon:** Mr. Speaker, it won't be long that that member will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Activities such as—the communities of Arborg and Bifrost will have to pay almost \$600 more in hydro, almost \$200 more on natural gas and, thanks to the PST being applied to insurance, will now pay a whopping \$3,453.79 in insurance for the coming year.

The government went door to door, and each time the door opened, they made a promise to not raise the taxes. The government lied and raised the PST.

Mr. Speaker, this spenDP government tax grab equals almost \$17,000 that will not go to recreation activities in the communities of Arborg and Bifrost.

Why is the spenDP trying to shut down recreation activities while at the same time lining their own—

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

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no apology from members opposite for insulting the people of Interlake. Highway 68 is an important link in the Interlake, and there are many people travel on every day, and I ask the member from Midland to stand up and apologize for insulting the people from the Interlake.

And to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, before he starts measuring the curtains in the minister's office, is one of the reasons we're going to be fighting to be government in 2016 is to make sure we don't go back to the '90s when they cut funding to municipalities, when they did nothing in terms of Interlake roads, when they did nothing in terms of affordability of things like hydro rates.

I want to say on the record that this government has made it more affordable for communities like Arborg on issues like equalizing the hydro rates, but also, we're putting links in the Interlake like we are across the province. We don't have a map like they did which ended at the Highway 1. We invest in every single—

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

**Mr. Graydon:** We didn't hear an apology from this minister who has refused to upgrade the highway to keep 500 jobs in this province.

Activities such as Ukrainian dancing, minor hockey, summer day camps and curling will be threatened by this 14 per cent PST increase. The community will now have to pay almost \$17,000 more PST than last year, making it harder for the community to run these worthwhile activities.

Why did this NDP government lie to the people of Arborg? Mr. Speaker, why is this NDP government taking the vote tax and shutting down community programs for young people in our province?

**Mr. Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I was just in Arborg. I had a public meeting on infrastructure. My advice to the people of Arborg is don't believe a word the Tories say about the Interlake, because they are about divide this province.

And, you know, it's interesting, because I was joined by the member for the Interlake. I also will say to the members—the people from Arborg that they've got an MLA that fights for the Interlake. That's one of the reasons—it's one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that we've paved Highway 68. It's RTAC.

And for the first time in Interlake history—which is Manitoba history, for the member opposite—we now have an east-west strategic trade link in the Interlake. We're proud of that.

This is a party that governs for all Manitobans, including the Interlake.

### **ER Services Case Concern**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, I heard from a very upset and scared mother last evening.

She was stuck in the Grace Hospital ER waiting room with her son who needed care. Her son is a type 1 diabetic. He had passed out, fell, smashed his head on a concrete floor and seized. Despite all of that, he was stuck in the waiting room for six hours. The waiting room was full, the ER hallways were full, even though this NDP government promised to end hallway medicine 15 years ago.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to tell this mother why her very ill son had to wait six hours before being seen.

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for bringing the question to the House, and I would ask if she has any information that she could pass it along to my office so perhaps we could connect with the family and find out exactly what happened there.

Nobody wants to see their family member wait, particularly in a case when they're worried about their loved ones. We don't want to see that either.

Manitobans expect the highest care and that's what we want to provide with them, Mr. Speaker. We certainly want to make sure that when they go to the emergency room that they get the help that they need. If they haven't got that help that they need, we want to know why. If something's gone wrong, we want to find out, and if there's something we can do better, we want to do that.

We're bringing in a number of initiatives to try to take some of the weight off of the emergency rooms, redirecting to people who may have less serious cases to go to QuickCare clinics.

We have a new access centre that will have available hours for people at the Grace area in order to take some of that flow out of the emergency—

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



The honourable minister's time has expired.

**Mrs. Driedger:** While waiting, her son's blood pressure bottomed out and his blood sugar skyrocketed—it was so high they couldn't even read it—all because he wasn't getting the care he needed. Luckily, his mother is a nurse, because she ended up having to care for her own son in the waiting room last evening.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell this mother how her announcements, her rhetoric, her broken promises are making a difference in helping health care get better in Manitoba.

**Ms. Selby:** Of course, that is not what we want to see in our emergency rooms. And I would ask this member, if we could talk after, that she could give me a little bit more information so that my office could contract this person directly to find out exactly what happened, because it doesn't sound like it went very well and that is not what we want to see in our emergency rooms.

Certainly, we know that there are not one single answer to make our emergency rooms more efficient, but we are doing a number of things, including making sure that there are more doctors in our emergency rooms, making sure that there are more nurses, but also making sure that there's more options for people, for people who maybe don't need to be in an emergency room who maybe could be better seen at a QuickCare clinic, at an access centre, and making sure that everybody has a family doctor by 2015 so that they can better manage and prevent chronic diseases and take care of people so that when someone does have an urgent need where there's nowhere else to turn that the emergency room has the time—

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

**Mrs. Driedger:** By that minister's response, she really doesn't get it. And I'll tell her the mom—I asked the mom last night if she wanted me to take this to the Minister of Health and she said, what for, this Minister of Health doesn't understand, she's clueless about health care. And that's what the mother said.

So, Mr. Speaker, mom, who is a nurse—this mom, who is a nurse, said that her son's first six hours of waiting was totally mismanaged at every level. She said that the care, or lack of care, was worse than what her family experienced a few years ago when they went to a hospital in Mexico.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to tell this mom and her son: Why are ERs failing patients continuously even after 15—

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

**Ms. Selby:** We know that families expect timely care. We know that they expect the right care at the right place when they need it, and we think they should get it. It's why we are hiring more doctors. It's why we've hired more nurses to make sure that the people are there at the front line.

I do have to say, though, Mr. Speaker, the people in our hospitals, our front-line workers, work very hard.

Our nurses and doctors are very good at what they do, and if something doesn't go right, we want to know about it. We want to know how we can improve it.

We know that there's a few things that we are doing in order to make it better flow in the ER. We know that we want to make sure that people have access to health care where they need it. We're building QuickCare clinics so that people have other options if they have a less serious situation so that they don't have to go to the ER. We're building an access centre at the Grace Hospital so that people with little minor incidents, with ailments that don't require emergency—

\* (14:00)

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

#### **Lake Manitoba Financial Assistance Program Review Request**

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz):** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report indicated many shortfalls and discrepancies in the delivery and implementation of the Lake Manitoba Financial Assistance Program.

Will the Minister of Agriculture commit now to a review of those programs?

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development):** Obviously, a question was raised during Estimates, and I'm glad to repeat the answer I gave the members opposite.

Obviously, the Auditor General's report says that compliments to the government of the day to deal with something that's totally unusual, a seven-year hard flood that nobody was ever prepared for. And

we continue to work on those programs. And, in fact, to the attest to our government, to the team that was involved, we were actually asked to come out to Calgary and help them in their situations to assist them and the programs we brought forward.

It's the members opposite that seem to have a problem understanding of the importance our staff and our team put together to deal with the issues that he's bringing forward. And we continue to work with landowners as we move forward to put the issue aside. Thank you so much.

**Mr. Briese:** Mr. Speaker, the hard-working people at MASC did their best to apply the programs, but the rules kept changing to a point of overwhelming the whole system. Flood victims were not treated equally because of changing rules.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture now do a review and correct those oversights and discrepancies?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** As we all know, the flood of 2011 was a 1.3-, 1.2-billion-dollar flood, and we've been working with landowners, as we had discussed in Estimates and the member opposite was obviously sitting across from us as we provided the information.

But also to our positive thinking, we also brought in a person that will give the appeals scenario that when people have issues to deal with—and we will work with them, and we have worked with them, and we will continue to work with people that were affected by the flood. And we've done the proactive thing that we want to have the appeal process and we did have the appeal process.

And we had a very capable individual to deal with the issues, and I'd like to compliment Mr. Ron Bell for an excellent job he's done. And if members opposite don't feel that he done an adequate job, I would please request them that they put it forward to him in person. Thank you so much.

**Mr. Briese:** I would like to compliment Ron Bell too. He was—he did a good job given the parameters this government foisted on him.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP put in place stand-alone programs and then blamed the federal government for the shortfalls instead of focusing on keeping their own promises.

The Auditor General stated that the treatment of claims were—was inconsistent, there was a lack of clearly documented policies and that the mandate for

the appeal 'barty' was unclear. Those are serious allegations.

Will the Minister of Agriculture do the right thing, treat the Lake Manitoba flood victims fairly and do a review of the inconsistencies of the program's implementation and delivery?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** In a quote that the Auditor General made mention, Mr. Speaker, was it is truly an unprecedented type of a flooding event was developed and a number of flooding assistance programs to help out the people. The immediate response was to help out with the stress level, provide financial support, and the Auditor General recognized the importance of that program as we talk about today. And let this be—never, ever again be a flood.

But I want to assure the member opposite, why did they vote against the proposed bill and the budget we're bringing so we will never, ever have an event, so we have proactive infrastructure in place that we have in Lake Manitoba to have a control structure so we could operate the situation so we don't have a reoccurrence?

And also, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that they have to understand the true watershed of water movement. It's not only within the boundaries of the province of Manitoba; we have to consider other areas.

So I hope they would open up their eyes and understand the importance of flood events that we've experienced in 2011.

### **Local Food Industry Regulation of Sales**

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** Mr. Speaker, an increasing number of consumers want to purchase food products directly from farmers who are producing for this niche market. These are relationships built on respect and trust, something this NDP government does not know anything about. This should be a win-win situation, except this NDP government continues to interfere with more and more rules and regulations.

Why does this government insist on closing down a marketing opportunity for locally grown food products?

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development):** Obviously, the member opposite is referring to—should we risk the family that buys a product and take it home and have one of the family members get sick from it?

Our priority, Mr. Speaker, as have food safety in place, and we are working with the organizations that will provide that. We recently had a meeting just yesterday with a number of the people and we're talking about moving forward, of exploring options. We're communicating with the necessary people, and at the end of the day, this Agriculture Minister, this government, is not about to turn away opportunities for rural development in the province of—regardless what the members say.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. Speaker, farm families wanting to supply food products directly to consumers now face even more regulations. Farm-gate sales to consumers are now banned from Internet websites. Farmers selling to consumers are now prohibited from working together to deliver their products to the consumer's door.

Why is this NDP government so intent on regulating local food sales out of business?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Let me reinforce the earlier comments I made.

Let's be realistic on the food safety of the situation. And then when the consumer goes to buy a product, they have to be assured that the product is safe and it is. Now, we talk about the opportunity of marketing; it's very creative, and we understand that. That is why I've put together my staff along with other people that have been discussing with us. We will continue to operate and discover opportunities of developing a compromise of the food safety being the top priority, Mr. Speaker.

And I don't really care what the member opposite feels that we're trying to do. I know subconsciously that I am the rural minister.

This government believes in added value, and we are going to work towards that production, and we will have food values in the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the real reason the NDP wants to stop—put a stop to consumers buying direct from the farm gate is because they can't tax it. So if they can't tax it, they will regulate it out of business.

Mr. Speaker, one day the minister eats prosciutto; the next day he bans it. But consumers and farmers develop relations built on trust and quality.

Why is this NDP government so intent on regulating the local food industry out of business?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** And I hope the member opposite appreciates people that have facilities on Highway 68, that they're going to have a great highway to travel down.

Farmers—in all due respect to the members opposite bringing forward the commentary, let me be—let me just repeat the situation I said. We are being proactive. We've gotten together with chefs. We've gotten together with the Manitoba Food Processors. We're talking about buying local; we promoted that three years ago. We continue to do the promotion of buy local.

I want to ensure the members opposite we are moving forward. We're moving forward in a positive attitude towards buying local, and we will be continuing to communicate with the necessary people to make that a reality for the betterment of the farmers.

#### **Former MPI President Consultant Contract**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, last week many workers at Manitoba Public Insurance were expressing concerns and questions about the rehiring of Marilyn McLaren just a few days after she retired. In fact, in response to those questions, MPI sent out an internal memo to staff saying not to worry, the former CEO would be limited to a small number of hours per month.

That same day the NDP minister responsible said that for those small numbers per month, the now retired CEO would receive \$50,000 and they would have to override the conflict-of-interest laws to do it.

Is overriding the conflict-of-interest laws and paying somebody \$50,000 after retiring for 30 days part of this government's lean government strategy?

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act):** Again, I'm pleased to speak about Marilyn McLaren and her legacy of three decades of service to MPI where she spent the last nine years as the chief executive officer at MPI, at which time Manitobans enjoyed unprecedented—not just freezes but reductions in the cost of auto insurance.

\* (14:10)

I know the member for Steinbach won't listen to what I say. He won't listen to what Deloitte says when they talk about the lowest cost of public

utilities in the country. Maybe he'll listen to Saskatchewan.

When SGI was before their equivalent to the Public Utilities Board asking for a 5.2 per cent increase in premiums in Saskatchewan, they actually filed a chart which actually shows the average rates across Manitoba. It's a picture, so I'm sure the opposition will actually understand it, and it will show you that Manitoba has, bar none, the lowest insurance rates in the entire country. I'll table this now.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Mr. Speaker, the internal memo said that the now-unretired CEO would only be working a few hours per month. The minister said that she'd be getting \$50,000 for those few hours per month.

And then just a day later the minister went out to the public and told them to prepare for a significant rate increase because of our, well, cold winter. Apparently the cold winter didn't stop this minister from writing a cheque for \$50,000 for a few hours of work per month for the now-unretired CEO.

Won't he admit it's not the cold winter that's causing the rate increase, it's the cold heart of this government that doesn't know how to control costs?

**Mr. Swan:** Well, I'm very glad the member for Steinbach wants to talk about controlling costs, because I'll refer him to the very nice chart that he now has and he can share with all his colleagues.

Maybe now, instead of talking about privatizing auto insurance, he'll recognize the benefit. Maybe even their leader will understand. I know he's not listening today. There's been a lot of days the Leader of the Opposition does not listen to what goes on in this House.

But if he was to listen, he would know that next door in Ontario the average cost of auto insurance, \$3,782; average cost in Alberta—that shining beacon to the west for Progressive Conservatives—average automobile insurance premium for comparison, their average is \$2,127. Families in Alberta even without children pay more than \$1,000 per year. Families like mine with a daughter who's just begun driver's ed pay \$2,000 more in the province of Alberta.

We think having cheap auto insurance here, providing—

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

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, and it's unfortunate that the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) isn't listening to this debate, Mr. Speaker, because, ultimately, it's about ensuring that individuals continue to be able to afford Autopac.

Now, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) went out into the hallway and told individuals to prepare, told Manitobans prepare for higher Autopac rates, and he said that they should prepare because of the long, cold winter. Well, that long, cold winter didn't stop them from handing out a \$50,000 cheque for a few hours of work. In fact, the PUB said that this government had to get the costs under control for Manitoba Public Insurance.

So why won't the minister acknowledge it's not the long, cold winter, it's frozen ideology of the NDP who can't control costs and they keep going back to Manitobans and asking for more?

**Mr. Swan:** Well, to tell you a Frozen ideology, in the words of Disney, let it go.

I know the Leader of the Opposition could not wait to get his hands on—he would love to privatize MPI. Each member over there, despite the indisputable evidence that public auto insurance provides great service and low premiums for Manitobans, we know they would follow on the heels of the Filmon government when they privatized MTS. They would sell off MPI. It would result in people in Manitoba getting less service, paying more for it.

And I would point out that right next door in Saskatchewan, SPI has asked for a 5.2 per cent rate increase in that province.

I know the members opposite and the member for Steinbach don't appreciate it has been a cold, difficult winter. Every Manitoban who's actually spent this winter understands how difficult it is. Those who maybe go away for two or three months maybe wouldn't be so aware of that.

#### **Drug Treatment Court Future of Funding**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, there's been no end of complaints and concerns about the revolving door of the Manitoba justice system with criminals reoffending as soon as they're released.

Drug treatment courts are an effective solution and have been found to dramatically reduce the revolving door, what's called recidivism. I table

an evaluation report that has verified their cost-effectiveness.

Yet, guess what? Funding for drug treatment court ends next March, and because effective treatment takes a year or more, very soon there will be no new intakes.

I ask the Premier: Why is his government killing the goose that lays the golden egg?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, it was this government that put in place the drug treatment court in Manitoba, and we think it has been very effective. We're the government that put it in place. We put the resources in place, and we're going to keep the drug treatment court going in Manitoba

It's very unfortunate the federal government is considering withdrawing resources. We want to give them every opportunity to continue to provide those resources because it's an effective program that keeps people from reoccurring in terms of criminal offences and keeps the community 'safer' and helps those people recover and make a useful contribution to the community.

**Mr. Gerrard:** My understanding, Mr. Speaker, from the public prosecutors of Canada that, in fact, the federal government is ready to commit, but they want to pay the government directly instead of what their—provincial government wants is the money to go through the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

When will the government end this kind of Mickey Mouse and decide for sure that they are going to continue the drug treatment courts and make sure that people in Manitoba are well served?

**Mr. Selinger:** If the federal government wants to continue to fund the drug treatment court, we'll find a way to help them do that, Mr. Speaker, no doubt about it.

Look, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the federal government cut the band constable program. They've reduced resources for legal aid. They're threatening to cut resources for the drug treatment court.

This government has invested in community safety. Just this week, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan)—our Minister of Justice—committed to another 10 RCMP constables in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, something the members opposite voted against, including the member from River Heights.

We like the drug treatment court. We like the mental health court. We like the family court. Those

are all courts we put in place while we've been in office. Those are all courts that the members opposite have voted against every single time.

### **Brandon and Thompson**

**Mr. Gerrard:** While the Premier is going back and forth on whether he's going to continue drug treatment courts, the Minister of Justice has said that the Winnipeg treatment court is so good that there should be similar drug treatment courts in Thompson and Brandon.

And the question really is: Why is the Premier—of course, with his government, constitutionally responsible for drug treatment courts—why is he neglecting Brandon and Thompson by failing to set up drug treatment courts there?

**Mr. Selinger:** We've just provided resources as requested by the City of Thompson to have people, parapolic officers, working in the community that will provide services to the community, similar program to—that we've done in Winnipeg. The member opposite may know about the Block by Block program, which we've launched in the North End of Winnipeg, which is intensively focused on reducing crime in one of the areas where there is a serious incidence of crime.

We're investing in early childhood development to prevent people from having to need a drug treatment court. The more we can do to help people get off to a healthy start in their lives, the less they will be subject to being victims of addictions in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're investing in that. We're investing in families. We're investing in schools.

And what do the members opposite do? They vote against it. They wish to cut it. And then they get up, after they've voted against resources that would keep families and individuals healthy, and they ask for more drug treatment courts.

We want more healthy citizens so they don't need drug treatment courts. We want more people working so they don't need social assistance. We want more people getting an education so they can make a decent living for their families, and then they won't need drug treatment court.

### **New Gymnasium Funding Kelvin and Laura Secord Schools**

**Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley):** Today I was very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to host my hard-working colleague our Education Minister in the marvellous constituency of Wolseley at École Laura Secord

School. It's a 100-year-old school. Wouldn't you know it? The gym was built, well, about 100 years ago.

There are now 550 students at that school, and I would note, in the theme of today's question period, that our same Education Minister and our Premier (Mr. Selinger) were just across the river in someone else's constituency, represented by a different party, making a very similar announcement for them, fitting very much with our government's theme of working on behalf of all Manitobans.

Could the Education Minister please give us the details on these fine announcements?

**Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning):** I was delighted to join with the member from Wolseley today, along with the principal representatives from the school division, representatives from the parent council and students themselves, to announce the design will begin on a new gym at École Laura Secord.

\* (14:20)

And then yesterday I stood with the Premier as we announced a new gym for the fine students at Kelvin High School.

Our government has committed \$50 million in our Active Schools Fund, and so far we've built and renovated 14 gyms all across Manitoba.

On this side of the House, we build gyms and we support healthy and active lifestyles for our students. On that side of the House, they're going to cut a half a billion dollars from the budget, they're going to close schools, and they're not going to build any gyms.

### **Manitoba Hydro Development Concerns**

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** Yesterday this NDP government said that Manitoba could run out of energy in 10 years, yet in the La Capra report it very clearly states this is not the case at all. In fact, there is no rush to build dams.

Mr. Speaker, we only have one chance to get this right.

Will the minister, will this government, commit to listening to the experts and let NFAT do its work and not Americanize Manitoba Hydro?

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro):** Well, Mr. Speaker, what's clear

is that every time members opposite have had a chance to get it right, they've got it wrong.

And it's absolutely clear that within 10 to 12 years, there—we could run out of power in this province. We—that may happen, and we don't intend to be unprepared.

We want to be clear with Manitobans that we are going to build hydro, that we're going to improve our capabilities to create power through these clean, green energy means. We're not going to take the advice of members opposite who think that building natural gas plants is the only option for producing energy in our province.

We know these are facts. We know we're prepared to make the decisions to move forward and provide that kind of clean, green energy and, in such a manner, keep rates the lowest on the continent.

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

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has awarded billions of dollars of work on Keeyask, Bipole III, and NFAT has not even finished their work. The NDP is so intent to Americanize Hydro, like spending there's no tomorrow. Projects have not received their environmental or regulatory approval.

We on this side of the House want to listen to the facts, listen to the experts and do it right the first time.

Why won't this government give the experts the freedom to do what they were hired to do, yes or no?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, there they go again, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand, they tell us to listen to the Public Utilities Board, and in the next breath, they're dissing the Public Utilities Board. They can't have it both ways.

What about the experts that the member opposite wants to talk about? Well, what did Meyers Norris Penny say to PUB? What did they say? They said the Preferred Development Plan results in the highest cumulative net GHG emissions displacement of any alternative plan.

Mr. Speaker, what else did—what did TyPlan's socio-economic review say? They said overall the Preferred Development Plan exhibits the greatest socio-economic benefits to the people of Manitoba, northern communities and First Nations compared to other plans.

