

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	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, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 1, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 30—The Non-Smokers Health Protection Amendment Act (E-Cigarettes)

Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady), that Bill 30, The Non-Smokers Health Protection Amendment Act (E-Cigarettes); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de la santé des non-fumeurs (cigarettes électroniques), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Crothers: Mr. Speaker, Bill 30 is primarily focused on protecting children and youth from potential risks associated with an emerging product. It will prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to minors and will also restrict display and advertising of e-cigarettes similar to the restrictions presently in place for tobacco products.

In addition, the use of e-cigarettes will be prohibited in enclosed public places and other places where smoking is presently prohibited. Bill 30 will allow e-cigarette use in designated rooms in group living facilities and hotels, similar to the present exceptions allowed for smoking. Customers will be able to use e-cigarettes to test or sample products in shops where the sale of e-cigarettes is the main business activity. The bill also provides for the regulatory ability to authorize e-cigarette use in beverage rooms and other places where children are generally prohibited.

And the title of the act is changed to reflect its inclusion of e-cigarettes, and there are consequential amendments to several other acts.

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.

Government Communication and Fund Allocation

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government is diverting hundreds of thousands of tax dollars and hundreds of hours of labour away from infrastructure projects for a self-promotional sign campaign entitled Steady Growth, Good Jobs.

The signs are misleading because the actual rate of growth under this Premier is the lowest west of Quebec.

Since this Premier came to power, the average weekly wage of Manitobans has risen less than in eight other provinces.

Provincial government members have been quoted as stating they need a record number of signs to counter the public backlash against the PST hike and improve the government's public image and branding. This is evidenced by comments reportedly made by the member for Thompson, there might even be a record number of signs, and from the member for Minto who reportedly said, people will see that sign, they'll see the branding.

According to documents obtained through access to information requests, the provincial government is not being upfront with Manitobans by allocating taxpayer dollars from the additional PST hike to projects other than strategic infrastructure, such as splash pads, gym storage rooms and golf courses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to, in the interest of accuracy, amend the signs and materials by adding the words in taxes and fewer, so that the sign will read, steady growth in taxes, fewer good jobs.

(2) To urge the Premier to—urge that the Premier admit to Manitobans that PST funds are being diverted away from strategic infrastructure projects that develop and grow Manitoba's economy in favour of a self-promotional government branding and spending directed to non-strategic infrastructure spending contrary to the stated reason for the PST increase cited by this Premier and his government.

This petition is signed by J. Taft, D. Coleman, D. Biles and many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by D. Armstrong, A. Brehm, N. Zohorodny and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Election Request

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

And this is the background to this petition:

(1) In 2015 the current provincial government will be in its fourth year of its mandate.

(2) There is a certain crisis of leadership unfolding on the government side of the House.

(3) According to media reports, the member for Minto stated that the Premier is, quote, more concerned about remaining leader than doing things in the best interests of the province, unquote.

(4) According to media reports, the member for Seine River stated, quote, if you are in a position where you support the point of view of the Premier, your priorities and your projects move up the queue, unquote.

(5) According to media reports, the members for Southdale, Dauphin, Seine River, Minto and Fort Rouge stated that, quote, the Premier has stopped listening to our advice, unquote.

(6) According to media reports, the members for Southdale, Dauphin, Seine River, Minto and Fort Rouge stated, quote, we can no longer work for a Premier who refuses to hear us; he refuses to hear us not just on the leadership issue but also on a wide range of issues in our portfolios, unquote.

(7) The concerns over the Premier's leadership has not been confined just to government members. NDP provincial council member Darlene Dziewit has been reported as saying, we have a crisis here in that I don't think the people of Manitoba trust our leadership anymore, unquote.

* (13:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Premier to immediately consider calling an election so that Manitobans can decide who is best placed to govern in the best interests of Manitoba.

And this petition is signed by J. Remillard, G. Patenaud, G. Chouinard and many, many more fine Manitobans.

**Bipole III Land Expropriation–
Collective Bargaining Request**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

On November 19th, 2014, the Premier authorized an order-in-council enabling Manitoba Hydro to take valuable and productive farmland for its controversial Bipole III transmission line project without due process of law.

On November 24th, 2014, the minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act signed a confirming order for the province of Manitoba declaring that no notice to landowners is required for the seizure of property.

This waiver of notice represents an attack on rural families and their property rights in a modern democratic society. There was not even an opportunity provided for debate in the Manitoba Legislature. In many cases, the private property seized has been part of a family farm for generations.

Manitoba Hydro has claimed that it has only ever expropriated one landowner in its entire history of operation. The provincial government has now gone ahead and instituted expropriation procedures against more than 200 landowners impacted by Bipole III.

Since November 2013, the Manitoba Bipole III Landowner Committee, MBLC, in association with the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations, CAEPLA, have been trying to engage Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a fair business agreement.

For over 14 months, the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro have acted in bad faith in their dealings with the Manitoba landowners or their duly authorized agents. These actions have denied farmers their right to bargain collectively to protect their property and their businesses from Bipole III.

MBLC, CAEPLA has not formed an association to stop the Bipole III project and they are not antidevelopment. MBLC, CAEPLA has simply come together, as a group of people, as Manitobans, to stand up for property rights and the right to

collectively bargain for a fair business agreement that protects the future well-being of their businesses.

MBLC, CAEPLA are duly authorized agents for Manitoba landowners who wish to exercise their freedom to associate and negotiate in good faith.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government immediately direct Manitoba Hydro to engage with MBLC, CAEPLA in order to negotiate a fair business agreement that addresses the many legitimate concerns of farm families affected by the Bipole III transmission line.

And this petition is signed by A. Green, P. Harris, A. Plis and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): I'm pleased to table the supplementary information for the legislative review for the Department of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development for 2015-2016 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the supplemental information for the legislative review for the Department of Municipal Government for the 2015-16 Estimates. There you go.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I'm pleased to table the supplemental estimates for the Department of Jobs and the Economy.

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the supplemental information for legislative review for the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship and the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund for 2015-16.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Kildonan-East Collegiate, we have 70 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Luke Klassen, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Leadership Campaign United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Globe and Mail referred to the NDP leadership contest as a, quote, abject farce. And the reason was they said that the playing field was certainly not level because the—one of the candidates remained in the premier's chair in the premier's office while the contest was going on, and the Premier we know used the power of his office to assist in employing campaigners and strategists for his leadership run. He also used the office to lever his union-boss support, a disproportionate amount of support being given to union bosses to provide delegates to influence the outcome.