Mr. Speaker, what do members opposite have about supporting clean, green energy for the benefit of all Manitobans?

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Speaker, this minister, this government, has made up its mind to build Keeyask, Conawapa, Bipole III regardless of what ratepayers, the rightful owners of Manitoba Hydro, have to say about it.

The NFAT committee is supposed to be the protector of Manitoba taxpayers and NFAT has not said yes or no on these projects.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this government once again: Will it let the NFAT committee do its job? Will they wait for NFAT to come out with their recommendations, yes or no? It's their board.

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the NFAT is to look at all of the options, and Manitoba Hydro has put in front of the NFAT 15 different options, 15 options versus one option from members opposite. Members opposite tell us to go all natural gas, leading to privatization, I will add. They tell us, across the way, we should go to all natural gas. That's their only option.

Well, what does the Morrison Park Advisors' commercial evaluation say? And this was before PUB. What did these experts say? They said, clearly, if Manitoba builds natural-gas-fired facilities or meets its needs in some other way, then it may no longer be able to claim that it meets the high standard of carbon-free production. If Manitoba Hydro builds additional hydroelectric generation facilities, it would find willing buyers for firm energy contracts for the sale of a substantial portion of—

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

#### **Moose Population Monitoring Vacant Ecologist Position**

**Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Estimates the minister advised that the almost 15 per cent vacancy rate his department is carrying involved predominately back-office staff with no front-line programs being impacted.

I previously asked this minister about the health of moose populations in 19A, which has been surveyed by Manitoba Hydro earlier this year. At the time, the minister gave a typical non-answer.

Can the minister advise if his inability to release moose population numbers is a result of his department's lacking a population ecologist the last two years?

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to moose population management, I think it's important to recognize the tremendous efforts of Manitoba Conservation, its staff, hard-working staff, in co-operation with other Manitobans and Manitobans who are on the land and have first-hand knowledge of population trends.

But there are population measures such as closures in the GHAs. There's licence hunting suspensions, of course. There's the NROs who are on the land that, unfortunately, members opposite want to undermine the powers of.

We are doing surveys on a regular basis. We have a wolf management program. We have a brain-worm strategy. The bipole licence pays particular attention to moose and we're developing a province-wide moose strategy. I could—

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

#### **MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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

The honourable member for Emerson, I believe.

#### **Marcella Towle**

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't have my ear on.

Mr. Speaker, for her entire life Marcella Towle has played baseball. Her family played baseball for as long as she can remember, with herself as the catcher, her brother as the pitcher and the family pasture serving as the outfield. Her dad, known as Mr. Baseball, made sure that his children knew how to hit, catch pop flies and pitch.

Growing up, she travelled with mixed teams to tournaments all over the area and on a family team. This was prior to slo-pitch becoming a popular sport. After that time, anyone—everyone could play, and the popularity grew, with two-day tournaments of 24 teams becoming the norm.

In the '90s, Marcella played with the ladies team called the Winnipeg Travellers, who advanced to three Canadian championships. Marcella and her

husband also played for and managed a mixed senior team in Winakwa, later becoming Winnipeg South, and finally Charleswood while living in Winnipeg.

When Marcella and her husband moved to rural Manitoba, she continued to play ball. This meant more driving to games and tournaments, but there was nothing that would keep her from the sport she loved. In 2000, Winnipeg hosted the World Seniors Slo-Pitch Tournament and teams from all over came to play ball. Marcella quickly joined the team of Winnipeg for Manitoba where they competed against teams that were predominantly American.

In 2001, Marcella was picked up by a BC team, the BC Swingers, for the World Seniors Slo-Pitch Tournament held in Las Vegas, held in the beginning of the month. After that tournament, Marcella has played with them 10 times, travelling to places like St. George, Utah, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Nashville, Atlanta, where in 2013 the team won first place for the ladies team, 70 years and older. Each member of the team was awarded a large baseball bag, something Marcella will truly treasure.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all the members of this House to join me in congratulating Marcella on her lifetime of playing baseball, and I wish her nothing but success in the games and tournaments to come. She's truly a testament to the love of the game.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **EDGE Skills Centre—Joan Embleton**

**Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital):** Mr. Speaker, joining us in the gallery today is Joan Embleton, whose passion for helping others inspired her spectacular 18-year career as the executive director of the EDGE Career program. Joan recently retired, but the legacy she leaves behind is a testament to her vision and her leadership.

For an adult trapped in the cycle of poverty, gaining access to quality, long-term employment can be an overwhelming challenge. However, Joan understands that with the right support and training, we can give individuals the tools they need to take charge of their life.

The EDGE Career program has long been serving the employment and educational needs of adults in our community. Its history extends back to 1988 when an initiative called Mager Women Working was started at Victor Mager School. This program provided job training to single mothers on

social assistance to help them find a meaningful job and become financially independent.

\* (14:30)

Under Joan's leadership, the organization evolved and began offering both men and women individualized training based on their work experience, interests and skills. Today the EDGE Career program is part of a broader initiative, EDGE Skills Centre. Each year the EDGE Skills Centre works with more than 50 clients, many of whom are low-income earners or newcomers to our province. The centre provides clients with services such as personal development, literacy programs, English and computer classes and employability training. The centre then works to connect clients with a work experience placement and, ultimately, a sustainable job.

Mr. Speaker, Joan has devoted her life to building this program, and its success is evidence of her dedication. Joan will be greatly missed, but her passion lives on in the great team of staff she built around her. Joan, thank you for 18 years of helping people tap into their own potential. You have left a huge legacy of citizens who are contributing to our economy and the great province we live in.

Thank you.

#### **Cameron Krisko**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** I rise today to congratulate a most amazing young Charleswood man, Cameron Krisko. Cameron is the founder and president of Making Waves Winnipeg, a program which offers affordable swimming lessons to special needs children.

Cameron's journey began when he was a grade 11 student at St. Paul's High School. As part of the community service component at the school, he decided to put in his 30 hours of volunteer time with Special Olympics. He has never left. He stayed on and coached the track team and still volunteers with Special O. He also finds time to volunteer at Count Me In Winnipeg, the Lighthouse Mission and the Children's Hospital and is an assistant coach of the St. Paul's High School hockey team.

This experience awakened a desire for Cameron to do something more for children with special needs. In 2011, Cameron founded Making Waves Winnipeg, a program that provides affordable, one-on-one swimming lessons and water safety skills with volunteer instructors to special needs children.



He started with 10 swimmers and 10 volunteer instructors and the program has grown to 105 swimmers and over 50 instructors. Because of the needs of the children, this one-on-one instruction is crucial and Making Waves makes this affordable for the families.

To cover the costs of the program, Cameron has organized three golf tournaments, the first annual gala dinner and also receives sponsorship from a number of local businesses. As the program is growing, Cameron hopes to introduce summer camps this year.

Cameron was recently rewarded for his volunteer efforts as he was named one of Canada's Top 20 Under 20 by Youth in Motion, and he was also flown to Toronto for that awards ceremony. He was also recently named the winner of the Future Leaders of Manitoba awards in January for 20- to 25-year-olds.

Congratulations, Cameron, on your many accomplishments. Charleswood and Manitoba are so proud of you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Investing in Brandon**

**Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East):** Mr. Speaker, our NDP government has invested in Brandon's infrastructure at levels never before seen in Manitoba history. Working together with the community, we built the Brandon Regional Health Centre and the western Manitoba cancer treatment centre.

We have embarked upon unprecedented post-secondary construction supporting Assiniboine Community College, transforming one of western Canada's most outstanding collections of monumental architecture into a world-class college campus. The Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts and the Len Evans Centre for Trades and Technology are among the fruits of that labour. At Brandon University, we recently opened the Healthy Living Centre and look forward to future growth.

Mr. Speaker, we worked to bring the Memorial Cup to Brandon, built the Keystone centre of agricultural excellence and proudly support the Provincial Exhibition in Manitoba in their historic reconstruction of Display Building No. 2. We have twinned 1st and 18th streets, twinned the Thompson Bridge and completed the eastern access route.

Mr. Speaker, over the next five years, our NDP government is investing more than \$80 million in

Brandon's core infrastructure. This investment supports the unprecedented work our government has already done building roads, bridges and flood protection in Brandon. Victoria Avenue, a central thoroughfare in Brandon, will be upgraded between 8th and 1st–18th Street and 1st Street. Major renovations on the 1st Street Bridge, improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway and several provincial highways are also planned. The Daly Overpass will undergo a major rehabilitation and will be expanded to include a fourth lane.

Indeed, our provincial investment in roads, bridges and flood protection is by far the largest in Brandon's history. Working for Brandon is a privilege, Mr. Speaker; working together with others is an honour.

#### **Margaret Saundry**

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** A resident of my constituency was recently recognized for her hard work in respect to those she worked with in sports broadcasting. On June the 7th, 2013, Stonewall-born Margaret Saundry was inducted to CBC's hall of fame.

Margaret began her career in banking before being brought on as an accountant with CBC. She 'shoon' threw—soon threw her hat into the ring for a script assistant, stepping into those shoes in 1961. She mainly worked in sports and covered football games in what used to be the western interprovincial football conference, the forerunner of today's CFL's western division.

In her working career she covered—her crew covered football games in three Prairie provinces. She never imagined playing baseball as a young girl for the Stonewall team would ever allow her to spend time in professional dugouts, rubbing elbows with such greats as Yogi Berra, Ted Williams, Johnny Bench.

CBC assignments allowed her to travel our great country from Victoria, BC, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, seeing many cities, towns and farmlands in between. She witnessed some remarkable history. She was fortunate to cover the Olympics, Pan Am Games, the Commonwealth Games. Each assignment has many memories for her. Margaret was present for the Pan Am Games, the 1976 Montreal Olympics and worked in the 1972 Olympics in Munich during the time of the terrorist attacks.

Margaret retired in 1985, but her dedication and hard work were not forgotten. Mr. Speaker, I'd like

to congratulate Margaret Saundry on her induction with only a dozen people before her to ever have the honour of such an award. Margaret Saundry is certainly a prime example of what it takes to be worthy of this award.

Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Grievances?

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

#### House Business

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, on House business, in accordance with rule 28(3), and after consultation with the Opposition House Leader, I would like to announce that the Opposition Day motion brought forward by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) will be considered on the afternoon of Thursday, April 17, 2014.

**Mr. Speaker:** It has been announced that, in accordance with rule 28(3), and after consultation with the Opposition House Leader, that the Opposition Day motion brought forward by the honourable member for Steinbach will be considered on the afternoon of Thursday, April 17th, 2014.

\* \* \*

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, could you please call Committee of Supply.

**Mr. Speaker:** We'll now proceed to call the Committee of Supply—resolve into the Committee of Supply.

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

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

\*(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 resume consideration of the Estimates for the

Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors. As previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** I just want to pick up from the questions that were asked in question period and ask the minister if all of the ER task force recommendations have been implemented.

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health):** I'm just wondering, while we're looking for the information that the member's just asked for, there was some question that she had yesterday and in a couple of areas that I have answers to. Perhaps she'd like me to read those into the record now while we get the information on the task force recommendations?

**Mrs. Driedger:** That would be fine, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Selby:** Yesterday the member was asking about staff reductions in relation to amalgamation, and I can let the member know that amalgamation of the previous 11 RHAs into five in 2012 has resulted in a reduction of over 100 executive and board positions, as we discussed yesterday. The member asked for an accounting of those positions, which I can provide today: 81 of those positions were a reduction from the 11 to five boards; 37 of those positions were RHA senior executive positions. A total of 72 executive positions existed across the 11 former RHAS; 37 of those executive positions were eliminated through a merger process, more than 30 to 35 position target—more than 30 to 35 was the position target the government set and more than half of the total senior executive positions that existed prior to those mergers.

I can confirm that some information has been put on record in the past with respect to the details of the reduction in executive positions and where those individuals went. As the member's aware, of course, human resources are dynamic and people move between positions regularly, so there may have been some changes in the positions of these individuals more recently. However, the net reduction in the number of executive positions as a result of amalgamation is still correct.

Also, wanted to talk about the summary of the 32nd executives that were reduced. So in Prairie Mountain Health, which, of course, is Assiniboine, Brandon and Parkland formerly. The former RHA was Assiniboine, Parkland and Brandon, of course—had a total of 18 senior executive positions among them. The new RHA, Prairie Mountain Health, has

seven executives, of a net reduction of 11 senior executive positions. Of those 11, seven were severed and four remained in the RHA but not as part of executive management.

As for Northern RHA, which was formerly NOR-MAN and Burntwood RHAs, it had a total of 15 senior executive positions before the merger. The new Northern RHA has now seven executive positions. This is a net reduction of eight senior executive positions, rather—and of the eight reduced senior executive positions, four were severed, three resigned or retired and the position was eliminated, and one position moved into another role in the region.

Southern RHA, of course, was formerly Central and southeast RHA. They had a total of 15 senior executive positions before the merger. The new southern health RHA does have seven executive positions, being a net reduction of eight senior executive positions. Of the eight reduced, two went to executive positions in a different RHA and their positions in Southern RHA were eliminated, three were severed and three remained in the RHA but not as part of executive management.

As for Interlake-Eastern, formerly Interlake and North Eastman RHA, had a total of 12 executive positions before the merger. They now have seven executive positions for a net reduction of five senior executive positions. Of the five reduced senior executive positions, three were severed, one retired and the position was eliminated, and one moved to another health-care role outside of the RHA and their position was eliminated.

\* (14:50)

And all Winnipeg, which was formerly Winnipeg and Churchill, had 12 senior executive positions before the merger. They now have seven executive positions and the region's senior team did not change. This is a net reduction of five senior executive positions. However, because some of the positions were retained in the former Churchill RHA, the WRHA has deleted some other senior administration positions to offset the retained positions in Churchill, and these include eliminating the following positions: executive director of planning and corporate services, VP chief and administration—administrative officer, chief innovation officer and director of human resources at Churchill. Of the five senior executive positions in Churchill, one was severed, two resigned, two

remained in the RHA but not as part of executive management.

I also had some answers for the member was asking about an order-in-council for Bev Ann Murray. I can advise that that was approved on November 8–28th rather—November 28th, 2012.

Was also asking for qualifications and backgrounds of the members on the health professional advisory council. I would like to table a document that does have each of their professional backgrounds summarized—[interjection]—table it.

And I can just summarize the document for the member: that Neil Duboff, who is the chair, is a commercial law lawyer with Duboff Edwards Haight and Schachter of Winnipeg; David Schellenberg is a professional social worker and community volunteer in Winnipeg; Bev Ann Murray is a consultant with broad experience gained in academia, direct service, middle and senior management in the fields of health care and social service; John Harvie is a partner with the law firm Myers Weinberg practising in the areas of administration law, child protection, criminal litigation, civil litigation and Aboriginal law; and Lynne Fineman is a registered social worker holding a master's degree in social work with extensive experience in health and social services and patient advocacy. And I would like to say that these are all outstanding Manitobans; I believe, will provide my office with the best recommendations and advice that is independent and of the highest quality.

I can also now give some answers on the ER task force the member asked about. I'm sure the member knows the task force was launched to work with patients, front-line staff in hospitals to develop plans to improve emergency care in Winnipeg. Of the recommendations, all the recommendations have been acted on and all but one referral fully implemented.

One of the long-term recommendations regarding health information system project is still go—ongoing. Phased-in improvements to electronic health—hospital health information systems will allow better patient access to patient records to be shared within the hospital and long-term care facilities as well.

But the fully implemented recommendations of the Emergency Care Task Force include redevelopment of ERs. I can tell the member that the emergency rooms at Health Sciences Centre, Seven Oaks, Concordia, Misericordia Urgent Care,

St. Boniface and Victoria have been redeveloped, and plans for the Grace Hospital ER renovation has begun.

We—introducing reassessment nurses to ERs—we've done that to ensure that patients—waiting patients are regularly reassessed and to communicate with patients and families. And I should note that the WRHA was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement this rule. All our ERs do have reassessment nurses in place in the WRHA today.

We are following up with patients who leave without being seen through Telehealth. We're increasing the geriatric program assessment teams that conduct home assessment of discharged patients to help decrease the need for ER visits; establishing protocol for nurse initiative procedures for the treatment of pain, nausea and allergic reactions that's reducing treatment time; installing computerized diagnostic imaging readers which will shorten turnaround time for X-rays and CT scans; enhancing diagnostic services at all acute sites; implementing mental health education for ER nurses; creating regional temporary mental health beds and establishing on-call psychiatric assistants; adding psychiatric emergency nurse resources; using IV clinics to relieve pressure in ERs by reducing the number of scheduled ER visits; using nurse practitioners for fast-tracking of minor treatment, managing intoxicated persons and assisting in primary care in personal-care homes with nurse practitioners.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Chair, while the minister was able to indicate that there were initiatives ongoing and implemented, she would also know, or should know, that just because it says on the paper that those things happen doesn't mean it's always consistent, especially with, you know, reassessment nurses. That's not always happening on a regular basis. Follow-up calls is not happening. We saw that with Bonnie Guagliardo who didn't get one, and, unfortunately, she did die. So there is still a lot of work obviously that needs to happen with ERs. I understand that things were chaotic last night in ERs. Besides the incident at Grace Hospital, I heard that Health Sciences ER was chaotic too, 32 people in the waiting room waiting for care. So this government has a long way to go to improve what many have deemed an ER crisis. Fifteen years ago, a promise was made and not kept, and what we are seeing with ERs is something that is far worse than what it was 15 years ago and certainly, in many minds, called a crisis.

*Mr. Ted Marcelino, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

So I would suggest to the minister that there needs to be a lot more done with our ERs, and not just assume that because the task force put together some recommendations that, in fact, things have moved along and progressed when, in fact, that is absolutely not the case, and that's why we're continuing to see chaos in a lot of the ERs and there's a lot more work yet to be done in those areas. So I would urge the minister, and over the next several months, there will be a lot more questions coming forward in terms of the ERs.

With the minister's response on the Health Professions Advisory Council, she did give some brief information about each of the members that are that—on the advisory council for the health professions new act, and I would wonder how closely were all of these members vetted. Like, would the member have known if one of these had been a card-carrying NDP member and attended an NDP convention and put forward a resolution? Would she have checked out conflicts of interest prior to putting somebody on this committee? Like, how carefully were all of these members vetted to be sure that they didn't have connections to the government or conflicts of interest?

\* (15:00)

**Ms. Selby:** Of course we vet people's professional backgrounds. We work with people who come from a variety of political stripes, but we do look to ensure that they have the professional experience and background to be able to work on the particular board that we're looking at. And I'd like to say of this particular board, as I said before, they are outstanding Manitobans. I believe they will provide my office with recommendations and advice that is of independent and of the highest professional quality.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The council held a public meeting on May 23rd, 2013, with respect to the application by paramedics for regulation. And at the beginning of this meeting Mr. Harvie, who was just appointed in November of 2012, declared a conflict and he did not participate in the meeting. I would note that he represents the MGEU in—that were in matters before the court and particularly in matters involving the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

So I'd like to ask the minister: Is she aware of the nature of Mr. Harvie's conflict and did Mr. Harvie withdraw from all meetings of the advisory council

when matters of the application by the paramedics was discussed?

**Ms. Selby:** We're just looking for that information. We'll get back the member.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister that, given the appointment of Mr. Harvie occurring after the application by the paramedics had been received by the Minister of Health and were referred to the council, should the minister and the government not have investigated this possible conflict of interest during the appointment process and perhaps looked for another candidate?

**Ms. Selby:** So I can confirm that John Harvie recuses himself from all meetings in regards to paramedics, but generally the members split up the work. Different members deal with different things and so it isn't a problem for him to be not at those particular paramedic meetings because the members share the workload as it is.

**Mrs. Driedger:** But the minister would be naive to think that there weren't discussions that come back to play at the table. They may do separate work, but then when decisions are being made at that council, they're not going to be—you know, they're going to be made around a table with all the members there.

So how does, you know, if he has a conflict of interest, you know, that really wouldn't work particularly well and certainly there could be bias, then, at the table. Is that not the case?

**Ms. Selby:** I have been informed that Mr. Harvie recuses himself both from the meetings regarding paramedics and the discussions around the table that may also be about paramedics.

**Mrs. Driedger:** On December 4th of last year, the minister wrote a letter to the chair of the Health Professions Advisory Council, and in that letter, the minister gave assurances to the council that no decision on the regulation of massage therapy had been made, and to disregard media statements made by the Massage Therapy Association in the October 23rd publication of the Winnipeg Free Press during Massage Therapy Awareness Week.

The minister's letter provides no specifics about the concerns of the council. This publication was four full pages of information, so I wonder if the minister could explain what the concerns were by providing some context or reasons for the concerns.

\* (15:10)

**Ms. Selby:** I just wanted to just remind members here that, of course, the review process that we're working on towards the regulated health professionals act, important that it is independent, that it's a non-political process, that certainly has involved extensive consultations with health professionals, patients, other experts, really looking to make sure that we bring all those viewpoints into account.

And I just want to confirm that the former minister certainly provided process advice to the Massage Therapy Association, but to be clear, and I believe that's what the member's referring to, to be clear, it was not political advice but process advice. And I should also mention that I know that the Deputy Minister of Health has met with the organization in December, discussed some of their outstanding concerns. But it is really important that this review process is done independently, and we're looking forward to recommendations from the committee.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The minister seems to have misunderstood the question because the letter I'm referring was one written in—on December 4th of last year, and it was written by this particular minister, and, you know, it was to the chair of the health professional advisory council, and it was talking about concerns about the Massage Therapy Association's advertisement, and yet there is no specifics, you know, outlined in this particular letter, and just wondering if the minister can explain what the concerns were that arose out of this to provide some context for this letter of hers. She was certainly responding to a letter outlining the health professional advisory council's concerns, and then the minister sent a letter back, but in none of this do we see what she's referencing as concerns that have been raised. Could she clarify what they're talking about in the December 4th letter that she signed?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, Mr. Chair, I would be happy to do that.

On October 23rd, 2013, the Winnipeg 'fress'—Free Press included a four-page advertisement in respect to massage therapy week. It was paid for by the Massage Therapy Association of Manitoba. It had in it an open letter to the minister, the former minister at the time, and it had a line saying that she has provided political guidance in the required process, and, so, in my discussions, both with the department and the former minister, we were aware that she provided process advice, but to be clear, had

not provided political advice, and I wanted to make that clear.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Did the council or the minister or any of her staff discuss these concerns with the Massage Therapy Association of Manitoba?

**Ms. Selby:** I can repeat again for the member that the Deputy Minister of Health met with this organization in December. The Legislative Unit at Manitoba Health has also been in discussions with this group on many occasions. We know that they do great work. I think that probably most people in this room personally know the great work that massage therapists do, but all the more reason why it's important to make sure that we maintain the integrity of the independent process.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Were those meetings that the minister is just talking about, did they happen prior to the letter that the minister sent out?

**Ms. Selby:** I'll get back to the member with those dates.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Certainly, what I have seen in terms of all of this was that there had been no contact with the Manitoba massage therapists prior to her letter going out, that they were caught quite off guard by the minister's letter. In fact, there wasn't a meeting with them by her department until December 17th, and that was after the December 4th meeting. And even at the December 7th meeting, I understand that nobody informed the Massage Therapy Association that the minister or the council had any concerns about the October 23rd publication. So something just doesn't seem fair here towards this profession. And, particularly, I'm wondering, because if the council had any concerns and the minister is indicating that there might have been some worrying concerns, why was there no courtesy given and an explanation sought before the minister went and signed a letter and sent it off and then also told the health-care advisory council to share the letter with participants in the review? It seems like a very unfair and unprofessional approach to handling this issue.

Does the minister want to respond to any of that right now or do some more homework on this?

\* (15:20)

**Ms. Selby:** I will say, once again, that I don't doubt that everyone in this room recognizes the important work that massage therapists do, but also that is important to maintain the integrity of the independent process of this particular process.

And, I'm not sure if the member is suggesting that there should be interference, but, of course, we're not going to do that. We think it's important to note that review process is done independently, and we look forward to seeing those recommendations. So, if the member is suggesting that there should be some interference, well, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to respect the work of the group, and allow them to work independently, and look forward to their recommendation.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Chair, the minister has totally misunderstood or misconstrued all of this, and her comments right now are just absurd.

The integrity of the process was not maintained by herself when she wrote that letter and told the council to distribute it. It was distributed with an email cover, and the subject line was: MTAM complaint. And so that's out there now, and the only person that hurt the integrity of the process was this Minister of Health. And that's what I'm trying to get her to understand, is where she messed up and interfered and, somehow, in what she did, she's tainted MTAM. And I wonder if she—like, she really doesn't seem to get this.

And wondered if she would be prepared to apologize to MTAM for not bringing them in on the discussion, letting them know what they were being censured for, and why she told the council, who's supposed to be independent, to send out her letter, and it talks about an MTAM complaint.

Does she not understand that she's the one that interfered and messed up the integrity of this process by what she has done?

**Ms. Selby:** I think it's important to put the facts on the record, so I will read the letter that the member is referring to that, of course, went the chair of the Health Professions Advisory Council. It says: Thank you for your letter outlining HPAC's concern with the Massage Therapy Association of Manitoba's advertisement in the October 23rd, 2013, issue of the Winnipeg Free Press regarding MTAM's application for designation of massage therapy as a regulated health profession under The Regulated Health Professions Act. I appreciate the opportunity to respond. One of the key features of The Regulated Health Professions Act is uniformity in the legislation, provisions applicable to all regulated health professions. Similarly, The Regulated Health Professions Act establishes a formal process to review all requests through regulation under it by currently unregulated professions including criteria

for the evaluation of such requests. I truly appreciate the effort that must be made by each HPAC member in evaluating applications and look forward to your advice. Please be assured that our government has not made, and will not make, a decision with respect to any application referred to HPAC before receiving the requested advice. The independence of HPAC is imperative to its review, and advice to the minister must be maintained as a matter of respect to applicants and the work involved in making the application. I ask HPAC to set aside the remarks made by MTAM in the media and continue the review of MTAM's application to its conclusion. In addition, HPAC may share this letter with participants in the review to assure them that HPAC's work is meaningful and unconstrained.

And, again, I'm not sure if the member is suggesting that we should not allow the independence to go forward, that it's not important to maintain this independence and respect for the applications and the applicants that work in this, but we are not willing to do that. I think this is really important work that they're doing and I look forward to seeing their recommendations.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The minister really doesn't seem to be connecting the dots on all of this, and that is very concerning because she hasn't seemed to have understood the questions. She has not understood how she's the one that is responsible for a breach in the integrity of the process to some degree and, instead, is trying to play some little games with words that—but basically without understanding what she's even talking about.

You know, and that does raise some concern because, you know, basically, in all of this if there were any concerns raised about the advertisement in the paper, I don't know why somebody wouldn't have spoken then to the association and told them what your concerns were. That didn't happen. The minister didn't have the courtesy to even pick up a phone and share what the concerns about the advertising might have been, and then she responds to a letter where complaints are thrown out there and then tells the advisory council to share that letter. And she doesn't seem—like, there's a big gap here in her misunderstanding of this whole process. And I'm really, you know, concerned by it because, you know, this is an issue with this act that is really critically important, and it sounds like the minister really doesn't have a handle on this at all and really doesn't seem to appreciate that they mistreated the Massage Therapy Association by ignoring them and

not telling them what the council or the minister herself felt might have been a complaint.

\* (15:30)

So I would ask the minister: Why was there no courtesy in picking up the phone and telling the association what her concerns were? Or is she just going along with the advice of somebody and just doing some things that seem a little bit out of place?

**Ms. Selby:** Certainly, we know the important work that MTAM does. We recognize it. It's exactly why it's so essential that we allow this process to proceed without interference. We are working and maintaining the integrity of the process, and that's what's at stake here.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does the minister not understand the role she played in breaking that integrity?

**Ms. Selby:** As I've been saying, this is about maintaining the integrity of the process. The member might not be aware that the chair of HPAC sent a letter to the minister's office. To summarize, it said that the public assertion by MTAM that the former minister provided political guidance may undermine and prejudice the work of the council as it investigates MTAM's proposal, and I think it's very important to reinforce and to let HPAC know that we respect the independence of that process.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I don't disagree at all with that, but what I don't understand is why would nobody from HPAC or the minister, she just went, then, willy-nilly and wrote the letter and told them to share it around. Why didn't somebody then talk to MTAM, which would be the proper, respectful thing to do and share with them the concerns that were raised? Why didn't that happen?

**Ms. Selby:** As I've said a couple of times earlier already, the Deputy Minister of Health did meet with this organization in December and that was an opportunity to discuss their outstanding concerns. And, again, I will say once again that the review process is done independently and we are looking forward to those recommendations coming from the independent advisory council.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I would point out at that December 17th meeting that MTAM was not informed by the deputy or anybody in that room about the concerns. So it was not brought up with the massage therapy group and was, sort of, had just been left out there uncorrected or not involving MTAM in actually sharing what the concerns were. Does the minister

not think she has and should apologize to them for not consulting with them on this issue and sharing the concerns that been raised about their advertising?

\* (15:40)

**Ms. Selby:** And I'm informed that many things were discussed in the December meeting. But I think it's important not to dismiss the concerns that the chair of HPAC had. The chair was concerned that public assertions made by the group could jeopardize and undermine and possibly prejudice the work being done by the council as it investigates the proposal. I think it is very important that we let the council know that we respect their independence, that we respect the process and look forward to their recommendations.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I will just indicate that if they were so concerned, they should've at least then had the courtesy to let MTAM know, I mean, and that just makes sense. And that's not interfering with anything, that's just being respectful and courteous.

But I've got a lot more questions, and I will probably look at putting the rest of these in writing because the minister seems to be struggling with understanding what it is we're asking about.

So I want to go on to a few more topics, and a big one, and I'm wondering, why have the nurses in Manitoba been without a contract for a year?

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell the member that the issues have been settled at the bargaining table. We are awaiting final ratification of the settlement, but we're hoping that's close.

**Mrs. Driedger:** But the question to the minister was why have they been without a contract for a whole year.

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell the member the discussions were ongoing during that time. And we have found that those issues have been settled at the bargaining table, and we're hoping that this settlement is ratified very soon.

**Mrs. Driedger:** In 1999, although I dread bringing it up with this minister, but at that point, Manitoba nurses were the third highest paid in Canada. And now, after 15 years of NDP, they are the lowest paid in Canada. Will the minister give us a sense of where this new contract might place them?

**Ms. Selby:** We're just checking on what we're able to say without disrupting the negotiation process that

is—as I've mentioned earlier, the final settlement hasn't been ratified yet.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister explain that if—in looking at the deal, there's a 2 per cent increase for 2014 and a 1.1 per cent market adjustment. What is a 1.1 per cent market adjustment?

**Ms. Selby:** We'd be happy to discuss this at a later date, but we aren't going to discuss the details of the deal until it is ratified.

\* (15:50)

**Mrs. Driedger:** Any idea why the MNU leadership would have taken off comparisons that they used to have on their website with salaries across Canada for nurses? Any idea why they would have removed that from their site?

**Ms. Selby:** I think that the member would probably have to ask the MNU why they would do anything in particular on their website.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And I'm just curious, has there been a lot of intense lobbying with this government about nurses' wages, seeing as they were the third highest in Canada in 1999 and now they're the lowest paid in Canada? Have there been—has there been any intense lobbying by the MNU?

**Ms. Selby:** I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of nurses both—everything from nurse practitioners to our ER nurses in Winnipeg. I've also had a chance to meet with LPNs and registered nurses, and I can tell the member that in any of those discussions I don't remember anyone discussing wages in any of those meetings.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Madam Minister, with your predecessor I've had a number of discussions in the past regarding the emergency room at Bethesda hospital and the datedness of that emergency room and the challenge that it causes for staff and the ability to have the kind of procedures that one would expect at a regional centre like Bethesda. Are there any plans currently being discussed or in place to update the surgical rooms at Bethesda hospital in Steinbach?

**Ms. Selby:** I wonder if the member could just clarify if he was saying surgical units or emergency department.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Surgical units, Madam Minister.

**Ms. Selby:** It just feels like we're in Steinbach so often announcing things happening, from the wellness centre that was committed to in the budget,



the site of our first primary care networks in Steinbach, certainly a QuickCare clinic in Steinbach, and I know that ministers of education have been out there making announcements of school expansions as well.

As the member knows, currently we are renovating that ER. There have been some recent upgrades to the surgical units in Ste. Anne's, but we're not aware of a proposal coming in regarding surgical rooms at Steinbach.

But, clearly, we invest in Steinbach. We have invested, and we're happy to work with folks to hear what plans they have and where they're moving and always prepared to look at proposals that will keep health care closer to home.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I suspect there's a little catch-up going in Steinbach because it's been ignored for a number of years during the growth, and that was certainly the case with schools, what became a dangerous level where students were having to cross the street to use the gym facilities at private facilities. That was before the government got going, and certainly I know with the emergency room, which I think will be a welcomed project—Mr. Doer committed that project to me in 2007, I believe, so I know things don't move quickly. This is a question I've asked a number of years, though, with previous—the previous minister.

I think that there was some discussion about doing possibly the emergency rooms at the same time as the ER, and I think of the Bethesda health foundation, which the minister will know is always very eager to partner with the government on projects, had had some discussions on that.

So I would ask that—I'll leave it at her looking into the situation and perhaps we can have further discussions in a different forum about that. But it is a significant problem and challenges—the kind of surgeries and the nature of surgeries that would normally happen in a place like Bethesda aren't able to happen, and it impacts the entire region, so I'll leave it at that.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

I wanted to ask a couple of questions about a potential helipad in Steinbach. Now, my understanding is that STARS would have done missions in 2013, about 22 at Bethesda hospital, which is second only, I think, to Boundary Trails out in the Morden-Winkler area, and they have a landing pad right on site.

I think part of the challenge, as has been discussed to me by health professionals in Steinbach, is right now the STARS helicopter—it's on a restricted use, but right now, when it's landing, it would land at the airport in Steinbach. They would then take their stretcher and put it into the ambulance and it would take about eight minutes to drive to Bethesda. The patient would be loaded onto that stretcher, put back into the ambulance, take another eight minutes to go back to the airport, be loaded back into the STARS ambulance and then take 14 minutes to fly to—will take 14 minutes to fly to the HSC pad, which isn't in operation yet. So now they're flying to their airport landing site and then retransferring a person to HSC or to whichever hospital they're going to, I suppose.

But there has been discussion, I know, within the community. And the Lions Club, for example, has talked about doing some fundraising potentially for a helipad, but they're not really sure to go with it because they don't know if it's a project that's proceeding or not, but they've offered to do some private fundraising for that. I think they're quite involved with—the Lions is quite involved with STARS in Alberta, so they have some history with that.

\* (16:00)

So there's a willingness to do fundraising for it, but they aren't certain where the government's direction is on the helipads generally for rural Manitoba, and I'm speaking specifically about Steinbach at this point.

**Ms. Selby:** The member's probably aware that construction to begin on the helipad at Health Sciences Centre. Unfortunately, there was a fire and it has delayed the process. But, and correct me if I'm wrong, my department staff are here with me, but I believe it's on track to be ready for early 2015, the helipad at Health Sciences Centre.

The member's probably aware that currently, STARS is only flying those scene calls, emergency situations where you couldn't get either a land ambulance or a jet to the area, to the accident or whatever need there may be. But they are up on the scene emergency call, but they're not doing the full service, the transport of patients, interfacility patients, right now.

That, right now, is one of the things being looked at by the Clinical Oversight Panel under the direction of Dr. Brian Postl. We have a number of people around the table at that panel from STARS,

from EMS, from the department, experts with the background in critical care and emergency care. And this is a number of things that they're going to be looking at. They are looking to guide us up into that full recovery of service to—that we're back into full resumption of service, rather, that we're looking at those interfacility transfers. Patient safety is their focus, but we are also all looking at issues of everything from training to dispatch, and we'd like to see more use for STARS, and that's part of the thing that they're looking at as well.

So I can tell the member that the panel has been meeting, discussions are ongoing, and we'll be looking forward to their recommendations on what we can do to get back to full service but also to bring in improvements and patient safety, of course, being the utmost focus of the work that they're doing.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Would the minister agree, though, that—and her goal is to see STARS utilized more often, and that's fine. Would she agree that a helipad at Bethesda would increase that usage because it shortens the time with those transfers with the ambulance?

**Ms. Selby:** I absolutely think that—well know that helicopter ambulance is an important part of our EMS service; it's the future of Manitoba, absolutely. Our focus right now is the helipad at Health Sciences. That's our first priority. It did have a little bit of setbacks, but I'm certainly eager to hear the advice of the Clinical Oversight Panel with Dr. Postl on how we can use STARS more, how we can ensure that we're doing the best we can in terms of dispatch, in terms of patient safety and get back to that full service of interfacility transfers as well. So this is something that they will be looking at, and we'll be eager to hear what they have to say.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Is it fair to say that the helipad at Bethesda is certainly a goal for the air ambulance service in Manitoba?

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell the member that we know that helicopter air ambulance service is an important part of our system. As I said, we're focused right now on getting the one at Health Sciences up and going.

I'd be happy if this group would like to meet with either the department or someone to discuss where we're going, but we are, at this point, following the direction of the Clinical Oversight Panel. Dr. Brian Postl has been tasked with looking at a number of things, including making sure that we're getting the most out of STARS, that we're

using it to its fullest scope. And they will be looking at dispatch and patient care as well. So, certainly, I know the department would be happy to meet with folks, but we are definitely following the lead of the experts around the Clinical Oversight Panel.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Can the minister, then, provide me—should I just have the group contact her office directly for a meeting with her staff on this issue?

**Ms. Selby:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Goertzen:** You know, the issue on—that we're facing right now at Bethesda with the restriction on STARS and the inability to do the interfacility transports, I've talked to the doctors at the emergency room at Bethesda, and it's become quite critical. In fact, I think, in some ways, it had almost disputes with the dispatch for STARS. When they've called for the ambulance to do an interfacility transfer, they're told they're under restricted flight usage and they can't do the interfacility transfer. Lifeflight, I don't think, has ever landed in Steinbach, if I'm correct.

And so what's happening right now is we often have one doctor in the ER. They ask for an interfacility transfer. They're rejected, and so the doctor then goes with the ambulance into whatever hospital they need to go into in Winnipeg, and the region is left without an ER doctor for up to, in some cases, five to six hours because there isn't that interflight—or that interfacility transfer.

And I don't expect the minister will think that that's a good scenario and, in fact, it can be a critical scenario particularly at a busy hospital like Bethesda. But is she aware that that is currently what's happening, where you have ER doctors who aren't able to ask for or request the interfacility transfers and so they have to leave the ER, a packed ER, and be gone for about five hours without anybody else covering it off?

**Ms. Selby:** I appreciate the member's concern for his community and I'd be happy to bring those concerns to Dr. Postl and the Clinical Oversight Panel if they're not aware of it, I suspect they've probably have had a number of discussions but would be happy to make them aware of it.

We're eager to get STARS back into full service. It's why we're—it's why we've brought this group together to be able to guide us back into full service. It's certainly important to recognize that MTCC folks at the front line, those guys—those folks there make the decisions as to what is the best and safest thing to

do. But we're working towards getting STARS back into full service and I'd be happy to bring those concerns to the Clinical Oversight Panel.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I wanted to bring those concerns to the minister so she's on notice that it, you know, it could lead to a critical situation, obviously, if a doctor has to leave the facility and there are better alternatives. And the better alternative in this case, or in some cases, would be the use of the helicopter to do the interfacility transfer.

When is the Clinical Oversight Panel expected to meet to determine this issue?

**Ms. Selby:** They've met. There are ongoing discussions.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Are they meeting next week to discuss this issue?

**Ms. Selby:** I've been informed that the next Clinical Oversight Panel meeting, the discussion will be on dispatch, I don't have the exact date but it is—it looks like it's in April, but they're just confirming that.

But, if the member is suggesting that we put STARS back up in the air for interfacility transfers now, against all medical advice to do so, I have to tell the member I won't do that.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm advising the minister of risks that are currently in the system because of the restrictions. And I suppose the minister's responsibility is to balance those risks, but there are risks on each side and it's not a simple of equation or a zero-sum game where all of the risks exist on only one side. There are always risks within the medical system.

\* (16:10)

I'm advising her that we've had situations at Bethesda, which is one of largest regional—certainly one of the largest rural regional hospitals in Manitoba, where the facility is vacated of an ER doctor because they are doing interfacility transfers that they, the doctors, would prefer to be doing with the helicopter.

So I'm just advising her that there are challenges and problems that could be critical, and she can decide what she wants to do with that. But it's my responsibility to put those on the record so that she's aware that there are—can be dangerous situations happening.

I will leave it at that, other than I will hold the minister to her word. And I appreciate her suggestion

that she—that her department staff will meet with the service club that is interested in doing fundraising for the helipad at Bethesda. I'll advise them of that and ask them, if they choose, to contact the minister's office and arrange that meeting. I appreciate that, and I am sure that she'll—I'm sure that that is followed up on.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Just to stay on the topic of helipads for a minute, can the minister indicate or confirm that she said the other day that the helipad at the Health Sciences Centre was not a tendered project?

**Ms. Selby:** I'm not sure which conversation the member is referring to. Perhaps she could remind me of that. But I can tell her that the helipad was tendered.

**Mrs. Driedger:** It was a comment she made the other day, and I believe it might've been in Estimates, about the helipad not being a tendered contract. But, you know, and that's fine. If she's saying it's tendered, that's fine.

The other question would be, then, is St. Boniface getting a helipad. Is there anything in the works for that facility?

**Ms. Selby:** So, as I mentioned earlier with the previous member, we certainly are focused on getting the Health Sciences Centre helipad up and operational right now, but I would be interested in the advice of the Clinical Oversight Panel as to where they see that we should concentrate those efforts. Certainly as they're taking a look at, well, patient safety being number one, but also dispatch issues as well, I'd be interested to know their advice on where efforts should be concentrated next.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Has the minister identified who leaked the Wheeler report to the CBC?

**Ms. Selby:** We do not know, but we—I should tell the member that a full forensic search was done on government computers and that once the public personal—or the personal health information was removed, we made that report public as well. And I would note that both STARS and Manitoba Health committed to working on all the recommendations within that report.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate why her office has refused to give me a copy of STARS' response to the Wheeler report?

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Selby:** The report, of course, or the—what the member's referring to was given in confidence, and we respect that. But I should tell the member that STARS' response was very clear. They sat with me—the CEO—at a press conference, where they stated that as an organization that believes in continuous improvement, we're committed to making any changes needed to ensure we provide the highest quality patient care. That was said by Andrea Robertson, the CEO of STARS. She went on to say that this is a new day for STARS in Manitoba, and we look forward to getting back in the air and working with our partners to save lives.

I can tell you that STARS has agreed to work on all the recommendations, that they're at the table with the Clinical Oversight Panel and Dr. Postl as we work towards allowing full return of service. STARS has put patient safety as their number one priority, as it is for Manitoba Health. And the Clinical Oversight Panel works together to enable us to go back to full service for STARS.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, the minister made public the Wheeler report. Is it not fair to STARS to also give them their day in court? Their reputation has been hurt by this, and yet they have no recourse. You know, if the government hadn't have bungled this whole issue and mismanaged it, STARS wouldn't be in the position they're in.

I'd—I note that they have acknowledged where their weaknesses are and have agreed to fix them, but do they not have a right to have their day in court and have the right to have their voice heard by the government making public their response to the Wheeler report?