Now, Alex Forrest had promised to support the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), but at the last minute he changed his position and that determined the outcome of the question.

So I have to ask the Premier: Did he use the power of his office in determining a public policy position which would have influenced Mr. Forrest to support him in the leadership race?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, short answer is no, but I'd like to take this opportunity today to rise to thank the member of St. Vital, who has informed us that she's not seeking re-election, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Selinger: The member has served honourably the people of St. Vital and, indeed, all the people of Manitoba since 1999. She has been the minister of Labour and Immigration, brought in many bills there that improved safety and security for newcomers coming to Manitoba, safety and security for workers, served as minister of Education where we made great

progress on making report cards more user-friendly for families, ensuring that people stayed in school 'til they're 18 and had opportunities to complete high school, and so I wanted to take this opportunity to thank her for that. But, most importantly, she was—played a leading role in the bill 18, the safe schools—the safe and inclusive schools act, Mr. Speaker, what we call the antibullying legislation, legislation that focuses our values on inclusiveness, protecting human rights and ensuring people in our schools have a safe and welcoming environment regardless of their background or orientation.

So, again, I want to thank the member from St. Vital—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time on this question has expired.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll add my congratulations to the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) and say that I know that she has made the people of her hometown of MacGregor very proud as well.

Even with the campaign rigged in his favour, the MLA for St. Boniface managed a razor-thin victory, though I'm not sure that victory is what the member for Seine River or the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) would call it. Going into the second ballot, his leadership was in jeopardy. CUPE wasn't enough by itself. Unifor, the UFCW—he needed more. He had to call in the cavalry, so he needed Mr. Forrest and the firefighters to come in and save the day for him. But Mr. Forrest had pledged his allegiance to the MLA for Seine River. The question would be how could you change his mind and how could you get him to break his word.

So I'm asking again: What did the MLA for St. Boniface promise Alex Forrest in order to get his support and hang on to the premier's chair?

Mr. Selinger: The short answer is nothing, Mr. Speaker.

The member will note that the health professionals advisory committee took the question of regulation of paramedics under—in hand and came back with a recommendation that regulation makes sense once a greater degree of consensus is achieved among all the people providing that front-line service in Manitoba. That committee has operated in an impartial fashion. It continues to operate in an impartial fashion and it will play a mediating role among all the people that are providing paramedic services in Manitoba to take sure and steady steps towards regulation in a way that brings everybody on

board, and there's a great deal of comfort with that. We support that process because it's impartial.

Now, I note that members opposite have now decided that they want to pick sides in this dispute and have picked a side for partisan purposes. We prefer the impartial approach, Mr. Speaker, that has served us well in Manitoba, and I can only recommend that the members opposite consider it when it comes to professional regulation that they consider an impartial approach.

I do note, Mr. Speaker—and I will give this a more complete answer in my third response.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that would be the first complete answer we'll hear from the member.

* (13:50)

The MLA for St. Boniface was asked on March 10th by the Winnipeg Free Press if he had used his premier's power to influence the outcome, and his answer was: No firm promises were made from my level—a double qualification in his answer—no firm promises from my level. Well, Mr. Forrest was asked, he had no comment, but he has always assured people that he has the ear of the Premier whenever he wants it.

So what paramedics want and the position of our party has been for eight years the same, is a self-regulatory body. Mr. Forrest does not want that to happen. Now the NDP are continuing to drag their feet. They are twiddling their thumbs. They are continuing to put politics ahead of patient safety.

Is this the Premier's way of keeping his promise to the wrong people?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the health professionals advisory committee took this matter under advisement early on. They did an independent report on it. That report was tabled in public. That report recommended that self-regulation occur once a greater degree of consensus occurred, had nothing to do with any other events. They did their own work in their own time in their own way with proper consultations.

We support the work they do. We support them taking an impartial role in mediating a long-term solution for regulation in Manitoba.

I note the members opposite say they support this. Why haven't they supported the growth? We had 280 paramedics in Manitoba full-time when they were in office. We have 1,500 full-time paramedics in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, right now. And every time

we've increased the number of paramedics in Manitoba and put it in the budget, members opposite have voted against it. We've increased the number of ambulances in Manitoba with new GPS technology. And every time we've done that, they voted against it.

They're not in favour of safety of Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, they're in favour of cutting the budget. We're in favour of investing in quality health care—

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

Manitoba Hydro Rates Administrative Costs

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Hydro is continuing to plead poverty before the Public Utilities Board, saying that their six rate increases have been granted in five years isn't enough.

A closer look at Hydro's operations reveals administrative costs have grown by 50 per cent since 2008. Fifty per cent growth administrative cost since 2008, Mr. Speaker, that's unacceptable.

Will the minister commit today to stopping the steady growth of administrating cost at Hydro that's resulting in Manitobans paying more and getting less?

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'll commit to is making sure that Manitobans have the lowest hydro rates in Canada. And, in addition to that, what we'll commit to is when we put it together with home heating and car insurance rates, then we have the lowest bundle of utility rates in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to pull the plug on Manitoba Hydro. They want to turn the lights off on Manitoba Hydro and they want to leave Manitobans in the dark. As I said to him before, we're never going to let that happen.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, administrative costs at Hydro have grown at an average of more than three times the rate of inflation since 2008. Those costs have to be covered by someone. That someone is the hydro ratepayers, the real owners of Manitoba Hydro. Manitobans are facing, according to Hydro's own numbers, at least doubling of rates and will likely be more under the NDP—doesn't commit to get skyrocketing costs under control.

Will the minister today commit to stop at least a doubling of rates that will see Manitobans pay more and get less under this NDP government?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, the member's premise is incorrect. Manitobans pay among the lowest hydro rates in Canada, and he needs to remember that most basic thing.

More than that, we—when we invest in hydro, we produce clean, reliable energy for Manitobans for generations to come. And then in addition to that, when we invest in hydro, we create jobs for Manitobans and we create jobs for First Nations, who enjoy the benefits of that investment.

Mr. Speaker, we're committed to investing in Manitoba Hydro; the opposition is committed to turning out the lights on Manitobans.

Mr. Eichler: The purpose of Manitoba Hydro, according to law, is, and I quote, to promote economy and efficiency in the development, generation, transmission, distribution and the supply of power, end of quote.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP obviously have a different idea of the word, of the meaning, efficiency. We wouldn't call the doubling of administrative expenses since 2008 efficient. We wouldn't call growth in expenses at more than three times the rate of inflation efficient. We wouldn't call the doubling of rates efficient.