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell the member that the CEO of STARS sat next me at a press conference on March 7th. She said at that time that they are willing to address all the recommendations. STARS has representation at the Clinical Oversight Panel. I have found that they have been very eager to address concerns and to make sure that they are addressing patient safety issues to the satisfaction of both Manitoba Health and STARS so that we can get back to full service for Manitoba families.

Certainly STARS has been a good partner to work with. They're at the table under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl, and I'm quite confident that they, as much as Manitoba Health and the experts around the table, want to see STARS return to full service in Manitoba.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does the minister not think it's important for the reputation of STARS and the damage that's been done to their reputation to have them have their day in court by having that response made public because, obviously, there's always two sides to everything, and I'm sure they would have provided a fair bit of information that could be very useful to this whole debate.

So does the minister not see a sense of fairness and giving STARS their, you know, day in court, so to speak, by hearing their side of the story?

**Ms. Selby:** I think that STARS made a very public response when they sat next to me at the press conference and I talked about how important patient safety is to their organization, committed very publicly to work on the agreement, the recommendations of the Wheeler report, and have been very good partners around the table of the Clinical Oversight Panel under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl. I think that Andrea Robertson, the CEO, made a very public response when she said that they're an organization that believe in continuous improvement and they're committed to making any changes needed to ensure we provide the highest quality patient care. I believe them when they say that.

I know that they've provided excellent work in Manitoba. They've helped a number of families here and have a great reputation outside of this province as well. And I certainly think they have been good partners and have shown a great willingness to address all the concerns raised in the Wheeler report. I think that they have been very public in their response, and I appreciate their attitude that they have shown at working together to get full service back right across the province.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate if all tenders have been awarded for the Selkirk hospital?

\* (16:30)

**Ms. Selby:** We're just checking on that status.

Yes, we've awarded the tender.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And has there been a tender awarded for a temporary MRI as well?

**Ms. Selby:** We're just checking on that. We'll have to get back to the member on that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I understand that phase 2 tender award had been cancelled which, I understand, was

quite unprecedented. Can the minister tell us why a tender award was cancelled in June of 2013?

**Ms. Selby:** The new Selkirk Regional Health Centre, the member probably knows, is among the biggest health capital projects currently under way in the province. It's going to double the size of the current facility, including a 27 per cent increase in beds and a design that delivers 80 per cent private rooms. Compared to the current facility, it's only 20 per cent private rooms in the current facility.

There was a need for the Interlake-Eastern RHA to cancel the tender for the next phase of construction to ensure there'd be no question that the bidding process is fair and transparent, not unprecedented to reissue tenders on complicated projects such as this. I know that the community wants to see this building get built as soon as possible, and we're working with the region and the community to see that that happens.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate when construction will begin and what the completion date is?

**Ms. Selby:** I'll have to get back to the member with more information.

\*(16:40)

**Mrs. Driedger:** From an engineering perspective, are the piles still safe and safely can be built upon? Are they structurally still fine, seeing as they've been in the ground now, sticking out for—back since November of 2012? Do the piles have to be replaced or are they safe enough that building can still occur on top of them?

**Ms. Selby:** I have some answers for the member. Since the contract has been awarded, we're expecting construction to begin very soon and we are expecting the completion date to be 2017. And I should just advise the member that regarding the piles, that would have been considered in the construction tendering process, but, of course, we keep safety at the forefront of any design plan or anything construction moving forward.

**Mrs. Driedger:** How expensive is it going to be to have an engineer come now and evaluate the stability and safety of the piles?

**Ms. Selby:** Again, that all would have been considered in the construction tender, but, of course, safety is our top priority.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate will there be an engineering review of the piles as they've now been in there for quite some time with no building on top of them? And, structurally, you would want to be sure they're safe and still reliable.

Will there be an engineering review done or—I'm not sure if I've got the language right, but will an engineer come and look at them and determine that they're still structural—structurally sound? And how much would something like that cost?

**Ms. Selby:** I will have to get back to the member.

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** I was wondering if the minister could give me an update on the construction of a new hospital in Notre Dame de Lourdes.

**Ms. Selby:** I'll have to get back to the member with that information.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister tell us, does government use any private labs?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does a patient have to pay a fee then to have their specimens tested at those labs?

**Ms. Selby:** I can tell the member that we cover all testing medically necessary by a doctor.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does the government have contracts with any private clinics?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does a patient have to pay for care there at the private clinic?

\*(16:50)

**Ms. Selby:** Well, the member that the WRHA does do contracts for, echocardiograms and also some surgical procedures at no cost to the patients, but those clinics may also do private work such as plastic surgery.

**Mrs. Driedger:** How extensive is the use of private labs by the government?

**Ms. Selby:** We can get that information for the member.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And how many private clinics does the government have contracts with?

**Ms. Selby:** We have contracts with three private clinics. The member should know that we are always willing to work with private clinics to enhance medicare. But, of course, we stand firmly against a

two-tier, American-style health care. That's not what we're looking at. We're looking at contracts if it helps shorten wait times, if it's cost effective to do so. But, of course, most importantly, they need to comply with all of our regulations around patient safety and medical standards.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister name those private clinics?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes. Western, Maples and Atru.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Do hospitals and personal-care homes hire nurses from private companies?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes, sometimes.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And does the patient have to pay for those private-duty nurses themselves, or does the government pick up the salaries?

**Ms. Selby:** When an RHA is using an agency nurse to replace an existing nurse, the RHA pays.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And are there any privately owned personal-care homes that the government contracts with?

**Ms. Selby:** Yes.

**Mrs. Driedger:** And can the minister tell us what percentage of Manitoba's health-care system is privately funded?

**Ms. Selby:** I will have to get back to the member.

**Mr. Goertzen:** If I can just intercede quickly, for tomorrow's Estimates, I just want to ask that the second minister, the Minister responsible for Healthy Living and Seniors, be available for questions for tomorrow's Estimates. More as a matter of notice than as a question, Mr. Chairperson.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Will the minister be available tomorrow?

**An Honourable Member:** It was just information, so I don't think we have to respond.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay. all right.

As the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

#### CONSERVATION AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the ever-exciting Estimates of the

Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship. No pressure.

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

**Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris):** I wonder if the—just to continue on our line yesterday—if the minister can advise how many new staff were hired in his department in 2013-14?

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship):** Yes, no, I'm advised we'll have to dig that number up. Of course, there's the new hires every year. Whether there's a created record already or whether we have to comprise one from the divisions and put together a comprehensive answer, we'll pursue.

**Mr. Martin:** And, as well, if the minister can advise how many of those were the result of an open competition versus a direct appointment.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we'll indicate that along with the overall number.

**Mr. Martin:** Can the minister provide me with a description of any positions in his department that were reclassified in the last fiscal year, the 2013-14 fiscal year?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we can provide that I'm advised.

**Mr. Martin:** The outgoing auditor has expressed some concerns related to the government's handling of untendered contracts and the information provided. I'm wondering if the minister can provide me a—details on the contracts that have been awarded by his department and anything over, say, \$25,000 would be a reasonable cut-off.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, the Province utilizes tendering as the usual—in the usual course however sometimes there are good reasons to deviate from that. The department can certainly provide the list of the contracts but it's our understanding that the information is publicly available. But we can certainly rally that and provide it to the member directly.

**Mr. Martin:** Would the minister also undertake to clarify out of those contracts issued over \$25,000 in the last fiscal year, which of those contracts were tendered and which were not—which were untendered? And, as well, for those that were untendered, the minister indicated that there may be

reasons to, I think the term was to deviate from standard practices and result in the untendering of a contract so if the minister could touch—or provide that information as to why a contract may have been untendered?

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** I'm advised that in the listing of contracts for those that are untendered, a reason is inserted into the public document but we can find that document and provide it directly to the member. But I think it's available now publicly.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Honourable—I think you're up, honourable member for Morris.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if the minister can advise as well, as—any positions that may have been relocated in his department in the last fiscal year, either from rural Manitoba into Winnipeg or from other areas of the province.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The department advises there were no relocations, it appears, but that does not mean—there may have been some people that got different jobs and, you know, moved on their own, but there was no initiative, I understand, to relocate positions.

**Mr. Martin:** If the minister could provide us with a status update of any new departmental initiatives that were announced or undertaken in the last fiscal year and may have been publicly announced, say, like, in a news release or whatnot. So this obviously might be a bit of a longer answer, but if the minister can just highlight the status of any of those new initiatives undertaken by his department last year.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The announcements are—comprise a good list, and so we would have to compile that. I think I may have something that resembles that in my office, actually, in binder form, going back a year or so.

It would really start with the park strategy, and then there were some follow-up announcements with that. For example, there were public discussions around smoke-free beaches and playgrounds. There were public discussions and announcements around upgrades to particular parks, for example, Grand Beach and the Whiteshell. And so that was one dominant theme.

There were also announcements around climate-change efforts, both involving myself and some other ministers. That includes, of course, the methane capture at the Brady landfill site and, as

well, changes in the regulatory regime when it comes to coal and petcoke heating.

The other major theme aside from parks and climate change would be around Lake Winnipeg. Last year's been particularly busy in water—in the Water Stewardship Division because this is the year that we have launched the concept of the Lake Friendly Accord and subsequently began the task after the alliance considered the accord of engaging other jurisdictions. And I should say that the accord goes beyond engaging other governmental jurisdictions in the basin. The accord is designed to also engage sectors of Manitoba. Of course, this year, as well, we launched a lake-friendly alliance, and some of the other initiatives include the announcement in the Throne Speech around a study area for polar bear park and the launch of consultations in that regard. In June, as I recall, we announced our intentions regarding reducing pesticide exposure for children. And we also, as a result of some unfortunate incidents, have launched a review of trapping within provincial parks and that consultation is still ongoing. I think the timeline is still running or—*[interjection]*—yes, it is.

I missed a couple I can add. Spruce Woods, for example, has been the beneficiary of the biggest investment in provincial park in Manitoba history. Earlier, by the way, Winnipeg Beach had the biggest investment ever in a campground. But Spruce Woods, the Spruce Woods investment follows on the flood of 2011 which wiped out the park and we thought it was a great opportunity, instead of even entertaining the notion of walking away from the challenge there, to put in place both flood prevention initiatives and to rebuild the park. And that was accompanied by investments in St. Ambroise provincial park. St. Ambroise likely—likewise, was wiped out in the flood of 2011. So public commitments were made on that in the last year as well. There was also a commitment around the expansion of Birds Hill park and—oh, the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund was a subject of public discussion and the heritage tree legislation that went in last session.

On climate change there were a number of initiatives in addition to the methane capture and the coal and petcoke heating ban.

So I think those were the key areas of public release over the last year. But if there are some other areas that I missed that should be noted in Estimates, I'll—I can raise that at the next session if there's time.

**Mr. Martin:** If the minister can advise any travel, any out-of-province trips the minister took in the last fiscal year and the pertinent details with those trips: the purpose, the dates, who went, the costs and who paid?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, the member should be advised that that is all posted proactively, I think every quarter or so those details are online.

**Mr. Martin:** Can the minister provide a list of staff who have retired from the department in the last fiscal year?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Actually, coincidentally, tomorrow is staff recognition day in the department, and I hope to be there, even if it's for a brief time, and—given the calendar right now—but it's a great time to recognize those that have given a long time of their life to the public good and Conservation in particular and also to recognize some that are leaving us. But, yes, we can certainly provide that list. I think that they'd be readily available.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Martin:** Can the minister provide a complete list of any and all fees charged by the department in the last—that would've been—Manitobans would've been subject to in the last fiscal year?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The department does have a very significant regulatory role, and so, therefore, the list would comprise fees or fine levels under many, many different statutes. In fact, my—the binder in my office with the statutes is a good two or three inches thick, but the department is of the view that the Finance Department does have a list of the fees or other revenues, I guess, from other departments in their Estimates information. So we'll just check on that to make sure that it's available for the member and we'll advise him where that is listed.

**Mr. Martin:** Can the minister provide a cost on any advertising that his department may have done in the last fiscal year, as well as the cost of any individual ads, the location of those ads and the purpose?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The department is required by law to a great extent to publicly post information, whether it's under The Environment Act and, for example, I just saw an ad two weeks ago in the Free Press. I don't think those are cheap and I think worthy of reconsideration, in terms of the format, but I think the format actually may be set out in the regulation and so on. But we're going to have a look at that one.

But there's extensive advertising required, whether it's, of course, posting of jobs or other requests for consultation or involvement of the citizens. I guess the trapping in parks consultation would've had some ads that went with it. I'm just trying to think of whether there were any other awareness campaigns, other than the required advertising that is necessary under different statutes and we'll think that through more.

But we will—if there's—I don't know if there—the member has a certain area that he's interested in. I'm just—I'm advised that there's going to be quite an effort to amass the answer, given the widespread requirement of advertising across the divisions. We could make an effort but perhaps if there's an area of particular interest, it might just serve the public best if we could focus on an area where he has a concern.

**Mr. Martin:** Well and, obviously, I don't want to burden the department in a make-work project, so I mean we—I'm not particularly interested in any ads dealing with any classifications or, sorry, help-wanted HR ads, whatever. I'm specifically interested in advertising related to programs, policies and initiatives put forward by the department in the 2013-14 fiscal year. So I would imagine taking HR out of the component should take a significant chunk out.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** We were just talking about examples of some of the advertising that was done, and one example would be we did some limited public awareness to let Manitobans know to get back to us on the parks strategy. We are just recently putting out reminders on the coal and petcoke heating ban that is in the works. So that I saw across my desk recently. But we'll see what we can come up with, I think, and if we take HR out of it, we'll manage it as best we can.

**Mr. Martin:** If the minister can provide the number of freedom of information requests his department received in the last fiscal year.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The department recalls that this number may actually be compiled by the Ombudsman's office, but we'll search that out for the member.

**Mr. Martin:** And, while the minister's searching that out, if he could advise the number of those FOI requests that were responded to within the required 30 days.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we'll provide that.



**Mr. Martin:** If the minister can also provide me the number of complaints his department would've—that would've—sorry—would've gone to the Ombudsman's office as a result of interactions with his department.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we'll look to see if—it may be that the Ombudsman has that information readily at hand. So we'll make an inquiry.

**Mr. Martin:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise his most recent numbers in terms of the number of boil-water advisories that are in effect in Manitoba and where those boil-water advisories are.

\*(15:10)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we're just checking to see if indeed some recollections are accurate in that this is posted on our website. But for the benefit of the committee, it's my understanding that as of April 10, there are 129 boil-water advisories. That comprises 68 public water systems, 47 semi-public water systems and 14 areas served by privately owned wells. Manitoba has about 450 public water systems, has about 1,500 semi-public water systems and about 35,000 to 50,000 privately owned wells, to provide context.

Since 2000, the number of advisories that have been satisfactorily addressed and lifted include 241 public water systems, 62 semi-public water systems and seven areas served by privately owned wells for a total of 310.

The year-over-year changes are as follows: 46 in 2010 and 65 in 2011, 44 in 2012, 64 in 2013 and 14 in 2014.

The increased surveillance of the water utilities in Manitoba since 2003 has resulted in more systems that are deficient being identified and, of course, then more advisories being issued to the public as a result. Most of the advisories now in place are on very small water systems. In the end, about 99 per cent of Manitoba's population is not under an advisory. I can advise that there are no longer any long-term advisories in place for systems that serve more than 500 people.

That comprises the essence of the status update.

**Mr. Martin:** The number the minister identified for the boil-water advisories was, I believe, 129 currently. Would that include or comprise any boil-water advisories that are occurring on First Nations here in the province?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, the numbers provided are within areas of jurisdiction of the Province. And I was just advised, by the way, that Health Canada would issue advisories in respect to First Nations.

**Mr. Martin:** I understand the department previously had a significant backlog in terms of drainage licensing. I'm wondering what the status is.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, this is an area of significant regulatory reform currently. First of all, in terms of the drainage licence applications, we have been working with municipalities and other stakeholders to change the approach and to move towards the bundling of applications.

The member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) will be familiar with some of the work done just a few years ago. It has continued on, the—so the comparison over time may not be very useful in—because we have changed the approach. But, more significantly, as a result of stakeholder discussions, we have put together a new approach to drainage licensing in Manitoba. The efforts of Keystone Agricultural Producers, the conservation districts, the AMM, Ducks Unlimited and several government departments has led to a proposal that, in essence, sets out a risk-based approach to drainage licensing, unlike what we have seen in the past.

We've had a lot of complaints from producers and municipalities about overregulation of minor drainage works, whether that is replacing a culvert, for example, or cleaning out a ditch. And that has also imposed, then, a lot of burden on our public officers and most often, though, at a time of flooding in Manitoba, which has become more recurrent.

So the combination of all that concern has led to some good thinking across the sectors that we should lay off—is what some people call the culvert cops and focus greater attention on drainage that has more significant impact downstream or on the environment and notably on the drainage of what is called class 3, or what I would say are seasonal wetlands, that have a huge ecological benefit, both in terms of flood prevention, in terms of water storage and the potential there and, as well, drought mitigation.

And so the result of the cross-sector discussions is really offering a deal to farmers and to municipalities that the Province will get out of their face when it comes to the minor drainage works and will focus instead on maintaining the benefits of

seasonal wetlands. I think that is a much smarter way of regulating drainage in Manitoba.

In November at the AMM convention, the proposal was presented by one of our senior staff. And, I understand, about 300 people attended and gave a thumbs-up to the approach. We have talked to the conservation districts about this, as well, and many others in the meantime. So that is almost ready to go out in an official way for feedback of others in Manitoba, along with the surface water management strategy proposal. So it's certainly a key item on our work list.

**Mr. Martin:** Does the department have statistics on the number of individuals that they would fine or take legal proceedings against when it came to what, I guess, drainage that would run contrary to government regulations?

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The preferred method of attaining compliance with the regulatory regime is to work with landowners, to work with municipalities, to achieve a legal outcome and one that's right for neighbours downstream. Sometimes, when that doesn't work, and repeated efforts are required, and yet the result is not compliance, legal action is required.

I actually heard loud and clear from one municipality at the AMM convention that they were quite displeased that they were facing court action as a result of enforcement efforts by the Province, and that's certainly not the outcome that we would prefer but sometimes is necessary. On the other hand, we are also hearing from producers and municipalities of the need for even stronger enforcement when there are major infractions of our drainage licensing regime.

And so, in the result, we think it's important that we send a stronger message of deterrence. And we are looking, and we will consult with our stakeholders and Manitobans on ways to send a stronger message, particularly when it comes to significant changes to drainage in Manitoba.

We—just on another related topic—we certainly have heard concerns from Manitobans disproportionately on the west side of the province about water coming from Saskatchewan. And it was a recurrent theme, particularly at the last two or three AMM conventions. And so we are looking at different ways of approaching that and looking at some regional efforts at—across the border. And, as

well, I've had discussions with my counterpart in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan, now, is moving ahead with drainage licensing, in part, I think, based on the experience in Manitoba. I think they've had some challenges in moving in that direction, and I think that while they had the thumbs-up from many sectors, I know the municipalities weren't too keen. But we really have to support efforts in Saskatchewan as well because we are downstream from that province.

As well, there are other efforts that are taking place in the sub-basins of Lake Winnipeg basin that we support. There are efforts currently under way in the Assiniboine River, for example, to better co-ordinate activities there. And I look forward to the outcome of discussions that have been happening relatively recently in that regard.

**Mr. Martin:** And the minister had indicated that, obviously, legal action is not the preferred route that his department wants to take in relation to individuals that may find themselves on the wrong side of the—of regulations comes to drainage.

Is arbitration an option for these individuals when presented with the information that they may run afoul of water stewardship and conservation rules and regulations when it comes to drainage?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** As one of my colleagues reminds me, water ain't just for drinking and growing; it's for fighting, and that's—[interjection] Is that Harry Enns? It was, I think, the member for Interlake that had passed on something like that to me.

But we certainly know in Manitoba that the history of water can be hugely contentious, and I think it's always important that our officers rally any available techniques to solve disputes between neighbours or municipalities. And I know that efforts like that have been done in the past, and, of course, adjacent landowners can always use arbitration if they so wish. But I think that the efforts of our officers, from what I understand, has been, in no small way, focused on efforts to get the parties to agree. And, in fact, I'm aware of one in the—I think in the Ste. Rose area, where it was an ongoing challenge working with a party there. And the department really tried to bring in the folks and try to find a common ground, and sometimes it's not possible, but I think it's part of the mix of how we can ensure that drainage licensing works for

everyone. I think that we have to remember that everyone is downstream and anyone can be next in terms of feeling the brunt of wrongful drainage, so it's a good reminder that we're all in this together. So that, I think, has been the approach that I've been apprised of.

**Mr. Martin:** I appreciate the minister's comment that obviously arbitration is something that his staff advocates and, in the field, works towards those solutions—and the minister's examples given. And pardon me if it's there—and just my—obviously new, that I'm not aware of it, but is an arbitration option, is that a formal part of the licence—or, sorry, of the actual legislation or regulation when it comes to drainage, or is that something done almost on an ad hoc basis in terms of a general policy or general direction?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Arbitration, of course, is a model that's available for two parties. And we—the government can't impose on that on two parties successfully. Also, of course, mediation only works when the two parties agree to mediation. That's the—of course, the prerequisite for mediation. So, you know, whether it's—attaching those labels to it may not be the way that the officers always, in the field, work at this, but perhaps we could sit down with the member and we could have, perhaps, one of our senior officers—I was thinking of, you know, Geoff Reimer, for example—that, you know, we could have a discussion if the member would like some time in terms of how they deal with these matters in the field on a regular basis. And it may be that we can explore some better ways of dealing with this, but I think that their experience might inform us on how successful, by in large, we can be, and at the same time recognizing that there can always be room for improvement, perhaps.

But, having said that, I am hearing voices from the farm gate and from the municipal councillors that there should be an even stricter application of the law or at least a stronger message to prevent breaches of the drainage licensing regime. So we have, I think, a mix of views on how it should be enforced. It does depend on individual situations, I think, by in large.

**Mr. Martin:** The—this jumps track, but the minister's, actually, words just triggered me to another thing that I've had conversations about, and that's the mixed use of views. And when it comes to off-road vehicles, I've—just in my very short tenure as critic, not surprising, I have had very divergent views on off-road vehicles in use and on Crown lands in

provincial parks. I understand that the government has a policy or has been developing a policy when it comes to the use of off-road vehicles on Crown lands in provincial parks?

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** It's right that there certainly have been varying views on, for example, ATV use, and that is why it's necessary to now look anew at policy. The Off-Road Vehicles Act is under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), but, because of the importance of this issue, when it comes to Crown lands, we have an active role in policy development.

First, I want to just say that it is my firm belief that the different views can be reconciled. I think that ATVs are a very important part of recreational activity in Manitoba. I think it's a great time for families to get together. It's a great reason for Manitobans to get outdoors and see nature, and I can go on about why that is important because we have to do better. We have to get kids outdoors in ways that we didn't before.

We also know that there are concerns that have been expressed from time to time about how the ATVs impact the landscape then and other trail users. So it's a matter of finding the balance, and, clearly, if you can designate trails for certain uses, that can avoid conflicts. Sometimes that's not always necessary—or not always possible, I'm sorry.

One of the examples that our department had a direct involvement in was in the constituency, actually, of the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) in a wildlife management area called Mars Hill. It was an area where ATV use was becoming very pronounced. By the way, I should just add that ATV purchase and use is rapidly growing and the type of vehicles is changing, and so this is an area that has to be managed to a greater extent.

And we can take some of the experiences, for example, in Minnesota, where they've been working on this one for quite some time, into account as we develop our strategy. But we can also be informed by what happened at Mars Hill. So the department consulted with the user groups out there and others in the community that were concerned about the use of that important wildlife management area, and we arrived at a detailed plan for designated trails, and it wasn't easy to arrive at that. I mean there were huge debates about even, like, one trail versus another. There was one particularly sensitive area that we had

an eye on. But, as a result of all that, there was an acceptance of the plan. It wasn't the first of its kind either. We—that was also informed by work that was done over on the west side in the Swan River area where we were able to tackle the challenge. So, you know, we saw experiences where, particularly in wet—in the wet season, the ATVs would start to broaden the trail because it was too wet in the middle. It's called braiding, actually, I was told. And it gets to a point where the trail becomes so wide that you're really hurting land that should be protected.

So I think that there's reason for optimism based on the experience in Manitoba, based on experiences elsewhere. That plan is now in place, and I have not heard of any pushback on the approach to Mars Hill, and quite frankly, I'm surprised in a way because there were some very entrenched views at the beginning.

So we have to accommodate it, and we have to make sure that we also take into account some of the interests of the snowmobile-loving population of Manitoba because, again, there's a—for some it's a way of life, it's a means to make a living. For others, it's great for recreational value. I was able to go out, for example, with the snowmobile club in Nopiming last winter, and I can see the camaraderie there and the—just the exuberance of all the members getting together on weekends, establishing strong bonds. There's a support system in place; you know, the kids all know each other. And again just the value of getting out in the great outdoors is so important, which is why, of course, in many of our provincial parks we have excellent trails that are famous far and wide and I think are an important part of park infrastructure. So, and snowmobile—Snoman, I was just talking with them today, for example, but they certainly have some interest that the opposition is aware of in terms of their—the Snopass, and that is under very serious consideration.

But then, just getting back to wrap it up on the essence, I think, of the question, because off-road vehicle use involves so many departments, an interdepartmental committee is now concluding a proposed strategy for feedback from Manitobans. And Transportation is the lead on that one—and rightly so. And, finally, on Snoman, we're also working across departments and with MPI to investigate Snoman's request to review the funding structure of the Snopass system. As I said to a representative of Snoman today, I think that we could find some symmetry in terms of how snowmobile trails are done and maintained with

ATVs, recognizing, though, that snowmobile trails in Manitoba are of many different kinds, and in the North, for example, there's very different use and maintenance practices up there that have to be taken into consideration. So it's not a, I think, a one-size-fits-all approach that is called for.

**Mr. Martin:** Does the minister have a time frame in terms of the anticipated completion of the review and introduction of, I guess, new legislation?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** As I recall, the commitment was set out in TomorrowNow-Manitoba's Green Plan, but we'll check with Transportation and determine what the likely timelines are.

**Mr. Martin:** If the minister would be so kind to advise and update on the UNESCO designation that his government is seeking.

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** So I don't know if the member wants us to go back and review the recent history on this, but perhaps the jumping-off point might be the consideration that took place last, was it in June, which deferred the nomination at that time, which was, I think, both good news and bad news in that while the nomination was just not accepted, at the same time they gave some very complimentary kudos to the effort, and for the first time decided that there should be some visitation by representatives of the organizations so that the bid can be put over the top.

The decision of the World Heritage Committee would be taken during the session of the UNESCO committee in June of 2016. So the work has been certainly launched, and revising the new—or putting forward the new bid, and my understanding is that the next intake date is February 1 of 2015. There had been efforts to get a—the new bid in a few months ago, but the advice of the UNESCO folks was to make sure that we took the time necessary, and by the word we, I mean the efforts of the First Nations in particular in Manitoba, Ontario, and as well, the governments of Ontario, Manitoba and Canada.

*Mr. Bidhu Jha, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

So the effort now is focused to a great extent on documenting the patterns of use of the land by the First Nations of the area and everything from wild rice harvesting, the use of fire, you know, places where they camp, place names, the—essentially, the interconnection between First Nations and the land.

We might add that at the outset, there was a challenge to this nomination in that it was what's called a mixed site and that it was a nomination that included both natural and cultural heritage components, and the results of the bid so far has clearly indicated that to UNESCO—and it has accepted this—that there needs to be some change in how those mixed bids are dealt with. But that work is ongoing at the same time, which, of course, is bigger than little old Manitoba, but, in the meantime, our bid is being fashioned to recognize the mixed bid as it's currently required.

We've had ongoing partnerships, of course, with Parks Canada. They've supported the—this is actually Parks Canada's bid. I think there might be some misconception. Parks Canada is the sponsor of the bid. I had personal discussions with the Ontario government around the timing of—the preparation of the next bid, and I think there's unanimity that we're on a good course now with timelines that are certainly achievable with what will be surely a very strong bid.

Mr. Acting Chairperson, I've also heard from independent non-governmental organizations that this bid is very strong. And I think it will provide the world with an important story and an important place to visit for those that do visit UNESCO World Heritage sites. I understand there's a cadre—not too large, hopefully, because this—it's a sustainable tourism draw that's contemplated here, not a high-visit draw. But the recognition of this part of the boreal forest, I think, will serve humanity and Mother Earth well in the years ahead if we can succeed.

Now in the meantime, the nominated lands are protected by an Aboriginal- or a First Nation-led process and the Legislative Assembly has put that legislation in place and the regulations have now all been promulgated so that will remain no matter what the outcome of the bid. So that as well, I think, is a beacon because it was an historic recognition of the leadership and the insights of the First Nations of the area that led to the whole legislative scheme. As I recall, I think it was unanimously endorsed by the Legislative Assembly. But that recognition of Aboriginal decision making, I think, is key to our partnership as a province as we go ahead.

**Mr. Martin:** Can the minister give me an idea of any funds allocated in this most recent budget related to the UNESCO bid?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, I think I can obtain that on a timely basis. There will be an amount for administration that's continuing, there is—I know there is some reduction, a nominal reduction over the last year or two, but I'll confirm the numbers there, just in line with other grants, and as well, there is an amount for administration and a trust payment. But I just have to confirm that, so we can get that for the member in short order.

**Mr. Martin:** And I understand, as part of the UNESCO bid, there is a foundation that's been set up, the land that gives campaign: I'm wondering if the minister can update me on the status of that campaign?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, there was a fund that has been established; it's held by The Winnipeg Foundation. And the organization itself launched an awareness campaign, what, two or three years ago to start to draw attention to the area and as a result of that early effort, which, really, I don't think would be fair to characterize as fundraising, it's just an awareness strategy, but they had private donations of \$120,329. And we expect that if the nomination is successful as we anticipate, that then a fundraising campaign will be launched in earnest for that. Of course, then there will be a UNESCO World Heritage Site that will be the hook that was not there before. But, nonetheless, there was some good fundraising efforts that were made.

**Mr. Martin:** The minister made the comment that, obviously, the tourism draw that he anticipates or would hope in terms of achieving that UNESCO designation would be a sustainable tourism. I'm wondering if the minister has—his department or his government has done any studies in terms of what they're anticipating in terms of the tourist potential of a UNESCO designation.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** We understand that World Heritage Sites certainly can provide a tourist draw. But, having said that, it's important that it be recognized. This isn't, you know, like a Taj Mahal where it's easily accessible, and this is a very different kind of site.

Now they're—I think, first of all, we have to start with the understanding that there are outfitters in the area and some very well-known outfitters. And I think there's certainly an interest in expanding not only the existing opportunities, but starting new opportunities and developing Aboriginal ecotourism

as well or sustainable tourism, as I think they—the proper term is. So I think the expectation is that there will be a bump in tourist activity, but it has to be sustainable. It will have, you know, cultural components.

We also know that the rivers on the east side have been recognized internationally, and, indeed, when I was up there looking at what the offering was, I'd heard that even people from British Columbia were saying there's nothing like that even in that province, which, I think, is a great compliment. But the rivers are fantastic in terms of the opportunity for canoeing, in particular. The vistas aren't long, a lot of turns. There are enough rapids there to make it kind of exciting, but it is very beautiful country.

So I think there's some good potential there, but I think it's important, too, that it not be overstated, because, first of all, I don't think we want huge populations of tourists there. That wasn't the intention. But we certainly want to see that there is greater economic activity as a result of tourism, nonetheless.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Martin:** The minister used the term that there will be—a definite bump is the term the minister used in terms of sustainable tourism. So can the minister advise, then, what that level is currently and what that bump may constitute in terms of their Estimates?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The real potential here, I think, will be for Aboriginal ecotourism opportunities, and that has to be developed. And so that is an area that focus is required on.

The plan of the board, I understand, according to my advice, was that the tourism potential focus was planned for post-June 2013, after the bid had been considered. But, with the new bid now required, that focus is, once again, on the bid. So there are some efforts that are under way, but the main focus right now is getting the bid in. And then the focus on enhancing ecotourism opportunities will then be prioritized once again.

**Mr. Martin:** As part of the efforts to 'hance' the sustainable tourism that the minister talks about, and obviously the opportunities for the First Nations and for the other businesses that currently exist in the area, will that require additional infrastructure in terms of accessing for these—for tourists?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** When it comes to infrastructure, first of all, there's lodges at Poplar River and Bloodvein. They're First Nations-run. And, as well, we have the other operations, whether it's Aikens, for example. So there can be opportunities for expansion there.

\* (16:00)

But the focus has largely been not on any road network, if that's what the member might be interested in. But it's really looking at how to enhance the canoeing experience, for example, that has been recognized internationally and ensuring that there's the proper supports for getting people in and out when they pursue that kind of activity. That's the advice that I have in terms of where the main focus is when it comes to sustainable tourism. There may be other opportunities in terms of just cultural tourism. So that would also be the subject of further exploration.

**Mr. Martin:** Changing direction now, Mr. Chair, to the issue of cottagers and the fee increases that they're facing under this government's decision to increase rents and fees by upwards of 750 per cent. I know the minister and I have had some conversations in the House about this issue. I'm hoping that here we'll have a less rhetorically engaged conversation so we can get a better understanding of some of the issues that the cottagers are bringing forward on an issue that is of key importance to them.

So I do know, in the department's information that they provided and made public, there's an indication or statement that 72 per cent of funding for our parks is provided by the taxpayer or, I guess, the general revenues, as opposed to cottagers, and that the goal is to obviously recoup those costs.

Now the minister has previously indicated in the House, and I acknowledged that the information may have been inaccurate in an op-ed written by, I believe, the Whiteshell cottage association, that the minister indicated that some numbers may have been double-counted. So, notwithstanding the double-counting of that number, which would reduce the current cottage service fees collected from 1.7 down to \$852 million, would the minister be able to comment on the accuracy of the estimated revenue from cottage park passes of approximately \$250,000?

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, we'll just confirm the number for the member of the total revenues from park

passes. But everyone is required to have a park pass, and that, of course, there was some relief from that during the difficult economic environment. But that is back on there now.

In terms of the article in the Free Press a couple of weeks ago, it actually—it listed \$1.7 million as the current cottage service fees collected, and then in another line called vacation home lease and permits, it listed \$4 million, but that includes the \$1.7 million in service fees again, along with \$2.3 million in rent. So the service fees of \$1.7 million were double-counted, suggesting that cottagers pay far more than they do.

And, I suspect, as said in the article, the—you know, the numbers were pulled together from disparate government accounts, according to what was said in that article, and so it looks like the sources may have been, whether it's an annual report of Crown lands or—and some other numbers put together. So that was unfortunate. But, of course, what was, I think, more interesting was a thesis that once you pay for your services, your utilities, that you should no longer be paying for your access to Crown land in your rent. And that would be very—that is a very odd position to take if that's the member's position. So not only were there errors in the numbers in that opinion editorial, there were other errors in that editorial as well. But I think fundamental was some suggestion that park auditors should be relieved of paying fair market value for the use and occupation of their land.

So, given the freeze on the fee since 2003 and the rapidly—or the significantly increasing value of park cottages generally, and that does vary from location to location, in our view it is fair and reasonable to provide a decade to catch up, recognizing that anyone who presents a certified appraisal of their land that differs from the department's assessment will simply be accepted. And, as well, to avoid undue hardship, we are prepared to enter into an agreement with any park cottager who wishes to defer payment until the cottage is sold, and that would include interest of course. But there are—those are only some examples of really a fairly lengthy list of efforts to ensure that the catch-up period has several mitigation efforts attached to it.

I think that another area that has been the subject of some advocacy is concerns about whether the effort was transparent, and I look at what the efforts are there, they really are historic starting, of course,

with the announcement of the park strategy about one year ago where we talked about how we have to sustain our parks on a long-term basis. Our park cottagers enjoy, by and large—does differ according to different park districts—access to a vast network of roads that often enable year-round access. In fact, I think now I've heard that Riding Mountain has reduced some of the year-round access to parts of that park. But year-round access I have seen firsthand, for example, in Nopiming where the snowmobile club can be active and the cottagers can make use of their investment year round, and as well in our parks. And I say this because I share a cabin with family on Rainy Lake where there is no running water, there's no potable water, there is a pit privy only, there's no—and until recently there was no road access. How the value not only of the property but the quality of cottage life is enhanced when there is waste-water treatment, when there is potable water and as well when there are places even to bring your waste.

\*(16:10)

In terms of the—getting back to the transparency issue, so with the release of the park strategy there was a three-month consultation period, there were open houses held across Manitoba, it was attended by hundreds of people. The estimated service costs and fees were posted online last year. There were then meetings with associations. There were face-to-face meetings on fees. There were—there was detailed correspondence back and forth and, of course, one of the associations engaged legal counsel very early on even before I think numbers were known and I understand they're once again looking at legal action, and so be it. But there are review mechanisms already in place. Of course, we had direct letters to the cottagers with explanations; we had the independent outside audit; and we've got about 1,000 pages online now that respond or that I think proactively put out the background information, the fees, the audit and the Deloitte report. So that provides some of the background.

You know, we see in other provinces, for example, in Ontario, where there have been very aggressive measures taken to rebalance the contribution to provincial parks to ensure ongoing environmental and financial sustainability. I think Ontario has gone to between 80 and 90 per cent of park user contributions to the cost of provincial parks there. We are almost the reverse here in Manitoba, so we've got to, in a steady and fair and transparent way, start to address that and start to move along to a

greater contribution to the maintenance of our parks by those who use it.

But the first thing to address, of course, is to achieve some fairness when it comes to service costs. I'm hearing over and over again the concern from Manitoba cottagers outside of parks why they are paying for their cottage and contributing to park cottages at the same time, and it really does have to be addressed in the interests of fairness. When it comes to public subsidies, our only interest here is to find a result that is fair for everyone. And I think that when you compare, for example, the fees in the national park at Riding Mountain, there is a huge, huge discrepancy. And I'm hearing over and over again from those that—in fact, today, again, another person that owns property in a municipality that has no cottage on it yet, and yet they're paying over \$3,000 just for bare land.

So there is the challenge of addressing the unfairness between those inside—those that cottage inside parks and outside parks, but then during the consultations we heard a pattern of concern that within the parks themselves there was unfairness as between those that had very substantial, even year-round homes versus those that have very modest places. And so over the years ahead now, we are committed to developing a different appraisal model that I think will even ensure greater fairness as between park cottagers themselves.

So that would be my response to the member's concerns and some remarks as to the opinion editorial that unfortunately had serious error in it.

Oh, and I'll just—one more thing. It is, I think, obvious to all that our parks have to modernize. The infrastructure that's in place is not up to the expectations and, I think, the environmental needs of the modern day. We have to invest \$20 million alone in waste water upgrades in the Lake Winnipeg basin. Cottagers should—cottagers in our parks should know that they can swim in waters that are clean and safe. It's not only about Lake Winnipeg; it's about the lakes that their cottage fronts onto. The cottagers in our parks, they want year-round access to their cottage to enjoy their investment and to have their family have the benefit of great cottage life that that provides. I think cottagers want even more and more access to potable water.

So those are the modern-day expectations, and I think the Province has a role to help to provide that. But it has to be based on a foundation of funding fairness, and I think that really recognizes that

cottaging is an important part of Manitoba life and we have to sustain those services that make cottaging so accessible, safe and enjoyable, without damaging the environment and Lake Winnipeg, for example. I know, in Ontario, there were very serious recent concerns about cottaging in Algonquin Park. We want more cottaging in our parks. In fact, in our park strategy, we've committed to increasing the number of available cottage lots so that we can continue to offer that opportunity for Manitobans.

But, again, we have to get over the freeze. We have to get on with catching up. We're going to provide a decade to do that and increasingly look to see how we can ensure fairness as we do that. But, yes, we have to sustain that Manitoba dream of cottage life, and we have to do it over the long term.

**Mr. Martin:** I appreciate the minister's comments. And just to clarify, for the minister's information, and he can have his department check on it, but the national park access hasn't changed at Riding Mountain.

The minister also made a comment about how they have frozen fees. I'm sure the minister has received the same correspondence, and a great deal of correspondence, from cottagers. And I'll quote from one indicating that the first service fee invoice that I received was for fiscal year 2000-2001. It was \$185. This included a pass to access my property in the park. My last bill for 2011-12 was for \$273, and addition, I had to pay another \$40 to access my property for a total of \$313. That is an increase of \$128 per year or 69 per cent over 11 years. I would argue that an average increase of over 6.2 per cent per year over 11 years is not a free ride. So the minister indicating that there has been this freeze is simply not valid.

And I'm not sure if I—when the minister was making his comments, that if the minister implied that cottagers not only may be subject to increases in the range of upwards of \$750, but they may find themselves subject to also the education tax being imposed on cottages.

All that being said, Mr. Chair, I understand that in The Provincial Parks Act, sections 18(3) and 20 obviously outline that the minister needs to prepare an estimate that costs, direct or indirect, which will be incurred the next fiscal year, in respect of each park district, which shall include but not be limited to, in sewage, garbage and so on and so forth. And I would imagine the minister and his department is



quite aware of sections 18(3) and 20 of The Provincial Parks Act.

I believe that the minister would be of the view that the current data dump on his—on the department's website would meet those conditions in his estimation. My question to the minister is whether or not this data is also available for the years 2000 onwards on an annualized basis, as noted in, again, sections 18(3) and 20 of The Provincial Parks Act.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, I understand there's—was some litigation on this one going back years, but we have to make it clear that we are not pursuing park cottagers for amounts that were not paid in the past for the services they enjoyed. There—we're not going back in time. We're not—the concept that if you're going to charge, your service cost depends on you providing the service costs; I think that is a fair approach in law. But the fact is, going back, the Province was not charging the full amount of services, let alone the fair market value for the rent. So let's make that very clear.

In terms of the freeze, the member—I was very clear that there's been a freeze for 10 years. That was 2003. And there were two letters to the editor that said, oh, my fees have gone up significantly. We actually looked at those amounts, and there were some minor, actually, reductions on those two. So the member had a time period that was different than what I had said publicly.

\* (16:20)

The—and I was just provided with a reminder that a freeze was on services fees since 2003 and on rent, actually, since the late 1990s—so that is extraordinary, while at the same time, those properties have generally enjoyed very significant increases in value. And so it's just time for fairness, and fairness does mean we mitigate as much as possible the need to get back to what was originally contemplated in the whole legislative scheme, that I trust members actually participated in, and that is that if you're a park cottager you pay for your service costs the same as every municipality proceeds on the basis of. The same as Riding Mountain. You know, I was—Riding Mountain National Park, a \$5,000 rent and service fee for a lakefront cottage there, \$375 in Nopiming, \$800 in Falcon Lake. And I can have numbers from municipalities, but, you know, when we are looking at how we make investments in human services, I think one necessarily comes to the conclusion that you have to ask, where should

taxpayer subsidies go? And I think that I'm hearing loud and clear from Manitobans, they're saying taxpayers should not be subsidizing park cottagers because other cottagers are paying their fair share when it comes both to the fair market value of their property and their service fees.

In terms of the information online, never in the history of the province has so much information been crunched in terms of the expected amount of service fees that went up on the website last year, and then the final amount that went up after the audit was done by Grant Thornton. And, by the way, and the member had said in the House, well, there was a qualified audit. It was qualified only in respect of historical capital investments, but the Auditor General of Manitoba has audited that and—but we have asked the auditor to go back and we'll provide the original documentation, but we don't expect to see any change there, and if there is then adjustments will be made.