Will the minister today commit to respect Hydro, the Hydro act, or will Manitobans continue to pay more and get less under this NDP government?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of addressing this issue I believe it was last week. I just want to reiterate what I said at that time, and that is that low rates, low hydro rates in Manitoba, continue to keep our province the most affordable place to live in Canada, and that's our affordability advantage.

First of all, Manitoba Hydro has done a number of things and continuing to undertake a number of initiatives across the various business units that are intended to further in the operating and operating capital costs that are required. Some of these key initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps at a later time I'll have an opportunity to further express and expand on some of the tremendous savings that are occurring, as a result of the member's questions.

Education System Math Test Score Results

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, last week, once again the Minister of Education was in the news about our poor results when it comes to math.

Anna Stokke, a university math professor, said, and I quote: It's time to get back to basics with instruction, time tables and lots of repetition.

The Minister of Education said that they, the NDP government, are starting to reincorporate those things.

Mr. Speaker, why has it taken this minister so long to admit that it is his NDP government to blame for the poor math results?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not really sure where the member's been lately, but we revised the math curriculum quite some time ago to return a focus on those fundamentals so that kids have those most basic skills to be sure that they can be successful learners, go on and get a good job here in Manitoba and raise a family.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of initiatives to improve our—the quality of our education system. Well, of course, the most important one probably is the reducing the class size from K to 12—or from K to grade 3. That means we have more teachers, more one-on-one time between teachers and students and making sure every day that we have a quality education system here in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, our scores in literacy, science and math have declined since the NDP have taken over government. The minister and his predecessors have all stated that they were disappointed with the results, and did nothing. Manitobans have also stated that they were disappointed, and the NDP government has done nothing.

Now, on Thursday, the minister said he's accountable for making sure that he addresses those issues as quickly and speedily.

Is 16 years his definition of quickly and speedily?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the course of our government's life, we've invested in education at the rate of economic growth every single year. We

have low class sizes, small class sizes from K to 3. We've focused the curriculum on math and science and reading. We have supports for parents. We have supports for teachers. We have skill-building opportunities in our schools now so that students get job skills while they're still in school.

Every time we invest in education in Manitoba, that side of the House votes against it. We stand for a quality education; they stand for nothing.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure, if they're doing so well, why is he so angry?

Mr. Speaker, this is nothing new. Since the NDP government took over, we went from a leader in Canada to near the bottom in regards to math scores. The Education Minister and his predecessors said they were disappointed with the poor results, but they continued to do nothing. Thanks to the Education Minister for finally admitting that his NDP government is to blame for the low math scores.

Will he table his action plan today to right the ship in regards to the math scores, emphasis on the right, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not angry, I'm just passionate about kids. That's all.

* (14:00)

But let's remember when this side of the House was in government, they laid off 700 teachers. They cut funding to schools each and every year. My gosh, these guys were so desperate when they were in government, they tried to bring advertising right into the classrooms, while my friend from St. Vital brought human rights back into the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, as I've said before, every day we're concerned about the quality of education. And in our world, every kid counts.

Mining Industry Government Record

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the mining sector is facing many challenges. As we know, jurisdictions compete for the limited investment dollars in this sector. And, clearly, government policies and actions, or inactions, have a direct bearing on this.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister why his government has refused to develop a competitive framework for this sector here in Manitoba.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, the member need not ask me, he simply needs to ask the industry.

For example, Robert Winton, vice-president of HudBay, said, and I quote, this is a good place to build good mines and produce benefits for business, employees and the province as a whole.

Glen Kuntz, the CEO of Mega Precious Metals, said, quote, I think Manitoba does deserve their ranking. It's a better place to do work than a lot of other places in Canada and the world.

And Ken Green, their buddy at the right-wing Fraser Institute, said, quote, Manitoba is fourth out of 122—I'll repeat that—Manitoba is fourth out of 122, second in Canada. We have strong reason to believe that we've captured the general opinion. I think you would expect investments to lag perceptions.

It'll grow, Mr. Speaker, under us, because we put in place the incentives. Two mines in the last year, name another place that's done that.

Tax Environment

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, if we're doing that good, why is the minister so angry?

Mr. Speaker, it's not just us as opposition sending these warnings out. We have people in the industry talking about this government's shortcomings, in fact, people such as Tim Friesen from San Gold saying, you have a—have to have a fairly outstanding mine with existing assets to be a viable mining operating in this province with the current tax regime. That's what's happening today.

The NDP have been focused on their own leadership review, Mr. Speaker, but why are they refusing to listen to people in the industry?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, like the rest of my colleagues, I'm passionate about what we do every single day in this Chamber. And the member has to differentiate between the anger, the acute anger of his leader and the passion on this side of the House.

And, Mr. Speaker, I only could ask the member opposite—it is true that San Gold has been in trouble. They're \$95 million in debt. They are going through proceedings.

But I'd like the member to name another jurisdiction in this country or the world where they've built two mines in the last year, where there's three gold mines now being set up for production and where the Fraser Institute, the right-wing institute,

says it's the second best place in the country to invest.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we will congratulate the people at HudBay for opening those two mines.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell the minister what the mining association is saying. It says, we have made submissions to the province's budget consultation process for three years, and it's fair to say the industry has been frustrated. None of the recommendations have been acted on.

Mr. Speaker, this government is not listening.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk about the PST alone. Only three provinces have a provincial sales tax on the mining sector. One provides rebates; the other one, in Saskatchewan, the PST is only 5 per cent and not as broad as it is here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, why is the government refusing to listen to the warnings being put forward by this industry?

Mr. Chomiak: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, we'll give him a copy of the presentation I'm making to the mining ministers in about three weeks about what Manitoba's done to incent junior mining exploration in Canada, where we've been stated by the prospectors association to have the best incentive programs for mining prospectors in the entire country. We'll send him comments of that.

And perhaps, Mr. Speaker, he could explain to his colleagues why we have the best incentive rates for flow-through tax shares in Manitoba, which is one of the reasons why, when members opposite cry the blues, they don't realize two mines have opened, hundreds of jobs, another three gold mines under exploration, which dwarfs anything they had done during their mean, lean Tory years.

Manitoba Tourism Promotion of Industry

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's been recorded in the local newspapers that the Kirkella tourist information centre on the Trans-Canada Highway near the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border has been closed. Manitoba businesses, tourist destinations and communities rely on this travel centre to promote their attractions and hotels and restaurants.