But I think we have to keep in mind that we must address this issue, and I find it bewildering that the opposition would, for example, start the question period yesterday by saying that we should end taxpayer subsidies to strengthen democracy; at the end of question period they said, well, we should actually reintroduce taxpayer subsidies for park cottagers. I think that that is—that's an odd set of priorities for a political party. But we have to move towards fair funding. We can't have these heavy taxpayer subsidies continue. At the same time, we have to ensure an ongoing great quality of life for our park cottagers, and that has to be achieved.

The park strategy set out an investment of \$100 million over the next eight years, and much of that—not all of that at all, because camping is also very important, but a great deal of those investments are going to further benefit park cottagers and will enhance their investment. So—and I take the point that there may be some park cottagers that will feel a crunch. I think the average increase this year is about \$247. We had crunched the number on that one a couple of weeks ago for a park cottager. And, if some feel that that is too great to bear, we would certainly welcome, you know, a deferral arrangement with that—with any cottager that is so concerned.

So, when you look at even comparing fees for park use, a yurt is \$56, I'm advised. And, if you look at the fees, a cottager is paying significantly less at the same time has an asset of increasing value. So, you know, I know many, many people that are park

cottagers and they come from all walks of life, and I think that the initiative that we have introduced recognizes that there are people of many different incomes that are park cottagers and that has to be respected because we want Manitobans from all backgrounds to appreciate, and even to a greater extent, the great outdoors and Manitoba parks and, indeed, either living or summering in our provincial parks.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, I mean, the minister talks about what he calls an odd position and yet asks rhetorically where should taxpayer's subsidies go, but he has no problem of taxpayer subsidies going to his own political party in a situation where his government is posting massive deficits in the two to 400 million dollars so that his government actually has to borrow said money to loan, or actually not loan, to give to his political party and Manitobans and for the next who knows how many years because the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) has no clue when that general purpose debt will be paid off. We'll actually have to pay not only the original amount, provided to his political party, but we'll actually have to pay interest costs on those. So, yes, I do agree with the minister that it is odd the things that some political parties want the taxpayer to subsidize.

That being said, I note that the minister didn't specifically address my query, though, as to sections 18.3 and section 20 of The Provincial Parks Act that the minister has to, on an annual basis, in each fiscal year in respect of each park district, provide the aforementioned information as outlined in the act

I'd be more than willing—I understand obviously it would be a significant amount of data but, I mean, as the act outlines, I mean, this is something that the minister and his predecessors would have done, so, I mean, instead of cutting down excess number of trees to provide me a printout, if the minister just simply wants to bring a flash drive tomorrow with the preceding years of this data, that would be acceptable for me as well.

I note the minister also made comment about how the costs and services being provided to cottagers and to run provincial parks simply hasn't kept up to provide the amenities that people expect. I think the minister actually yesterday made reference—it's a lot of—in a lot of provincial parks the amenities are from the '60s and '70s and that—yet, I mean, the same minister has been in office since 1999, here we are in 2014 and it almost—the

impression we're left with is that the government woke up one day and said, you know, we're behind in terms of revenues for our cottages. But, during that same time frame where the government says, you know, we don't have enough revenues to properly and adequately fund our provincial parks, and somehow that these cottagers are freeloaders in our parks, we're going to give all Manitobans free access to provincial parks and forgo revenues of seven, eight million dollars during that three-year time frame, monies that the minister is acknowledging today would have gone, at least in some manner, towards the improvement of services to the park.

So again, if the—so my question to the minister is whether or not the minister can provide myself with a flash drive of this—of the information on an annualized basis outlined in section 18(3) and 20, The Provincial Parks Act for the 2000—and obviously current I don't need, that's on the government's website.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Well, we'll go back and, you know, we can revisit the old court case and service costs and so on, but if—is the member saying that if we're going to provide that information that his party thinks that we should go and ask for back payment, because we had no intention of doing that. We're moving on a go-forward basis; we are saying over the next 10 years we want to recover, on a fair basis, the amount that's needed to service the park districts and achieve fair market value rent for the properties.

\* (16:30)

So, you know, that, I understand was all hashed out as—in a—some court case that had been launched, and I think that at that time, perhaps because of the proceedings, the Province backed off on pursuing some fair funding, but we have to proceed and, you know, if there's further court proceedings, then there's another independent set of eyes in addition to the auditor, in addition to, you know, anything the Ombudsman might want to do or—and that, I can only say, we should welcome because we've got to get on with the job of supporting park cottagers for the services that make their quality of life good, and at the same time, being fair in terms of how we get back to where, I think, the Legislative scheme originally intended us to go, and that was a recovery of service costs and fair market value for rent.

But I'll just add another footnote, that on coming into office the government made significant investments across Manitoba in provincial parks. The

parks strategy is the latest iteration of investment on a go-forward basis until 2020, but I feel somewhat compelled to rally an example of some of the investments that have been made in parks over the last number of years, historic investments, as well.

But there still is work to be done, and I—for example, I think of Winnipeg Beach and the complete redesign of that campground. It is a remarkable investment, I think, for vacationers but the—and I've seen, for example, last year when I visited the Whiteshell, many investments there, whether it's the water plant at Falcon Lake, for example—very proud operator, I will add—and down the list, but I don't want to detract from the member's narrative. But the investment that we are embarked on now is building on some very significant investments over the last number of years.

But it's important that as we proceed that those who benefit from that pays their fair share, and I have never heard that as an objection. I have heard, though, objections about what the amount is and that is why we have done the detailed number crunching. And we brought in people that have expertise in this area including people from the Finance Department, people from independent auditing agents, whether it's Deloitte or whether it's Grant Thornton, and we are very—we are certainly open to any other outside independent scrutiny because our only interest is to get it right. We have no interest whatsoever in being unfair on how cost is allocated.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, you know what? It's always nice, I mean, despite, you know, obviously, the partisan politics that we can often get engaged in in this—in these Chambers and that, that the minister and I can agree on the concept of fair share, and, I mean, that's been a message that the cottagers in telephone calls with myself and in emails and in public statements that they've made are fully cognizant and willing to pay their fair share. And, yes, the dispute or the disagreement seems to lie in the amounts that the government is imposing on those cottagers and that the increase of upwards of 750 per cent, many cottagers are suggesting, does not constitute their fair share.

The minister also makes a comment about the information that I'm asking for and references a court case. I'm simply asking for information that the minister's own legislation that falls under his department, The Provincial Parks Act, outlines needs to be prepared on an annual basis and made public on an annual basis, so I don't think I'm asking for

anything out of the ordinary. I'm simply asking for information that the government is, again, according to its own legislation, compelled to gather and to perform on an annual basis, regardless.

Now, I know, previously, that the minister's colleague for Flin Flon, who's here, has made suggestion that we need to get those—some of those cottages out of our provincial parks. As well, the minister makes indication that the 750 per cent increase over the next 10 years that a lot of cottagers are facing is simply to pay for the cost of the services being provided to them in the phase-in process, and yet his colleague stated on the public record that those fees and the increase in fees that cottagers are paying will actually be used for the government's general revenues in order for the government to open up new provincial parks.

So a bit of sort of differing messages coming from the government on this file that on the one hand that the fees are there to simply—as a cost recovery of services being provided. And yet the member's own colleagues are suggesting that the fees, excess fees that the cottagers will be paying as a result of these increases, will be used to go towards general revenues and the opening up of new provincial parks, which, again, obviously, the opening up of additional provincial parks is something to be lauded but shouldn't be done at the—on the back of cottagers and shouldn't be done an end-run on cottagers in terms of this planned increase.

The minister also talks about and uses the example of the, you know, the \$5,000 fee in Riding Mountain National Park and has asked me rhetorically in the House on several occasions whether or not that's where I would like to see cottagers here in the province to go. I'm sure, again, the minister has received—actually, I know the minister has received the same correspondence that I have. In it, an individual who owns property at Falcon Lake notes that, in our case, as it will be the case for many others, land, rent and park fees will go from \$1,023.50 in 2012 to \$5,556.21 once the phase-in rebate is eliminated.

So it's almost passing strange that the minister's example of Riding Mountain National Park, \$5,000, this individual actually goes beyond that once the—once it's fully implemented. And the—this individual actually would be better off under the minister's suggestion that we go to a national park model, which, again, I find passing strange, since he uses the national park model as something to be apparently—

something that he needs to rally against and protect Manitobans from when his own government is going that way, at least in relation to this one individual at Falcon Lake.

I'd like the minister, actually, to respond specifically to an email that he would have received from the treasurer of the Singush Lake cottage association at Duck Mountain Provincial Park. He would have sent an email to the minister on the weekend indicating that—again, this was the treasurer of the park and had conducted a detailed analysis of the cottage costs using the NDP's provided numbers—and, quote, report that for the 2012-13 fiscal year, 44 cottages paid 87.44 per cent of the entire costs attributed to Singush Lake, end quote.

I'm wondering if the minister has had an opportunity to look at this Singush Lake cottage association treasurer's email to determine the validity of the numbers that he cites in that he obviously made note that some of the numbers in Mr. Klass's Whiteshell cottage association's op-ed may have been incorrect.

So, again, I'm giving the opportunity for the minister to correct or at least verify the numbers, again, provided by the Singush Lake association—cottage association—that their 44 cottage paid, again, 87.44 per cent of the entire costs attributed to the lake.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** The cottage community in question is a significant part of the service demand for that particular community. And that's why the amounts vary from park district to park district because there is a varying source of demand, if you will, as between campers and cottagers.

\*(16:40)

The—just to go back on some of the remarks, we have put in place a cap of \$3,000, which the member should recall. And just in terms of Riding Mountain, by the way, that \$5,000 fee is for a 300,000 lake—\$300,000 lakefront cottage. The \$375 fee last year for Nopiming—that's a \$350,000 lakefront cottage. And the \$800 fee at Falcon was for a \$550,000 lakefront cottage. So it depends on the value as well in terms of the examples that the member is putting forward.

In terms of the municipalities—Flin Flon, for example—the mayor has expressed an interest in expanding town boundaries eastward, and we'll have to, you know, respond to that request at some point. But, obviously, there are a lot of

issues and challenges to just acceding to that request. But, nonetheless, they have concerns in that municipality and many other municipalities about people moving out of the towns and villages, setting up large, year-round homes and not paying, you know, contributions for services, which led to an AMM resolution in November that was sponsored by the municipality or the town of—I can't recall—of Lac du Bonnet, and I think that was overwhelmingly endorsed by the AMM. So it's important as well to keep that perspective in mind.

But we're certainly confident that in each of the last number of years, the province has certainly spent more on providing service to cottagers than was ever collected in fees, and going back a decade or more, it won't change the picture.

If the member wants to make a case that cottagers haven't paid their fair share, is he then going to make a case that they should have paid a fair share and should do so? Because that is not our effort. We're looking forward. We're trying to resolve what is an historical challenge and make sure that we have both cottager and taxpayer fairness in mind.

I've just had some further information passed to me about Singush. There is no commercial activity there. There's just 44 cottages and a very small campground. So the cottagers' percentage of costs attributed are 87 per cent. So the—our senior officials have certainly considered their concerns, and I understand that there's a meeting scheduled.

And, again, we are—it's very important that we show respect for any of the associations that have concerns, and so the department, I think, has bent over backwards, and I've asked them to do so to attend to the issues, to resolve them, to answer questions and in fact even offer the independent auditor up for the association so they can have a face-to-face question and answer, and we'll continue to do that.

And, if there are matters going forward that can be resolved, we want to do that. And, again, rent appeal is available to every park cottager, and I don't think I have ever heard of an offer where if you just bring a certified land value appraisal to us, we will accept that at face value. I think that's extraordinary, and I think that's very respectful, and it just shows our determination to get this right.

So I think that concludes my remarks on that question.

**Mr. Martin:** It's the—actually, it's the minister's case that the cottagers have not paid their fair share for the last decade, not mine. I mean, that's the basis as outlined, I mean, in the minister's park district and service fee and Crown land rental document, that these cottagers simply haven't paid their fair share over the last decade and have gotten a free ride.

And as the minister puts it, they have been subsidized by the taxpayer in his view and that these first-time home buyers and little old ladies, and so on and so forth, are now—are in the process of subsidizing again these individuals in their opulent, lakefront cottages on loon-filled lakes. And, yet I note the minister often likes to make references to lakefront cottages and full-season cottages, when in many instances the correspondences I receive are from cottagers that are built when provincial parks were made open to cottagers from probably 50 to 60 years ago by everything from teachers in our province to truck drivers and a whole assortment of individuals who simply saw that—an opportunity to access a getaway—a summer getaway. So the suggestion that somehow these all-season opulent palaces, this 6/49 dream or picture that the minister likes to paint in terms of cottages isn't valid. In fact, one piece of correspondence I received from one cottager referenced that his cottage—that he inherited from his—built by his grandparents was a mere 600-and-some-odd square feet, and it was nowhere near—obviously, nowhere near lakefront. So he took great issue with the government's and the minister's continual presentation in the media that all these cottages were these lakefront, opulent cottages.

Now, if the minister can advise for me, in the minister's data dump that was provided on the website, it makes reference to—and, I mean, I can just take the first one. I mean, it's literally picked at random only because it seems consistent—that when we're looking at cottagers, we have several columns. We have the total BR—bedroom column, the adjusted bedroom column and the capacity factor.

Can the minister advise the difference between the total bedroom as well as the adjusted bedroom? I note, for example, No. 33—again, I'm literally looking at the very first page of the data dump—indicated that there was zero bedrooms and they have an adjusted bedroom of four for the capacity factor of eight. I'm wondering if the minister can explain how those numbers are arrived at.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Well, if there's any incorrect information in respect of the description of cottage,

then the department would entertain that and make the correction. That's long-standing practice. The director of parks has responsibility for that.

I'm advised though that it's unlikely to result in any significant difference, but the original analysis was done by way of a survey that relied on the cottagers responding. But any information like that the department would want to hear and the correction would be duly made.

The—but when the member talks about the—who our park cottagers are—I think I said earlier today—but they really are Manitobans from all walks of life and from all—from very varying incomes and histories. And I know there are many very modest cottages out there which is why the cottagers were saying they would like to see a different appraisal model brought in.

\*(16:50)

We know that that's not going to be straightforward. We're going to learn from municipal government's experiences and the experiences of municipalities. But we take the view that we have to provide some greater relief for modest cottages and so that those with the—the example, as the member said, would see a reduction. And—but, as well, I think, in the meantime, the deferral mechanism really does pay respect to the fact that there are many different sizes and shapes and values of cottages and, as well, varying financial capacity of our cottagers. And we have to recognize that in our mitigation efforts, which was really what the deferral mechanism was about and, as well, of course, the cap.

But there has been this freeze too. I think it's important to know that over the last decade or so there has been very significant increases in the value of those properties. So that's why within five years we'll be ushering in a new assessment process, and so the individual with a 600-square-foot inherited cottage will be assessed at a much lower value than a much larger building.

And we're also aware, of course, that there's been a real increase in permanent residences, sometimes quite substantial, in our parks. And so that likely means that there is greater demand on services, and so that has to be worked into the formula that we'll work on. And we'll do that in consultation with the cottaging community and make sure that we are approaching that in a way that is also fair for all.

I'll just also add that, you know, the level of financial disclosure, I think, that we see as a result of this exercise certainly exceeds that from municipalities in general. The level of information, I think, is historic.

The range of increase, of course, then, does depend on a number of factors. We just talked about where the service demands are in each park district being a very important determinative factor in the amount. But the range of rent increases go from two to 7.5 times and, of course, you have to put that in context of the freeze over the last 10 years as well. So not everyone, of course, is 750 per cent. You know, a back lock-back lot, for example, may see a doubling over 10 years.

**Mr. Martin:** The—just to clarify for the minister, I wasn't—because, simply, I was asking for information as to the presentation of the numbers that the minister provided in the data dump and for an explanation as to how his department determines a number specifically if it lists a total bedroom as zero, it has an adjusted bedroom of four, and then it has the capacity factor of eight. I'm just simply asking the minister, how is that calculated? I'm just trying to understand how that's calculated.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, I'm advised that Deloitte was retained to provide advice and to consult with stakeholders, including the Whiteshell Cottagers Association, and so that is how that evolved. It's my understanding that in terms of descriptions that there was a survey done and there were assumptions built into that, and if the cottagers did not reply, then we certainly would entertain any further correction. We have no interest in having someone that has a property description that isn't accurate even if they didn't respond to the survey. But that was a fair way of doing that, I understand, as recommended by Deloitte. And, of course, then, Grant Thornton was asked to look at the application of the methodology, and they actually came back and said that the fees should've been higher in most cases, and we said that that was not what we were going to do this year. We can adjust that down the road. And so, if there's anything, it appears the—from the Grant Thornton report, that there was some underestimating or—of the fees.

**Mr. Martin:** And, again, I'm not—to clarify the record for the minister, I'm not suggesting that the information is invalid, only because I simply don't know. I'm trying to get an understanding as to if the minister could define for me what is capacity factor

when it comes to a cottage. And how does that—and how does the capacity factor pertain in the allocation of your road share, your garbage share, your sewer share, and so on and so forth? That's what I'm trying to ascertain here.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Yes, the capacity factor in the Deloitte report are issues that we can fully discuss now. We're heading to the top of the clock, and we can start that discussion. I mean, it adds up: the capacity for each sector, if you will, in the park district and then moves to an apportionment. Perhaps the member would want to avail himself of a briefing with the department; I'll certainly offer that. And I think that this could take certainly more than a few minutes, and, I mean, it may take half an hour or so or an hour, but whatever, I think the member may benefit just from understanding how that was arrived at. So I'd offer that, and we can set that up at the—and to the—at the member's convenience.

**Mr. Martin:** And I appreciate the minister's offer, and I'll definitely take him up on that, and, as he indicated, and I'm sure he's been in my shoes before—though it has been a while being on this side of the ask—but I'm simply said I'm trying to get an understanding of how this information is arrived and, as well, and how this column called capacity factor which can range, you know, from a couple to—I mean, I'm just sort of looking through, I mean, to 14 and so and so forth, how that has an impact on a respective cottager's final cost being assessed through the department, and whether or not the fact that I have a, you know, a capacity factor of 12, does that mean I have a higher allocation of cost than if I have a capacity factor, say, of two? And so I said I'm just trying to get an understanding of—and I appreciate the fact that the minister and—is not out to take up the, you know, the necessary time in the Estimates process and eat up the clock just to get that explanation. So, again, I'll take the minister up on his offer, and we'll co-ordinate in terms of sitting down and get an understanding for it and ask those detailed questions without monopolizing the Estimate process's time.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Perfect timing.

The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

## EDUCATION AND ADVANCED LEARNING

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff):** Order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been

dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education and Advanced Learning.

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

We're on page 56 of the main Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor—before I open the floor for questions, does the honourable minister have any responses from questions the other day?

**Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning):** Well, yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of items that I'd like to respond to.

The first related to was we took under advisement the—sorry, taken under advisement questions that come from across the floor, related to the University of Winnipeg United Health and recreation complex. And I had previously advised the committee that the Province's contribution to the UW UNITED Health & RecPlex was \$15 million in capital support and an additional \$8.9 million in repayable loan for a total of \$23.9 million. We have received a correction on that statement, and it is actually \$15 million in capital contribution and an additional \$23.9 million in repayable loan for a total of \$38.9 million. So there was a number transposed in the original response and I wanted to amend the record accordingly.

In addition to that, the opposition had also inquired about an MTS survey, and so I wanted to just provide a little bit more information on that survey as had been requested by the members opposite. Viewpoints Research was commissioned by the—by MTS, by the Manitoba Teachers' Society to design, administer and analyze a survey of members' views on a range of issues. For this project 803 teachers were surveyed. Administrators were not included in the study. The survey was conducted by telephone between October 28th and November 7th, 2013. Six hundred and thirty-three of the 803 teachers surveyed identified themselves as classroom teachers. The remaining 170 respondents were specialist teachers in the positions of resource teacher, clinicians or school counsellors. One hundred of the 633 classroom teachers identified themselves as teaching in early-year classes of 23 students or fewer. These 100 teachers were selected to respond to the questions specifically related to the smaller classes initiative because their teaching experience in smaller classes is consistent

with the criteria identified in the survey questions. The 100 classroom teachers were asked four questions regarding the impact of smaller classes on students in four specific areas: opportunity for more individualized attention for students, student engagement in learning, student behaviour, relationship between teacher and parents and guardians.

The respondents were provided with the following introduction: In 2011, quote—this is a quote, direct quote: In 2011, Premier Greg Selinger, announced an initiative to limit kindergarten to grade 3 classes to a maximum of 20 students—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. Just for the advice of the honourable minister, members are to be referred to their constituencies and ministers by their portfolios.

**Mr. Allum:** Sorry, Mr. Chair, for that oversight. I know better on—in that regard.

In 2011, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) announced an initiative to limit kindergarten to grade 3 classes to a maximum of 20 students in all public schools in the province. The initiative is in the second year of a five-year implementation period. Please indicate, based on your experience teaching in a class of 23 or fewer students, what impact smaller class sizes have had in the following areas. Please indicate whether it has had a significant positive impact, a somewhat positive impact, little impact, or no impact at all. End quote.

So the survey results: in each of the four areas the majority of respondents indicated that there had been a positive impact as a result of smaller classes. MTS provided the following results to the department: in terms of opportunity for more individualized attention, nine out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact, 75 per cent significant positive impact, 15 per cent somewhat positive impact. On the question of student engagement and learning, nine out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact, 64 per cent significant positive impact, 29 per cent said somewhat positive impact. On the question of student behaviour, eight out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact, 58 per cent said a significant positive impact, 27 per cent said a somewhat positive impact. As for the relationship between teacher and parent guardians, seven out of 10 teachers believe that there had been a positive impact, 37 per cent significant positive impact, 35 per cent somewhat positive

impact. Respondents indicated the most significant impact of smaller class sizes has been the opportunity for more individualized attention for students.

\* (14:50)

So that, Mr. Chair, I believe is in response to questions we've taken under advisement in relation to the MTS survey that I'd referred to in an earlier session of Estimates.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I thank the honourable minister.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** And I—when I talk with students, post-secondary education students, one of the first things they start talking about is the level of student debt, which is very high in the province and of considerable concern to students. I wonder if the minister could—has the information as to what the total student debt is for post-secondary education students in Manitoba?

**Mr. Allum:** I thank the member for the question. I also have talked to a number of students, and so I'm glad that we're able to have this conversation and dialogue today. In '12-13, the average accumulated debt for students in the last year of a two-year college program was \$13,979 before remission bursaries and \$11,659 after remission bursaries.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Just a clarification: Is that all full-time students, or full-time plus part-time students? Is that the size of the debt to the Province from student loans, or the Province plus the federal government? And does it include loans that students have from banks or from other sources because they're not eligible for student loans?

**Mr. Allum:** I'm going to try that again for the member, so that it maybe makes it a little bit clearer, because I just referred to college students there, and so I want to get university students on the record, as well.

In the program year 2012-13, the average accumulated debt for students in the last year of a four-year university program was \$23,556 before remission bursaries and \$19,494 after remission bursaries. This would exclude students in professional programs such as medicine, dentistry, law, chiropractic and optometry.

And then just to repeat what I said earlier, in program year 2012-13, the average accumulated debt for students in the last year of a two-year college

program was \$13,979 before-remission bursaries and \$11,659 after-remission bursaries.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, I had asked, after the first one, whether this was the debt to the Province in student loans, the Province plus the federal government for student loans and whether it included loans that students had from banks or from other sources.

**Mr. Allum:** Yes, now, the figures that I referred to, Mr. Chair, for the member's benefit, refers to the Canada Student Loans Program and the Manitoba student loan program. It doesn't refer to any private loans that a student may have had to entertain over the course of their academic career.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I wonder if the minister has information on the amount of private loans that students have.

**Mr. Allum:** We'll certainly take that under advisement.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I look forward to receiving that information in due course. Thank you.

And the other question I had, the student loans were on a per-student basis so that this would just be full-time students or would it include part-time students? And it would not include, I gather, professional college students.

**Mr. Allum:** Yes, our understanding is, and I'll certainly make sure this is absolutely accurate, but our understanding that this is full-time students.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, I want to see if the minister has information on the professional College of Medicine and other professional—and the amount of debt that students have in those areas. I turn it over to the minister.

**Mr. Allum:** Of course, I just indicated to the member that we'll take that question under advisement. We'll get him the—that kind of specific information that he's looking for.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, and if the minister could provide, you know, a total-dollar value, as well, not just a per-student basis, because that would be helpful. Thank you.

My next question has to do with the bursaries and grants and scholarships, and I've been looking at the budgets for the last several years. And I note, for example, in 2008-2009, the total for bursaries and funds budgeted that year was \$38,780,000. And I note that this fiscal year, the total budgeted seems to have decreased, actually quite considerably, to



\$20,456,000. And I wonder if the minister could provide an explanation for this.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Allum:** Mr. Chair, I'm not sure that I understood correctly the round total. I understood the member to say 20 million, and if I have that wrong, then I'll wait for him to correct me in a moment. But what I can tell him is that that \$11 million was reduced by the federal government, I understand, from the Millennium Scholarship Fund. And then, in addition to that, additional money was removed from the bright future—from the Bright Futures program budget was removed from the Manitoba bursary budget, as well, and I believe the number there was \$4 million.

So that's what I can understand as the—yes, it was transferred to another department just so we're clear about that and—oh that—the Bright Futures money—but the \$11 million from the Millennium Scholarship Fund was the biggest hit, as I understand it.

We'll endeavour to make sure that I have provided all the correct information there, Mr. Chair, but as in—to try to answer the member's question as best I can at this particular point, those are the numbers that I have at present.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, just to make very clear the numbers I'm talking about so that the minister—were the budgetary Estimates of Expenditure for 2008-2009, which was \$38,780,000, and the Estimates of Expenditure for the current 2014-2015 fiscal year, which for Manitoba Bursaries and Funds was twenty million, three hundred and forty-two—that's on page 62 of the budget Estimates of Expenditure. All right, I look forward to follow-up and clarification.

Now the—in the Liberal Party, we have, for many years, been of the belief and have argued for multi-year funding for universities and colleges so that universities and colleges are able to know what their budget is going to be. Now back in 2011, the minister's government decided to allocate some money, multi-year funding, a 5 per cent increase a year for a number of years, and, of course, then last year and again this year have cut that back to a 2.5 per cent increase. I mean, the whole point of having multi-year funding is so that you know where you're going and universities and colleges can actually plan.

So just to help universities and colleges for next year, what is the minister's vision whether it will

again be the reduced 2.5 per cent or whether the minister will move back to a 5 per cent increase for universities and colleges?

**Mr. Allum:** And thank the member for the question. You know, when it comes to our funding of post-secondary education in Canada compared to other provinces, frankly, we rate at or near the top and have done so for quite a considerable amount of time. It's probably worth noting that, as the member pointed out, that three years ago universities were at 5 per cent, and then a year ago, again, they were at 5 per cent. Incredible financial circumstances hit the province, especially in relation to the mammoth flood. There's a global economic uncertainty as well, and yet, even within that context, we were able to maintain funding to universities at 2.5 per cent and to colleges at 2 per cent, and then, again, this year, we did the same levels of funding. And, as I talk to the presidents of each institution, I hear them tell me of their great gratitude for this government's continued efforts to fund the universities and colleges at a rate that, really, is at or near the top of every province across Canada.

Funding for universities and colleges has more than doubled since we were first elected, increasing by more than \$300 million. And so, while other provinces are cutting back on post-secondary investment, our government is investing in post-secondary education at one of the highest rates in the country. And the member did just ask me about student debt, and, of course, of some figures still to provide to him on that. But I'd want to say that students in this province get a very good deal and they know they do.

When I talk to the Canadian Federation of Students, and I've talked to them quite a number of times since I was privileged enough to sit in this, the minister's chair, they know that they're getting a good debt. They know that this government has funded grants and bursaries upwards of over \$240 million since we were first elected. They know that we have reduced the interest on student debt, not only at first down to one point to prime plus one, but I think now it's down to prime.

We've increased the exemption for student loans, allowing students to earn more money during the school year without affecting their loan eligibility. We've increased the vehicle exemption for student loans, introduced rural and northern bursaries to support students who have to travel or relocate to pursue post-secondary studies, and we've increased

the annual ACCESS program bursary by almost \$1 million, committing more than \$31 million in ACCESS program bursary assistance since 1999.

So the reason that I want to be sure that when the member and I are having a good dialogue and a good conversation about post-secondary education in Manitoba, he recognizes that the government of Manitoba, since we first came into office and every year since then, have been strong advocates of post-secondary education, strong funders of post-secondary education, and strong partners with students and university institutions to further that agenda so that our students get a quality, affordable, accessible education here in Manitoba that, in my opinion, is really among the best deals and best education systems in Canada.

\*(15:10)

So I just want to put that in context for the member, and, then, in addition to his talking about a grant—or funding over a three-year period or multi-year funding, he knows that—as we announced in the budget, that we'll be bringing the Council on Post-Secondary Education back inside the department. And we're doing that, I think, for very, very responsible public policy decisions and reasons.

And so, when it comes to how we will provide funding to the post-secondary sector next year, those are still issues to be worked out as we pursue bringing the council back into the department. But our record—our record—has been clear from the moment we first came into office, that we were strong supporters and strong funders of post-secondary education and, at the same time, providing quality, affordable, accessible education for our students.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, thank the minister.

Now, Mr. Chair, on page 31 of the departmental Manitoba Education, Advanced Learning supplemental information for legislative review in the departmental Estimates, under school programs it says that supports for—to build a strong start for children within the early childhood education system—and on this page, then, under school programs, it's not clear which resources, which funds and personnel are dedicated to that goal. So I'm just wondering, on page 31, which of the specific, you know, funding resources—which are dedicated to this goal with respect to early childhood education?

**Mr. Allum:** For the member's benefit, I just want to provide a little bit of context and then provide him with a figure. The ECEU, the Early Childhood Education Unit, provides leadership and support to school divisions in the area of early learning for children, birth to eight years of age. Unit staff work collaboratively with other government departments, education and community partners and parents to promote developmentally appropriate programming and services that prepare children for successful school entry and success in the critical early years, that is from K to 3. The unit monitors and supports early childhood education categorical grants provided to Manitoba school divisions, the Early Childhood Development Initiative, ECEDI, and the Early Literacy Intervention, ELI, grants. As part of the categorical grants review process, staff visits and reviews reports from one third at school divisions each year. ECEDI, Early Childhood Development Initiative funding has increased on an ongoing basis and was for a total amount of \$2.4 million in 2013-14.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I know that the minister and his government have recognized the need to change course a little bit in terms of math education, and I just wondered if the minister could provide an update on where things were and what the plans are for this year.

**Mr. Allum:** I thank the member for that question. In fact, Manitoba has taken a leadership role, as he knows, on math education and revisiting the curriculum to make sure that it meets the needs of our students so that they have those most basic skills, those fundamental skills that I think we all regard as absolutely essential to provide the foundation for good learning habits and techniques to make for successful students in the years to come. We have revisited the K-to-8 math curriculum, and I had the opportunity to have a couple of math professors into my office not so long before—or, not, math teachers, excuse me, not math professors, but math teachers—and they indicated that department's work to revisit the curriculum and improve how we communicate math in the classroom is actually taking hold and taking root, and there have been, I think, some progress made to date in getting us back on track in terms of educating our kids in mathematics in our schools.

I think he knows as well that we work with the University of Winnipeg to strengthen teacher education in mathematics. U of W hired a new math professor to work with the faculty of education so

that teachers are now getting the kind of training they need in order to be able to teach math, which I would have to think is a little bit different than teaching history like I once did. And so not only have we revisited the curriculum in order to ensure that we're focusing on the fundamentals—and as I said, I've had teachers tell me that we've done quite a good job in that respect—but also that we've—are also training the trainers, teaching the teachers how to teach math as well so that kids have a better understanding of memorizing math facts and then bringing back standard algorithms for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

\* (15:20)

Other provinces, some to the west, some to the east, continue to utilize methods which, and curriculums which we have found to be not as successful. So we, having worked with WISE Winnipeg—and I know he knows those good folks—they were very helpful. They came into our caucus and they met with my predecessor, and so they helped us to, what I would characterize as bringing the pendulum back into line with providing math instruction in a way that meets the needs of our students so that they have that strong foundation for learning going forward.

**Mr. Gerrard:** There—as the minister is well aware, there's been some discussion of merits, or lack of them, of all-day kindergarten, and I just wondered what the minister's view of this was.

**Mr. Allum:** Well, I appreciate the question, and I have had some discussions with folks, or at least it's been raised with me. The way that I perceive the problem is that our government has made small class sizes from kindergarten to grade 3 the signature policy for dealing with young children in elementary school. We've heard from teachers, students, parents, across the board, that this decision to focus on the K-to-3 small-class-size initiative—and you just heard me read out numbers from an MTS survey on the progress of the K-to-3 initiative to date, that there's a great deal of satisfaction with that particular initiative.

As he knows, we are in year 3 of a five-year program with respect to the K-to-3 initiative. We've hired upwards of 250 new teachers as a result of that initiative. And in addition to that, we're either building new classroom spaces, renovating schools to provide classroom spaces. So across the board, in my view, the responsible thing for us, as a government, is to continue to ensure the

implementation of the small-class-size initiative and to meet our obligations under that initiative. And so that's the priority of the government to date.

But I also want to remind him that, of course, we do have a Ministry of Children and Youth Opportunities, and he knows that the minister is considered among the most enlightened of people when it comes to providing hope and guidance to young people.

And so while we have a very strong small-class-size initiative, he also knows that we're working on early childhood education and we're also working on building more child-care centres and providing more childhood—child-care spaces.

So taken together, when you have the small-class-size initiative, you have a dynamic Children and Youth Opportunities Ministry, and then you're also putting resources and emphasis on child care, I think you're beginning to see the emergence of a very progressive, very strong program for young children, both entering school or about to enter school, or in school. And I know that these program elements that I've just talked about, either in Education or Children and Youth Opportunities, are meeting with great satisfaction with parents, as well.

**Mr. Gerrard:** That completes my questions, and I will turn it back to one of the MLAs from the official opposition. Kelvin, Ralph, over to you.

**Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods):** Just a couple of brief questions. I want some clarification from the minister, and it's in regard to the daycare funding. I'm not sure—I don't think it's from your department, but certainly your department's been involved in that. And maybe you could clarify for me, I know there's a proposal in the community of Wawanesa. In the school, there, there's currently an existing daycare within the school, and the community there is looking at putting up a separate, stand-alone building for the daycare. So, actually move—probably move the daycare from the school to this new building which is going to be on school property. I wonder if the minister is aware of that, and—or if his staff is, and if you could provide me an update in terms of the status of that particular project.

**Mr. Allum:** Yes, I advise the member that we'll—we will take that under advisement and get him the most precise, accurate, up-to-date information that we can.

**Mr. Cullen:** Thank you, minister. I would appreciate that undertaking and I thank you for your time.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** I believe that we're ready to proceed with the appropriations, Mr. Chairperson.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,288,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, School Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,960,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$347,163,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Education and School Tax Credits, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,282,042,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$654,994,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Support for Universities and Colleges, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

\* (15:30)

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,864,000 for the—for Education and Advanced Learning, Manitoba Student Aid, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$70,398,000 for the—for Education and Advanced Learning, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,523,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Resolution 16.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

Consideration of the minister's salary: the last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 16.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 16.1.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I have a motion, Mr. Chairperson.

I move that line 16.1.(a) be amended so the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

**Mr. Chairperson:** It is—had—it has been moved that line 16.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

The motion is in order.

The floor is open for debate.

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Question has been called.

All those in—or the question is shall the resolution pass—the question is shall the motion pass.

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I hear a mixed vote.

**Voice Vote**

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those in favour, say aye.

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

**Mr. Chairperson:** All those opposed, say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Chairperson:** We will now proceed to the resolution.

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,116,000 for Education and Advanced Learning, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

***Resolution agreed to.***

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

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Municipal Government.

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

We are in recess.

*The committee recessed at 3:36 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 3:38 p.m.*

### MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Municipal Government.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Municipal Government):** It is, indeed, a pleasure to be able to report on progress that the Department of Municipal Government has experienced over the last while, since our last appearance at government Estimates.

This is my first opportunity to defend the Estimates of Municipal Government, as the Municipal Government Minister, and I look forward to that. I look forward to working with the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) in the pursuit of the issues that are pertinent to this department. Well, not just the member for Lakeside, but members all around the Chamber, all 57 of us, Mr. Chairperson.

My view on Estimates is that it's a good opportunity to hear advice from members opposite, see if there's some good advice come forward that we can incorporate into the planning that we do. And I did use the word planning, which is a huge part of what Municipal Government is responsible for.

\* (15:40)

So I do look forward to exchanging some ideas, exchanging rationale, talking about what the future of this department could be, because I do believe it's an important department. It's a department with a long history in this building, I have found out. Municipal Affairs back to the '70s, the kind of work it incorporated throughout the decades in the history of our province. So I'm very pleased to be the minister in charge of the acts associated with municipal government, and I do look forward to hearing advice from my friend opposite, the member for Lakeside.

I do want to be—I really want to, and I'll introduce some of the people, in a few minutes, who have been working hard at their jobs in Municipal Government. We have a department that's full of people who are very committed to moving forward in terms of issues having to do with municipal government. We've got—I think the first thing that struck me about the people in this department is how well connected, what a good relationship these departments have with other levels of government, because so much of what we do overlaps not only with the federal government, which is pretty obvious, many departments overlap with responsibilities and policies of the federal government, but in this case there's no department more connected and no department with as good a relationship, I believe, with local decision makers, reeves and mayors and their councils than the people that work every day, the civil servants that work every day in this department.

In my course of 19 years of being an MLA I've had a lot of issues—*[interjection]*—19 years, yes. You can tell by the amount of grey hair that I've been here—I've been here a little while, yes. The—I've noticed, through dealing with issues as an MLA, the kind of interaction that takes place with people in this department and other folks around the province of Manitoba, other municipal leaders and officials, CAOs, planners, all—any of the boards that have responsibilities connected to this department. I've been very amazed and I'm very proud of the kind of work that people in this department do in

collaboration with others in every part of Manitoba. And it doesn't seem to me that it matters whether you're as big as Winnipeg or as small as Waskada, we have people who are connected who understand local issues who are more than willing to deal with MLAs in this Chamber and work through issues that come forward and take on some of the challenges that we face as a province.

We have responsibilities through the infrastructure secretariat, which is connected to this department, and we have commitments that we've made to the federal government through the Building Canada Fund and that file. But also we are very clear that we want to extend that commitment to the municipal level.

I'm very proud of the work that we have done at the department in collaboration with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities under their leadership of Doug Dobrowolski and his executive, which represents all parts of this province. The—we want to build that relationship so that the folks at the AMM can sit down with us and talk about infrastructure needs in Manitoba. Connected to that, we did a series—a number of us chaired round tables, infrastructure round tables in many, many communities in every part of our province. Those were well-attended meetings. The AMM played a prominent role, as did Chambers of Commerce, as did private businesses who came to talk about—to talk to us about issues that they were—that they've been faced with.

We have every intention of working co-operatively with the federal government to make sure that we identify those Manitoba economic strategic priorities that we have as a province, and we are also just as committed to make sure that people at the—leaders at the municipal level have access to advise us; I'm certain that they have access to advise the federal government. We need to draw upon that local information so that we know what are the specific roads, what are the specific bridges, where do we need the kind of flood protection that we've talked about.

So we—*[interjection]* That's not hard. So we need to keep working with local officials, not just in—not just at the time that we go out to do those infrastructure round tables but on a continuing basis. And that's been the commitment that I've made as minister, and I have very good people in the department, Karleen Debance, for example, who heads up the infrastructure secretariat, who is always

in communication with the folks out of Ottawa to make sure that they understand what our priorities are.

We also have the Water Services Board as part of the umbrella here in this department. Dave Shwaluk is a director of the Manitoba Water Services Board, does a great job—this also is a core infrastructure priority of our government. And as we've seen in the last two budgets, in the first—over the last two budgets we've increased that particular budget by \$6 million. Those go a long way to make sure that water—whether it be treating water or providing clean, safe drinking water or lagoons, or any kind of water infrastructure, whether it's in the constituency of Lakeside or Dauphin or others, have a chance to get those—that kind of infrastructure forward.

So those are some of the things that we do. There are challenges, we well know. We've—in a Throne Speech—not last Throne Speech, but the Throne Speech before we did announce that we were moving to amalgamate municipalities in Manitoba, 197 municipalities that we have—that we have had, we're looking to reduce that number, we're looking to reduce it with the—based on the advice that we get locally, based on the advice that reeves and mayors and councillors have come up with, and I have to say I've been very impressed with the discussions that have taken place locally amongst leaders to make it so that that—the implementation of these amalgamations makes as much sense to local communities as we possibly can.

We want to position ourselves so that we can be economically successful. We want to position ourselves so that we can be efficient and maybe even save some tax dollars for ratepayers. So we can probably end up touching a bit on that in these discussions.

But, with that, I want to thank our—thank the people in the department for working and doing the work that they do.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. The minister's time for opening remarks has expired.

We thank the minister for his remarks.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Lakeside, have any opening remarks?

**Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside):** We're ready to proceed with the process through Estimates.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank the honourable member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with the consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 1.

At this time we invite the minister's staff and staff from the official opposition to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance and the critic to also introduce staff in attendance.

\* (15:50)

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal Government to introduce his staff.

**Mr. Struthers:** I am joined by the deputy minister of the department, Mr. Fred Meier; Laurie Davidson, who's the assistant deputy minister, provincial-municipal support. I'm joined by Mike Sosiak, executive director, Municipal Finance and Advisory Services—always good to have a finance guy handy; and Brian Johnston, the director of financial administrative services—two finance guys handy, so all the better.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member for Lakeside, to introduce his staff.

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Scott Sarna, my assistant.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

**Mr. Eichler:** Global, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** A global discussion we will have.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Eichler:** I guess the first thing on the flow chart—I'd like the minister to assure us whether or not the flow chart is right. It shows—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. My apologies. The Deputy Clerk informs me that we need agreement from the committee to have a global discussion. Do we have agreement? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Eichler:** It's good we have staff that's going to keep us on the straight and narrow. I know that they do a good job at that, so we're so pleased that they

are with us and keeping us on the straight and narrow.

On page 6 of the flow chart it shows the Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg. I believe the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) is the minister responsible. Are they going to be attending the Estimates process so we can ask him questions?

**Mr. Struthers:** Every minister will be available for questions from any critic throughout the Estimates procedure. That's—we've done that for years and years around here. We pride ourselves in being open and accessible and accountable. The member opposite will note that throughout these Estimates as well, the—I'm not sure what the direction has been between House leaders. The Minister for Children and Youth Opportunities is scheduled on the Estimates order at some point. Whether it's that way or any other process that members want to propose, our goal is to be as accountable as we can to members opposite.

**Mr. Eichler:** So is the flow chart correct in saying that he is the Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg?

**Mr. Struthers:** The member for Point Douglas is the Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg. That is correct in the flow chart.

I will point out one error on the flow chart. I don't know—not so much an error but an update; that's a better word. Down at the bottom left under the little box under Planning Policy and Programs, a Mr. Jon Gunn has just recently retired so he's not in that position. And the name, I suppose, to pencil in there, in Mr. Gunn's retirement, is Leita Kalinowsky.