Mr. Speaker, why did this minister close the Kirkella tourist information centre this season?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, we're keeping the visitor information centre open.

Mr. Piwniuk: Was reported in the newspapers that it wasn't being opened this year, and the NDP government spends less than half as much than Saskatchewan as they promote the tourist industry here. The NDP government's waste and mismanagement definitely reduces front-line services in our important tourist industry.

This minister wants to move the tourist information centre 100 kilometres east on the Trans-Canada—off the Trans-Canada Highway in Brandon. By the time the tourists get to Brandon, many of the attractions on the southwest region have already been passed by.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government continue to reduce front-line services and do not invest in our—the important tourism industry?

Mr. Caldwell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I—maybe I'll expand a little bit on the Kirkella centre actually being open, not closed.

Just to enlighten the member, tourism is a very important sector of the economy in the province of Manitoba. We're proud, in fact, to have the Kirkella centre open, to have western Manitoba and the Trans-Canada Highway well represented as visitors and travellers come into the province. It's good for Virden. It's good for Kirkella. It's good for Brandon. It's good for Manitoba.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table some pictures of the newly expanded Brandon Riverbank Discovery Centre, which was—the Premier (Mr. Selinger) actually was—announced this—on Thursday, and what it basically showcases to our tourist industry is that the riverbank has been destroyed by this NDP government, which was once the beautiful Assiniboine valley.

Why is this government mismanaging our—and are promoting our tourism industry?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, I very much like the member for Arthur-Virden. He's a fine gentleman. He represents his constituency very well. I'm sorry that he gets stuff put into his hands by staffers—gets material put into his hand by staffers who don't have the same quality of character as the member himself does.

Mr. Speaker, the floods of 2011, 2014, the floods that we've been experiencing in the province

of Manitoba over the last decade, frankly, have been catastrophic in nature. We're working every day to repair flood damage and provide flood protection. The members opposite every day are voting against investment in flood protection and voting against the communities that they represent.

Children in Care Hotel Accommodations

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, today is June 1st, the day the minister responsible for Child and Family Services tearfully promised to have all children under the care of CFS out of hotels.

Last Thursday the promise was already broken when it was revealed that only in Winnipeg does this apply.

What is to happen to children in the care of Child and Family Services outside of Winnipeg? Is the minister not worried about their care as well?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I want to ensure all members, like everyone else sitting in this Chamber, and even citizens of Manitoba, we all care about Manitoba children. We want the best for all children in this province.

What we were able to accomplish over the last eight weeks was we have developed 90 more emergency placements. We have hired 80 more staff. We're able to develop a hotel reduction team that is providing the resources to Winnipeg and expanding to the rural and North.

We are very proud of what we've been able to accomplish in partnership with the authorities and with the agencies. It was a collaborative effort that has come to—has come true where we've been able to eliminate the hotel use in Winnipeg.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, what this minister has accomplished is continuing the long NDP tradition of breaking promises.

Not only are they falling short on their announcement today, but back in 2007 the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh), then minister of Family Services, made a virtually identical promise. Six months later, children in care were back in hotels.

Why should we believe that this time will be any different?

* (14:10)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I can tell them—all members of the House, what we were able to accomplish is the development of more resources, of human resources as well as capital resources. We also announced a initiative around ensuring that we have prevention services available to families, expanding the Families First program, hiring four more Families First workers to work within the North End of Winnipeg, working with agencies.

What we were able to accomplish with our hotel reduction team is reducing the use of hotels. Since May 11th, there have been no children in hotels. That's going to continue with the support that we have with all of the authorities and agencies. As we started this work, we identified that there was a—there were not the same resources in the rural areas. We have to work with the authorities and with the agencies, but I want to assure all members that even as we're doing that—

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

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears that it matters to children who come into the care of Child and Family Services not only where they come into care but when.

These conditional announcements on promises that have already been broken before have us all wondering, does this minister really have control of her own department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What it's about is co-operation and collaboration with the authorities and with the agencies across this province.

We have reduced the use of hotels in Winnipeg. We are committed to reducing the hotel use and eliminating it in the rural and the North. We need more time to develop the resources to support the agencies. The hotel reduction team is going to be expanded to the North. As well, if an agency must place a child in a hotel, they have to get permission from the CEO of the authority.

We have initiatives in place. We're going to continue to build resources, human and capital resources, while we are working on that ultimate goal of reducing the number of children in care.

Children in Care Rural Hotel Accommodations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, care for the lives and welfare of over 10,000 of Manitoba's children who are in care requires

proactive planning and not knee-jerk reactions. The Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) is still, after 19 months on the job, only reacting, bouncing from crisis to crisis.

Following her April 1st reaction to end all hotel use, she again reacted just before her own deadline, which was today, to push the date further away. The minister's had the last two months to work with all authorities and agencies to implement a province-wide plan to end hotel use.

Has the minister during this time only been focused on children in Winnipeg?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, if you take a look at the budget, there's been a dramatic increase in investments in children at all levels throughout this government, and it hasn't just started in the last few months.

Our Early Childhood Development investments have been very significant, starting with the prenatal benefit. We've expanded our daycare system by triple, Mr. Speaker, for early childhood learning. We've expanded our child-welfare system, more than doubling the amount available there. And, of course, in the face of opposition from all members opposite voting against the budget, we've also expanded our funding to public schools and smaller class sizes K to 3, and we have the after-school programming going on as well.

We have a long-term vision for investing in children and families from the earliest days right up until they complete high school and get a chance to enter the labour market, Mr. Speaker, and the child-welfare system is a crucially important part of that.

One of the reasons that there are children in care in Manitoba right now, Mr. Speaker, we've expended—we've extended the amount of time we care for those children beyond 18. Now those children are looked after as young adults up to the age of 25 so they get the support they need to survive and do well and thrive in our society.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Family Services said on April the 1st, and I quote: As of June 1st, we will no longer use hotels.

But the minister didn't say in Winnipeg only. The minister didn't say, we don't mean rural Manitoba. Her definitive statement for all of CFS was, and I quote: As of June 1st, we will no longer

use hotels. Presumably, she intends to end all hotel use by CFS in the whole province.

If this were really so, I ask the Premier: Why did the west region CFS just start advertising to hire a reservations clerk for hotels?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've done, in contrast to when the members opposite were in office, they cut funding for foster parents. They cut the per diem amount and then they eliminated funding for the Foster Parents Association.

We have increased the per diem amount for foster parents, and we have dramatically increased the support for the Foster Parents Association so they can train and support each other and offer the kinds of collective energy that allows foster parents to do well and continue to be foster parents in Manitoba. That is crucially important.

So we're investing in more foster parent placements throughout Manitoba. We're investing in the Foster Parents Association throughout Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. We're investing in social housing throughout Manitoba. We're investing in Rent Assist throughout Manitoba. Nobody's being neglected.

The minister is being realistic and moving forward in a sure-footed way to ensure there are less children in hotels, and at the same time, we're creating opportunities for families to thrive no matter where they live in the province.

Mr. Gerrard: I table now a copy of the ad from the Winnipeg Free Press on Saturday, May the 30th, for the position of a hotel reservations clerk for west region CFS.

Mr. Speaker, if there's to be no use of hotels planned for rural Manitoba, why is this a full-time position, a permanent position in this agency? Is the Premier going to use this position to set up a loophole service so that kids who would have been placed in hotels in Winnipeg are now to be placed in hotels in rural Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: We've also increased in the child-welfare budget more money for prevention, more—we've increased the amount of money for more family supports, more prevention for those families by 60 per cent. We've got more social workers working in the child-welfare system. We're following the Hughes inquiry recommendations and moving forward on that.

We're going beyond the issues of child welfare directly to address issues of poverty and inequality in Manitoba with Rent Assist and more supports for people to enter the labour market. We're expanding our daycare system, we're expanding our social housing system and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, we're providing jobs for parents. We're making sure the parents who want to work have those supports in the home and in the workplace. Those are benefits for all Manitobans regardless of where we live.

And I recently was in western Manitoba and I visited with the Metis friendship centre and I saw the excellent job they're doing on their after-school program, Mr. Speaker. We support them through the Lighthouses programs, we support them with training, and we will continue to support them because they're doing a good job—

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

St. Anthony's General Hospital Telestroke Program

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Our government believes that it's important for Manitobans to be able to get the care they need close to home. This is especially true when a loved one is facing a stroke.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I was so pleased to be at St. Anthony's hospital in The Pas for the announcement of the fifth Telestroke program in the province.

Can the Minister of Health please explain this important initiative which will help assure the delivery of top-quality patient care in rural and northern Manitoba?

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

Mr. Speaker, during a stroke it's important that patients get care as soon as possible to reduce potential effects and improve their chances of recovery. And the Heart and Stroke Foundation says that Telestroke is the best practice in the delivery of effective care, and we agree on this side of the Chamber.

And the Telestroke program, for those who are not familiar, allows neurologists and radiologists to consult with physicians in rural and northern hospitals through video conferencing and shared CT images. Stroke specialists can determine if a stroke

has occurred, the type of stroke and the treatment options.

And St. Anthony's is now the fifth to join the Telestroke system, along with Thompson this February and other sites here in Winnipeg and in Brandon, and we look forward to more in the future. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Hydro Transmission Line Manitoba-Minnesota Route

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Last week, I had the opportunity to attend a Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line coalition meeting in La Broquerie. At this meeting, there were residents from all parts of the southeast that are affected by this line. They all had the same concerns: What are the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for this Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line?

When will the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro release this information, or what is he hiding?

*(14:20)

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Again, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of responding to the same member on the very same question about a week and a half ago, and the answer remains the same.

There has been a number of discussions that have occurred with the communities and the people that live in the region that the member has made reference to, and we believe that this project has a lot of support, not only from Minnesota Power, but it's also a project that's widely supported by the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama.

So, indeed, I believe that all the measures that are necessary have been taken by Hydro to ensure a great awareness by the citizens that live within the corridor of this proposed line.

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

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, the minister has spoken on this topic, but he has not answered the question.

Manitobans are tired of this NDP government mismanaging Manitoba Hydro. Manitobans are tired of rate increase after rate increase. Manitobans are tired of paying more and getting less.

There have been hundreds of presentations at all the open houses held on this project. This NDP

government says they are listening to Manitobans, but they are not.

Why is this NDP government not listening to Manitobans on this project that affects the lives of so many?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, in 2013 Manitoba Hydro launched a series of open houses and workshops to engage the public on a proposed transmission project, and beginning in January of 2015 a preferred route has been presented to the public, which is now being debated by the people that live in that region. So to say otherwise would be misleading this House.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, several months ago, at an informational meeting, I asked for what criteria was used and for the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for certain sections of the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line. I was told this information would be made available to me.

Shortly after, I received the call that this information was ready but needed to be approved by someone higher up. As of today, I still do not have this information.

What is this minister hiding? What is this NDP government hiding, and where is this information, or is this just another NDP broken promise?

Mr. Robinson: On the main part of the question, Mr. Speaker, I will do some follow-up on the response that the member did request at the community hearing and, hopefully, get a response to him in the very near future.

However, let me reiterate what I said to the member some nine days ago. This transmission line is going to strengthen our connection to the American market. It's also going to ensure that Manitoba has a reliable source of energy in drought years, as well as ensuring that we're able to sell our excess energy instead of spilling it past the dam.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying exports have contributed about 32 per cent of Manitoba's revenue and has aided in keeping Manitoba Hydro's domestic—

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

Assiniboine River Dike Impact on Farmland

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, a couple weeks ago I attended Nott's Berry Farm in my

constituency. Despite the fact it is located half a kilometre from the Assiniboine River, standing water is drowning out his 25-year-old investment, as these pictures will show.

Can the minister explain why Nott's berries is drowned out by seepage along a provincially owned dike?

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I thank the member for the question. It's—I would welcome the opportunity to sit down with the member and discuss this issue further. It's casework-related. I don't have the specific information before me, so if the member opposite is willing and able, I can meet with him in the loge or in my office after this and take the details down and endeavour to get the answer for him.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, let's broaden the terms for the minister.

The NDP have permanently altered the water table in the area. They have turned formerly productive agricultural land into swampland. Now, instead of corn and saskatoons, you're getting cattails.

Will the minister commit to tabling an action plan to deal with the water seepage that is a result of government action?

Thank you.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Mr. Speaker, and if the member opposite wants to talk about water strategy, I would remind him of the situation back in 1999 when we were first elected. The first act—one of the first three acts we put through this Legislature was reconstituting The Water Rights Act because they had mismanaged the system so badly over their time in office that their jurisdiction was actually thrown out by a court of law in this province. It was called the Hildebrandt case. So we have no lessons to learn from members opposite in regard to water management in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for members' statements.