**Mr. Eichler:** Would he try to say that again, maybe a little slower?

**Mr. Struthers:** Leita. L-e-i-t-a. Kalinowsky That's a good Dauphin name, actually, so I hope I don't blow the spelling of this, Mr. Chairperson, but I believe it's K-a-l-i-n-o-w-s-k-y.

**Mr. Eichler:** Thank you. Just staying on the flow chart—organizational chart, it shows the Taxicab Board as being under the responsibility of the member from Point Douglas. Is that correct?

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr. Eichler:** So, on the advice of the minister that's with us today for Municipal Government, when would be the best opportunity to discuss issues in

regards to those that are underneath the responsibility for the City of Winnipeg?

I also see Manitoba Water Services Board. Is that also under there? And also below that is the Administration and Finance chart, as well.

**Mr. Struthers:** The way this has worked well in the past is if we have some kind of collaboration between myself and the critic. We will make sure that everybody who's necessary to answer questions, to help in answering questions, is made available. I would be asking questions—or, sorry, I would be answering questions on the Municipal Board, the town of Leaf Rapids and properties, the Energy Division, Administration and Finance, the Water Services Board, Mr. Chairperson, any of the other boxes that are located in the line coming directly from the box in the middle with Mr. Fred Meier's name in it.

What I would ask is that if we need to have—if we're going to have questions on the Water Services Board, give us an indication. We can have Mr. Shwaluk available to help me in answering questions. If you want to have some discussion about the Energy Division, give us a little bit of a heads-up on when we can get somebody in to help with those, to, you know, answer questions. If it's the Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg, give us some heads-up and I'm sure the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) would be more than happy to answer questions. It's only a question of timing; it's not a question of whether or not we want to answer or not.

So, my experience in the past, whether it be with this critic or any others, is that the things always work best if we co-operate and have a little heads-up, and then we can get people made available, so that we can make these discussions as productive as they can be.

**Mr. Eichler:** I thank the minister for his comments.

I will take his advice and give notice that we would like to ask Manitoba Water Services Board to be here tomorrow. I would also ask that the Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg be here tomorrow. I would also ask that the Municipal Board be available for comments tomorrow as well, and we'll work on the rest of the process this afternoon in the limited amount of time that we have this afternoon, and maybe we can carry on next week and the following week after that, 'til we get through all the Estimates questions that I may have.

If that's available or, certainly, let the minister respond to that.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, and that sounds fine to me. I appreciate the heads-up in terms of who we need to have around the table. I do believe that that makes it—makes the discussion go a lot better, when we can have people with some technical knowledge to help us as we debate the policy issues. I agree with that.

I appreciate knowing who we need for tomorrow and the week after and the week after and the week after—I forget how many weeks the member added on to that, but I look forward to each and every one of those—every minute of each and every one of those weeks, spending time with my friend from Lakeside.

**Mr. Eichler:** We're going to break out in song here pretty quick, Mr. Chair. I—maybe we just move on from there now that we have the agenda kind of laid out for us.

In regards to the assessment board, does—the assessment branch—does that fall under a separate—do we need to give notice on questions in regards to that or can the staff that are at the table now be able to handle those?

**Mr. Struthers:** I would challenge the member for Lakeside to come up with a question that my fine staff can't handle, even right now, here, this afternoon.

**Mr. Eichler:** Well, we could start with all the unanswered questions from last year if you want to do that, because there was a bunch. But I won't start with those, but we will challenge you. I can be a—make you very much aware of that. So we'll get into those as we roll out through the questions over the days and weeks ahead.

Of course, we would like to know the list of the department and political staff, including their position and whether or not they are full-time, part-time. Would the minister table that for us?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, I would be happy to fill in the blanks for the member for Lakeside. The—I have three full-time political staff, those being Brent Dancy, who is a senior project manager for Hydro issues; Rosalie Pshebylo, who is my executive assistant—Pshebylo is spelled P-s-h-e-b-y-l-o, silent P at the beginning—she's my executive assistant and she's located in Dauphin; and Kaila Wiebe, who is my special assistant.



**Mr. Eichler:** Were they hired through competition or were they appointed?

**Mr. Struthers:** These were people that were appointed to those positions. In the case of Rosalie, she was—I had a competition a number of years ago for a constituency assistant. Rosalie has done a fine job for a number of years in that position, and she has served as an executive assistant in a number of departments as my portfolio has changed over the last 10 years or so. Hers was a local competition, as member from Lakeside would well know how we go about signing on constituency assistants, but the other two were appointees.

**Mr. Eichler:** Would the minister, Mr. Chair, provide a description of any position that's been reclassified over the last year?

**Mr. Struthers:** I'm not sure what the member is asking for. Is he talking about the political staff that I just read into the record? And maybe he could clarify a little bit what he—what information he's looking for.

**Mr. Eichler:** Yes, that is correct, political staff.

**Mr. Struthers:** I don't believe we've reclassified. If it's those three positions that I just mentioned, if that's what he's asking about, I don't believe that we have reclassified those. I could double-check just to make sure, but I don't believe there has been a reclassification of the political staff.

**Mr. Eichler:** I guess this is the first question the minister's stumped on. It must be really hard to figure that out. But, if he would figure it out and let us know tomorrow, that would be fine.

In regards to vacant positions, is there any positions that are now vacant? And, if so, could we have a list of those positions?

**Mr. Struthers:** Is the member looking for vacancies within political staff, or is he looking for vacancies within the entire department?

**Mr. Eichler:** In the department, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Struthers:** As of March 1st, 2014, there were 30.90 positions that were vacant. That is 11 per cent of the total staff.

**Mr. Eichler:** In regards to the staff, is the staff years, are they all filled at this point in time, other than the number that the minister just put on the record?

**Mr. Struthers:** Other than the positions that are vacant, they're all filled. And what we're, you know—I think we're in an ongoing scrutiny of the positions

that we have, the vacancies that we have. We want to make sure that we fill positions in terms of priorities and making sure that we have the right people in the right positions to help and to move forward.

**Mr. Eichler:** Are those positions determined by the minister or by the deputy minister? How's that calculated?

**Mr. Struthers:** The deputy minister and the department are authorized to make those decisions. They know what the priorities of the government are and what they need to be putting in place in terms of staffing to make sure that those government priorities are carried through. There's an ongoing look at vacancies. There's an ongoing look at retirements that come forward. For whatever reason, there may be a turnover.

The one thing that this department has done a lot of work on is in the area of succession planning. I think it's imperative for any organization, whether they be public sector or private sector these days, given the demographics that we're dealing with in terms of staff, you have to have some thought put into succession planning. It's good for that individual who's retiring, I believe, and it's good for the continuity of, in this case, the Department of Municipal Government.

\* (16:10)

But, like I said, it's that kind of continuity and mentorship and apprenticeship and passing on of that corporate knowledge is invaluable. And I do think this department's done a very good job of—on the succession planning side—put a lot of thought into this, a lot of effort. So those kinds of processes are under way on an ongoing basis.

**Mr. Eichler:** Mr. Chair, the 30 positions that are outstanding: What's the role in filling those, and what's the timeline and the methodology that's used to fill those positions, whether it be through an application basis, a tendered basis, a appointed basis? What is the department's plan to fill those 30 positions?

**Mr. Struthers:** Okay, well, first of all, the—it'll depend on the priorities that are set.

And if—for example, if an opening comes in a front-line position, then that is something that is really as quickly as possible filled on a long-term basis. We do put in place—if it's a front-line person that is retiring, we put somebody in place who can, in a seamless way—we have that front-line service

available for his constituents and mine, if it's an acting position or a temporary position. But we do make an effort to make sure that firm, long-term positions are nailed down as quickly as we can, when it comes to front-line services. So that ends up being a priority, and the department moves to make—to ensure that those vacancies are filled, again, depending on priorities of the government.

The vast majority of openings that we fill are done through open competition. There are the odd time in which appointments are made. They are appointments that are depending on what the succession planning discussions have been. If there's a retirement and that retiree has been working with somebody in the department specifically to move into that position and any special professional development or any special training or any special education has been provided along the way, or if that person stepping into that post has any special experiences that can be called upon in that position, then on those rare occasions there are appointments made into those spots. But the vast majority are posted, and they are available for open competition in the department.

**Mr. Eichler:** Well, 30 positions—that number of positions, depending on what department they're in, you know, could be a serious concern, of course, and we hope that, you know, those positions, where they are needed to be filled, be filled in a timely manner.

In regards to the succession plan, is this a written plan and is it available and, if so, how would we gain access to that plan?

**Mr. Struthers:** We in this department, like any other department, take our cues on this from the Civil Service Commission. The Civil Service Commission, I well remember from my days as Finance minister, has done some good work across government in terms of providing tools for succession planning. I touched on a couple of them actually in my previous answer. They are professional development tools that we can use, you know, and I think, you know, Municipal Government has done a good job, not just recently, but over the years, in terms of utilizing the tools made available through the Civil Service Commission, to help the civil servant who is moving on, to help the next generation of civil servants move into appropriate positions and take full advantage of their skills and abilities and talents on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

So the—what we do is we follow the lead of the Civil Service Commission when it comes to

succession planning. And I do remember from my time as the minister there, that there are, I think, there are very significant payouts for government across the board, when departments take seriously succession planning, so that the services that we provide to Manitobans are seamless, they're not interrupted, and you maximize the skills—the skill set that's there for civil servants on behalf of the Manitoba public.

**Mr. Eichler:** The minister had talked in his opening comments about his grey hair, and, obviously, maybe, that's just a sign of age.

And, speaking of age, we know that we have a number of folks, the baby boomers and so on, that are going to be retiring. And do we have a number of how many positions are going to become available over the next year and how the department's planning on filling those positions?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, first of all, I want to say how, I don't know if I'm jealous that I have more grey hair than my friend from Lakeside, or whether it's because, you know, I'm so much younger than he is, and can point to earning so many grey hair over the years. I'm very proud of the grey hair that I've earned over the years. So—but if he has any secrets to have such colourful locks as his, I would certainly welcome that advice, along with advice having to do with municipal government.

\* (16:20)

The—I think we all know, kind of deep down in our bellies, that across society, the demographics are pointing to guys our age, people our age, looking at retirement. When you get, when you see the number of people that are moving through that, you know, we baby boomers, we see us moving through the system, I think you just down deep know there's going to be those challenges, succession challenges that are—have been playing out and will continue to play out over the next while.

*Ms. Melanie Wight, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

It is very difficult, though, and I know that the member will understand this, some people see that Freedom 55 and in the the first minute they can retire, they're going to—they get out there and retire. And they spend some time with their family and they go fishing and they go golfing and all the—they go travelling, all the things they wanted to do. The next person in the same department, when they turn 55, they have no plans to retire. They haven't even thought about it yet. They may have been, you know,

putting, you know, contributing to their pensions and buying RRSPs and tax-free savings accounts and all those things, but they have no intention—and I remember in a previous ministerial position, getting a list of, you know, oh, this is a long time ago, getting a list of people, of employees, and it showed some of them in their 70s still working and being productive and enjoying what they do and bringing a whole lot of years of corporate memory to the position.

So it is really difficult to project what we will need next year or what we'll need the year after. One of the things that is very helpful is, when a civil servant tells us ahead of time, says, you know, I'm—officially, I declare I'm going to retire as of whatever date, that gives us the opportunity to really put in place an effective succession plan in that case. But, for the most part, we're dealing a little bit with something that is unknown. We're dealing a little bit with, you know, a situation that's not absolutely crystal clear. So the best way, I think, for departments to handle that is to make sure, as I mentioned in the previous question, that we have tools, tools that are available through the Civil Service Commission, tools such as professional development, such as mentorship. Be—you know, we have to always be prepared.

I think the assumption that me as the minister makes is that we're going to be facing vacancies that are retirements and the rest of it and we need to have in place those tools well beforehand to help in the passing of the knowledge from that retiring generation to the next. So we want to be very—generally, we want to be very much prepared and have tools in place to help and help in succession planning. But it is difficult if you don't know how many and who and when and from where in that organizational chart those retirements are going to come from. It would be wrong on our part, I think, to assume that because you hit a certain age you're going to retire. But it would be equally as wrong for us not to be prepared when people do make the decision to retire.

**Mr. Eichler:** In regards to the 30 positions that are currently vacant, how long has the longest position been vacant, and what is the shortest position that's currently vacant?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, I have—I got two answers that are serious and another one I think the member for Lakeside will appreciate. I think this is a typo, but, according to what I have in front of me, it says that

there's been a clerk's position open since 1905, which I am going to blame on the previous, previous, previous—yes, so I'm pretty sure that's a typo.

So I'll refer to him the most recent retirement, or an opening anyway, is February 7th. As of March 1st, 2014, the most recent vacancy was February 7th, 2014; the longest outstanding position is—oh, yes—October 1st, 2011.

**Mr. Eichler:** We know staff has a very important role that they play, and we know that the impact it has on those workers that are trying to carry the workload for those positions that have been left vacant. And one comes to mind right off the bat, and that has to do with the minister's own riding in the constituency of Dauphin, the assessment branch, we know that there's a number of positions that are available in that department which impacts the municipalities as well.

I would like to ask the minister in regards to the assessment branch in his own riding, how long those positions have been open and when they will be planned to be filled.

Also, could I get the number of positions that are available open in the assessment branch within Dauphin?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Struthers:** Currently, we have two vacancies in Dauphin in our assessment office there. We are in the process of filling those vacancies—filling those positions. What we do is we keep a close eye on this. We monitor the workload that the people there are faced with.

I will put a plug in for my constituents. I think they, along with so many others in this department are—and with the assessment branch, have a lot of work and very good work that they do. They have a lot of important work that needs to be done, and we monitor what goes on in terms of the workload in that office as we do in any other office. We have the ability to shift people in to cover the workload if we, in our monitoring, we find out that there's too heavy a workload for the staff that are there. We can bring assessors in from other communities. In this case, if—in Dauphin we could bring people in from Swan River or from Brandon or up from Winnipeg. A real good example of how we're flexible on this, as the member can well understand, when we had the flood happening on lake Dauphin, the RM of Ochre River in that area, I know he's aware of that area and the pressures that that RM faced, we did bring people in,

at that time, to help with the, as he can imagine, the increased workload that came as a result. I know—and even in his own backyard, there were people shifted in to help deal with some of the flood issues surrounding Lake Manitoba.

These are—at the time of the flood, these are people who really stepped up to the plate, as they do every day of the week, but, in this case, very much stepped up to help with assessments, to help local municipalities. We maintain that kind of ability whether there's a flood or whether there's not a flood. If the workload in Dauphin or any other community that has vacancies—we monitor that workload and we make sure that we have the ability to bring people in to help with that workload.

**Mr. Eichler:** In regards to staying on the same area, in the Dauphin assessment office, where are we in terms of current assessment for those municipalities that are based out of that office in regards to building permits versus current assessment? I think it's pretty critical for those municipalities that are surrounded by the Dauphin area, and, as a result of that assessment, we know there's permits that have been taken out and, of course, you know the RMs are anxious to get that assessment in order to collect the taxation. So I would ask the minister if he could provide us with an update on where that's at and how far behind they are currently on those numbers.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, I think the member for Lakeside points to something, I think, very—that I think is very important. It doesn't matter what region of the province it's in, but I'm really pleased he's asking about the region of the province that I represent, because we are looking for ways to grow our local economy. It doesn't matter which municipality you deal with, which town or which city up in our area that is serviced by the Dauphin assessment office, they're always looking for ways to grow, to have housing starts, to have business starts, to—all of that. We all work for that as MLAs. We want to be able to be as efficient as we can, in terms of processing of permits.

We have taken on a—this year, in order to deal with some of the backlogs that I—which is, I think, part of the question that the member for Lakeside is asking—we've made some improvements to that permitting process which, we believe, is going to help us in dealing with, you know, the backlogs that happen.

\* (16:40)

We can, I think, if there are—I'm not sure if there's specific municipalities that the member's interested in. If there are, we can get back to him with some information specific to these municipalities. If he wants to indicate if that's the kind of information he wants, we can get that for him. I don't have that kind of specific information here, but that's sort of the general answer. If there's more specifics, then we would just need to know, more specifically, what he's interested in.

**Mr. Eichler:** I'll provide a list tomorrow for the minister and his staff, and I think that would be helpful for those municipalities that are impacted.

On the 'stame'—same theme as in regards to assessment, and we know how important that is for the municipalities, and, of course, you know, with the amalgamation, and we'll get into that tomorrow as well.

But, in regards to the other assessment branches located throughout the province, in comparison from Dauphin, say, to Brandon, to Selkirk, assessment branches, is the vacancy rate about the same in the others, or is Dauphin slightly lower, as a result of the positions that are vacant there?

**Mr. Struthers:** It's clear that when you look at the numbers in all of the offices around the province that Dauphin's not an outlier in terms of having more or less vacancies than anybody else. We went over the number of positions that are vacant in the department, and whether it's the Dauphin office or any other office that has a vacancy, we are looking to fill those positions. So it's not, as I said, Dauphin's not an outlier in this. We have pretty much the normal kind of situation that any other assessment office has.

**Mr. Eichler:** Still staying on the same theme of assessment, a few years ago the current government changed the methodology of which assessment would be automatically increased through inflation. What is that current rate that's being used by the department?

**Mr. Struthers:** The first thing I want to do is I want to make it clear that we did not make a change based on inflation. What we did, the change that we made was to move to a shorter assessment period. We went from every two years to every four years, finding that that smooths out a lot. So it wasn't a change to the methodology. It was a change to the number, to the time from two to four years. The goal is to make

these assessments more accurate. The goal is to make them reflective better of market values. So, in terms of any kind of a change that the member may be interested in terms of methodology, that didn't change. It was just the time period from two to four years.

**Mr. Eichler:** Is rural Manitoba the same as the City of Winnipeg? Is it the same basis for that calculation?

**Mr. Struthers:** Look at this, Mr. Chairperson. It's just an hour into our Estimates and I have to correct myself already. I think I got it backwards. My apologies. There's a first for everything, eh? I inadvertently said that we went from—make sure I get this right now—

**An Honourable Member:** It was four to two.

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, it was backwards from what I said earlier. We're going to the shorter period. So we went from four years to two years to better reflect market value and smooth that out, and this is the same as the City of Winnipeg.

\*(16:50)

**Mr. Eichler:** Based on the selling price of homes and values in rural Manitoba as opposed to values of those in the city of Winnipeg, is there evidence to suggest that that inflation rate or increase in values are close? Is there much of a variance between city values and rural values from properties that were sold over, say, the last two years?

**Mr. Struthers:** The member for Lakeside asks very tough questions, and the reason this is a very tough question, and he'll understand this being a rural guy, you will know that within rural Manitoba there are great variations between—from one region to the next, from one municipality to the next. If there's a—it's hard to compare rural to Winnipeg, a house in the RM of Ochre River—gosh, even within the RM of Ochre River if you're—if you've got a place along the lake and it's not—happens to be flooding—if you have a place along the lake, the assessment's different than in Mackinac, which is the rural area south of the lake, still within the RM of Ochre. That is a totally different comparison to a house in the Capital Region, say, in St. Andrews, in that RM.

The—and the same applies within the city of Winnipeg. There'll be big variances in the assessments even within the perimeters of our capital city. So it's difficult to make comparisons like that. My—our government's goal is to make sure

that we have strong assessments, that we have a growing economy that means we have strong assessments, high values. We want to make it so that municipalities can, if they're growing, if they want to use that to either use their assessments to promote themselves or if they want to build a better assessment by growing their economies, that we want to work with them to do that. We want to make sure that our, as I said in the answer before, that we have a process that very much reflects market value and is as smooth and as efficient, so, i.e., the two and the four years. You know, for example, Brandon did very well in terms of assessments and their growth, probably outstripping most parts of the rest of the province.

My own bias is that everybody wants to live in Dauphin and—because it's such a great place and that would be reflected in the assessments. If—we can work with the member for Lakeside if he wants more specifics on municipality by municipality in assessments and how they've increased or how they've decreased over the course of the last while. If he has some specific questions on that or has some specific information he wants, we can certainly work with him to provide that.

**Mr. Eichler:** I just want to be clear on the formula that's used and the methodology. I know in my area, and the minister referred to the Capital Region, home values within the Capital Region are substantially higher within just a 20-mile radius because of travel costs, price of fuel and so on, wear and tear and maintenance. I know that, for example, Stonewall versus Teulon, a home in Stonewall will be worth probably 200–\$225,000 more than that same house in Teulon for example.

So I think it would unfair to assume that the assessment in either one of those two communities could have a huge variance, so a blanket increase would not necessarily work, because once you hit that magic capital cost or that magic selling price, it doesn't matter what you do to it, and you can talk to all kinds of real estate agents that'll verify that some of those homes, even though they're just as nice a home that's in Winnipeg or Stonewall, may not be worth that in Arborg or Teulon or Gimli, for that matter, wherever that may be.

So I just think it's important that we establish that for assessment values because I think it's critical that those residences have a sense of fairness to them in regards to assessment.

**Mr. Struthers:** It's pretty apparent to me that the member has a pretty good understanding of how this works out on the landscape. The—what we have is what we refer to as a sales approach. We look at recent sales, recent home sales in the area, that determines what the market value is, which is what we have based our assessments on. This process is outlined on our website; the member can access that if he's interested.

But—so we have the sales approach where we look at recent sales; that determines the market value. If there's any unhappiness, there is an appeal mechanism, an appeal process that people can have access to if they feel that they—that their assessment isn't a fair one.

**Mr. Eichler:** It looks like you're about ready to put the hammer down. And I do want to thank the staff before we end here today for their openness. I think it's really important to the Estimate process, and I'm looking forward to carrying on tomorrow, and I have more questions for him and I think I might be able to stump him yet.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Speaker:** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

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