Fair Trade Gimli

Mr. Peter Bjornson (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, if you have ever purchased a fair trade product before, you know that your purchase provided fair wages to the producer communities in the developing world. And thanks to MCIC, the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation, it has never been easier to find fair trade products in Manitoba than it is today.

The town of Gimli might be one of the best places in Manitoba to find fair trade products. And back in 2009, Gimli became Manitoba's first and Canada's sixth certified fair trade town. This certification means that local retailers have agreed to promote fair trade products in their businesses. The Gimli Youth Community Partnership has also played an important role in this process by helping people understand what fair trade is and why making fair trade purchases are so important.

Gimli would never have received the designation of being Manitoba's first fair trade town without the help of people like Zack Gross, who has joined us in the gallery today, along with others from MCIC.

Zack Gross and members of MCIC have worked hard to develop the Fair Trade Manitoba program, which encourages towns like Gimli as well as universities and school divisions and schools to work towards becoming officially fair trade certified. In Manitoba today, Gimli and Brandon are both fair trade towns and Stonewall Collegiate was just named Canada's second and Manitoba's first fair trade high school. Winnipeg is working towards a fair trade designation, and next February will host the fourth annual National Fair Trade Conference.

Making the decision to purchase more fair trade products can be a little bit more expensive, but it makes such a difference for the families around the world. When we purchase fair trade products we can improve communities in developing countries by ensuring proper standards of—for working conditions, environmental sustainability and respect for cultural identity.

Thanks to MCIC and to Zack Gross for making more fair trade purchases possible here in Manitoba.

Thank you very much.

Donna Mae Unverrich

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are very proud of the fact that we are the most charitable province in Canada. We're home to

the highest number of residents who donate to charities, and as Manitobans we dedicate countless selfless hours volunteering to make Manitoba a better place to live.

In this light, I would like to pay tribute to a constituent who has spent her entire life giving back. What used to be Wisconsin's asset is now Dominion City's, and we're extremely happy to have her in our community.

Donna Mae Unverrich moved to Dominion City almost 13 years ago, and is the loving grandmother of seven. Promptly upon moving to Dominion City, Donna Mae became an instant leader within the community, and has been—become more involved each day.

Donna Mae was the driving force behind the Community Hall committee decision to hold a St. Patrick's Day supper to honour those with Irish heritage in the community. Since then, Donna Mae has managed to be the pre-eminent ticket seller for the dinner, and for those who cannot attend, Donna Mae ensures that delivery will be provided.

On the meals front, Donna Mae also ensures delivery of Congregate Meal program every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to those that have limited mobility. She also provides necessary transportation for seniors requiring shopping or health-related activities to Altona, Winkler and Winnipeg.

But this is just the start, Mr. Speaker. Donna Mae is a dedicated committee of the member—committee member of the Manitoba—Franklin Museum, which also volunteers as the museum from 1 to 5 every Tuesday to Friday. This commitment becomes even more so impressive as Donna Mae also works as a medical transcriber.

Mr. Speaker, Donna Mae Unverrich is an exemplary Manitoban, and all will be better served to emulate her dedication for giving back to her community and those less fortunate.

For this reason, I would invite all honourable members to join me in a round of applause to show gratitude where gratitude is undoubtedly due.

* (14:30)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wayfinders Mentoring Program

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, joining us

in the gallery today is Mr. Peter Krahn, director of the Wayfinders mentoring program. They recently received national recognition for their hard work, winning the Ken Spencer national innovation in teaching and learning award.

Wayfinders is a community-based program that offers free after-school tutoring that helps students who need extra support in the Seven Oaks School Division. These are students that are often not engaged in school because they may be in CFS care or are transitioning from moving to Winnipeg from northern communities or have challenges due to gaps in learning.

Wayfinders offers a broad range of services to support these students to earn credits towards graduation. Their programs include tutoring and mentoring, homework support and opportunities for community involvement. Wayfinders also sets up a long-term incentive scholarship fund of \$1,000 per year for their students to use towards their post-secondary education if they complete grade 12.

Wayfinders is now in its seventh year and has grown to include over 300 students, with a graduation rate of over 80 per cent. Three quarters of those high school graduates continue on to postsecondary schools.

Last year, over 60 Wayfinders students celebrated their graduation and newly released bursaries with their families. Many of them were participants for the full four years and will get \$4,000 to put towards their post-secondary education.

Wayfinders is always looking to improve their services for students. For example, this spring they piloted a literacy program. It worked with grade 7 and 8 students at Elwick school. Connecting with students before high school gives them a better chance to succeed.

Congratulations, Wayfinders, on receiving the Ken Spencer Award, and a big thank you for all your great work with students in the Seven Oaks School Division.

Relay for Life

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, on June 6th, the community of Pinawa will be hosting the 2015 Relay for Life. Every year communities across Canada join together to raise money towards cancer research and to assist Canadians who live with cancer every day.

The first Relay for Life in Canada was held in Ottawa in 1999, and since then, every year hundreds of communities across Canada host their own events and to date have raised over \$496 million for cancer research and support programs.

I am proud to say that communities in my constituency have also joined the fight against cancer, and in 2012-2013, Lac du Bonnet hosted their own Relay for Life events. Sandi Smith from Lac du Bonnet was instrumental in co-ordinating the Lac du Bonnet Relay for Life events and last year's relay in Pinawa. This year, Sandi has remained a key consultant, sharing her valuable experience with the Pinawa relay organizers.

In 2014, over 400 Relay for Life events took place across Canada, raising over \$40 million; 128,734 Canadians participated, 22,217 people volunteered and 28,296 people celebrated their survival at Relay for Life events.

I myself participated in last year's Relay for Life in Pinawa and had the sincere pleasure of meeting some members of the planning committee who have selflessly given their time and efforts to organize the event and whose goal is to beat last year's total monies raised and win the fight against cancer.

My mother is a survivor of breast cancer, and I would like to send a big thank you to everyone who is raising awareness and working on eradicating this disease.

If there is no Relay for Life event being hosted within your own constituency or area, then I urge you to register or donate online to the Relay for Life on June 6th. People from all over Manitoba and Canada come to participate, and we hope to see you there.

Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to enter the organizing committee's names and their positions for this year's event.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to include the names of the organization the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet referenced in his member's statement? *[Agreed]*

The names will be entered in the Hansard.

Organizing committee: Mary Greber, chairperson; Myrna Suski, events co-ordinator; Lorne Schram, volunteer co-ordinator; Shelly Kaminski, team co-ordinator; Kristen Ticknor, in charge of corporate sponsorship; Crystal Stanley, finance chair; Louise Daymond, master of ceremonies;

*Cindy Boer, in charge of survivor luminaries;
Jill Summers, cancer-care research co-ordinator*

Andrew Mynarski

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): If you've ever spent time in the North End, you've probably heard of Andrew Mynarski.

Andrew Mynarski is a World War II hero who grew up in the area. He attended King Edward and Isaac Newton elementary schools, graduated from St. John's High School and then joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940. This young Manitoban headed overseas in January 1942.

In 1944, Mynarski and his squadron fell under attack as they were flying over northern France. As the crew bailed the burning aircraft, Mynarski noticed that Pilot Officer Pat Brophy was trapped. Mynarski made his way through the flames to assist him but was unable to free him. With his suit and parachute on fire, Brophy waved him away. Before finally jumping from the aircraft, Mynarski turned to his friend, saluted and said, good night, sir. Mynarski soon died from his injuries but Brophy was able to escape the burning bomber after it crashed on the ground.

In 1946, Mynarski was posthumously awarded a Victorian cross for his valour of the highest order. In 2005, a large bronze statue of Mynarski was installed in England outside of the bomber base where he served.

Today, many Winnipeggers have joined together in the bringing-Andrew-home effort. Several individuals as well as the No. 573 Andrew Mynarski VC air cadet squadron, staff at Andrew Mynarski V.C. School and the Canadian Aviation Historical Society have been involved.

Their efforts have not been in vain. Sculptor Charlie Johnston began creating a full-sized statue back in 2013. This year, on June 12th, the Andrew Mynarski VC Memorial Statue will be dedicated at Winnipeg's Vimy Ridge Memorial Park at 1 o'clock.

Like to salute Andrew Mynarski and all of those people who have helped bring him home.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we might not go to Committee of Supply in three areas, that is, the Chamber, room 255 and 254, to consider Executive Council in the Chamber, Finance in 255 and Housing and Community Development in 254.

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

The chairpersons of various committees, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

**HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

* (14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the ever-exciting Department of Housing and Community Development.

As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global matter and, wouldn't you know it, the floor is open for questions.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I just ask that the information that was going to be tabled for one of our colleagues that be done at a bit later time and that'll allow the Liberal Party, Mr. Gerrard, to be able to—member from River Heights—be able to ask some questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee okay with that proposal? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I wonder if the minister could provide an update as to whether or not the total of 1,500 social housing and 1,500 affordable housing units under the HOMEWorks! strategy have all been completed.

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Thank the member for asking the question.

Fifteen hundred social units have been completed, and out of another 15 affordable units, 1,000 have been completed, and the other 500 are under way.

Mr. Gerrard: When the minister says completed, I presume that that means that they are either now occupied or ready to be occupied. When will the minister affirm that, and will the minister then comment on what date the remaining 500 would be completed by, expected?

Mr. Saran: Yes. A thousand has been either rented or in going to be rented because it's in that state. And the other 500 will be completed within 18 to 20 months.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, there were to be, is my understanding, under the three-year housing plan, an additional 500 new affordable housing units above and beyond the original 1,500. How many of these additional 500 new affordable housing units have initiated construction?

Mr. Saran: None has been started yet.

Mr. Gerrard: How many of the additional 500 new social housing units under the three-year housing plan, that's above and beyond the 1,500 initially, have initiated construction?

Mr. Saran: None yet.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I want to clarify something on the Rent Assist program. If somebody—if an elderly person is receiving Rent Assist, is it true that their senior's housing rebate will be withdrawn from them?

Mr. Saran: Yes, I think that answer could be asked in Jobs and the Economy. That question pertains to Jobs and the Economy and that answer can be provided by the Jobs and the Economy.

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry. Minister, were you done your answer? Or—

Mr. Saran: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before I recognize the next speaker, the cameraperson in the room is actually shooting vids for the Legislative Assembly. There's a video of some sort being made, so that's why. Normally, they don't come past the media table there.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, just for a point of clarification, does the full Rent Assist program come under jobs and economy and it has nothing to do with the Ministry of Housing? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Saran: That's correct. Sorry.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Thank you for the opportunity to ask some questions again.

When we were last here, I got into the issue of bedbugs and bedbug treatments. Didn't really get time to ask the question, and really the point is the training for the people that actually provide the service, different—there are a lot of facilities that require it. Who is responsible for training the staff, and is the supervisor on site when application is being done?

Mr. Saran: Yes, those people who do spray, they are licensed. Those people who do the spraying, they are licensed.

Mr. Wishart: Well and I'm familiar with the system. The ones that actually do the spraying are licensed? Or is their supervisor licensed?

Mr. Saran: Both.

Mr. Wishart: So everybody that comes out and goes through the various facilities with a spray can in their hand is actually a licensed applicator under the provincial system?

Mr. Saran: Yes, I think everybody may not even there spraying. Everybody may not be licensed, and—but he will be closely watched by the supervisor, licensed person.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank you, Mr. Minister, for that answer. But I've been told repeatedly by people that the people doing the spraying do not seem well trained in what they're doing, and, on top of that, they're, in many cases, actually asking the tenants to move furniture. And, as many of these facilities contain disabled and elderly people, I have a serious concern that this job isn't being handled very well.

* (15:00)

Mr. Saran: Yes, normally in the department they hire a global moving company, and—but how they move—and I think we have to get further information what they exactly do, because normally we expect when people are kind of professional and they have business, they will do properly the job. In the case they're not doing properly the job, and we have to—No. 1, we have to find out whether that's true or not. If they're not doing properly the job, sure, we will

make sure in the future they don't make those mistakes for the resident complaining about them, and we will investigate that. If tenants are asking for assistance, then the assistance is normally provided.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I certainly appreciate that, Mr. Minister.

I think you need to review the actual actions of some of these crews because I've heard from multiple sources that their average time in a suite is three to five minutes, which is difficult to do a thorough job in that period of time, and doing a thorough job is very important in this process. And, if you just go through lightly, you don't really get rid of all of the sources. And that, I mean, in particular, in several facilities, that they've been—people have been called on to move their own material, which is really not practical solution. And so I would certainly encourage the minister to review the process that is being undertaken.

Some of this has come from my own constituency, some of it has come from other constituencies, and I'd be happy to share some of those locations with you because the goal here is to get it done properly. Managing bedbugs is all about the reinfestation process, so you have to be thorough. And hit-and-miss-type treatments—hit this suite, leave the next one—is not a good way to deal with this particular problem.

And I can share one with you. They've been treated 16 times in three months and still don't have a solution. So I'm not sure that we have a process in place that is doing its job.

So, if there's anything the minister would care to comment on that, I'm asking him to review this process to make sure that it is being done right.

Mr. Saran: At present, 97 per cent of direct-managed properties are bedbug free. And, while I think normally I had one case in the other apartments, too, like a—it's a private-owned apartment, and a newcomer was there and he was asked to get out of the suite so that they can spray. And after that he was forced to pay that amount, whatever he was—the company charged the owner.

So then there was a kind of a discussion between who should pay, and they came to my office—MLA's office. So we were able to kind of negotiate that. So, instead of either, I told the newcomer maybe he should go to the tenancy branch and he may get reimbursed the full amount or he may have to pay the full amount. But then, between the manager and

between that tenant, they compromised; they separated 50-50.

But, considering that it's not easy to judge why those bugs are there, because they—at that time, what they did, he bought the sofa—a second-hand sofa, he brought in. And so there were vermin because he brought the bugs in. And, on the other hand, he was blaming that he never had any of those bugs before, but it was, you know, in the second suite and in the third suite, and those bugs have come from there, why should I pay?

So this kind of situation is always arguable, but we have to come sometimes to the kind of agreement and kind of compromise. And, because we can listen to arguments from both sides, and, after listening to both sides, we have to make our judgment.

But I assure that we will look into the system, perhaps if we can improve it. There's always chance to improve. Sure, we will try to improve.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that answer. Of course, the facilities I was referring to are Manitoba Housing facilities, not private ones, where, yes, it's often a bit of an argument over who brought the source.

I don't think that that's really—the point in this case is that we're looking for a proper set of treatment protocols that are followed to make sure that problems are dealt with as they arise. And they will continue to arise. It happens in lots of facilities that, you know, bedbugs do have—do find their way in one way or the other. And they are, no doubt, very difficult to control, but we certainly need to make the best effort to do that.

I did want to go on a little bit and ask some questions about program that has been put in place to sell off some of the properties that Manitoba Housing has. Many are in rural areas, though not all are. Some are in the city here. And I can't remember the name of the program. It's a special initiative that the department has put together to encourage sometimes even tenants to purchase the properties that they have been renting.

So I wondered if the minister could, first off, name the program and mention whether they've had any significant success in terms of selling off some of these properties.

* (15:10)

Mr. Saran: Okay, that program is called Rural Homeownership Program, they call RHP, and we

have sold up to now 58 units and 17 homes are for sale.

Mr. Wishart: How many units have been offered for sale, total?

Mr. Saran: Fifty-eight, and 17 for sale—58 have been sold.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the next speaker—and you don't have to do this now, but there was an agreement when you had arrived that information you had requested would be provided, so do you want to do that now or do you want to ask your next question, or—sure, whatever you like, so, honourable member for Portage.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, and I'll provide you with the opportunity to put the information on record here just shortly.

So that's the total number of units that the department is interested in disposing of, that total, which would be 75 units, is the total number of units that you intend to sell?

Mr. Saran: No, it's not just the 75. It will be more than 75 because we are identifying with the units are empty and we are not—cannot rent them out. It's a possibility to sell them so either those are being vacant and chronically we are not able to find a tenant for those units, so then we put on a sale and that way, like, some ownership is encouraged.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I certainly appreciate that, and I think they are far better sold than they are sitting empty. I just wondered how your process of identifying the units that have—that haven't been on the market, if you base it on vacancy rates over a period of time or whether it's they're just currently vacant. And how is the price set? Because I have dealt with some people that I know in the end did end up buying properties, but the original asking prices seemed a little unrealistic, and that was certainly their opinion and, you know, that's the market place. They eventually arrived at a suitable number where they felt comfortable, but how is the original price being set?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister. And maybe I—just a quick second. Are the sirens going to be a problem? No? Okay. We've had some sirens going by. All right.

Mr. Saran: So properties' assessment by the—I would say by the company, realtor, or the company who made the evaluation, and then we wait about six months before we put it on sale. And also we judge

the past trends, whether we are able to rent them—those houses, or not.

So these things could be considered No. 1. They are a—for six month household. We see the trend from the past, and then their property evaluated by the proper company and then it's put on sale.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate that. So it's based on a fairly short period of time. Is there—is it the remoteness that is often the factor in why these facilities are empty, because we have, as you know, a significant wait-list of approved families? Is it—why are we not able to find renters for these facilities? What's the limiting factor?

Mr. Saran: Well, I think it depends upon the area. Like, in Winnipeg, there will be a vacancy rate maybe close to 2 per cent and—but in some other remote communities, and sometimes people move from one community to other communities, so there are so many vacancies and that way those houses are just sitting there and we are subjected to pay their bills and the heating. So I think it depends upon community to community, like, Winnipeg had a different rate of vacancy, but other rural areas have different rates of vacancy. So it depends upon—that's why considering that particular area, that's why putting those houses on sale is better than staying those houses empty. It's better we sell that, get some money out of that so that we can invest it somewhere else.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. And some of them are in locations that are pretty remote, and others are in communities where housing is clearly a bit of a problem and a shortage. In particular, there's quite a lengthy list that is close to the Fairford area where we have over, probably, something close to 1,000 families that have been displaced by the flooding. And I just—I'm very surprised that these would be—would remain unoccupied for long periods of time and end up on the sales list when we know we have housing issues. They may not be on the reserve, but they're certainly in the community. So are they, in fact, offered to the local First Nations if they're sitting empty?

Mr. Saran: Yes, I think we try it both ways. Number 1, we try to rent it out and advertise so that if people are available to rent it out, so, in that way there won't be people left out who need those houses to rent it out. But if there's—that does not happen, then we put on sale so that some people can own those houses and be proud of that. So that's—I think is—we encourage both ways. Number 1, if somebody

wants to rent out, sure, why not, because if they need and they cannot buy it. But, if nobody's available to rent it out, then at that time it's a good opportunity to sell to somebody who can be owner and be proud of that.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I understand that the provincial government's under no obligation to particularly offer properties to First Nations. But I just wondered if any approach has been made, either by them to you or you to them, because quite a number of these properties are in the region where we know we have a bit of a housing issue and many people are displaced out of the area into the city of Winnipeg. No interest from the First Nations and no approach by you to them?

* (15:20)

Mr. Saran: Yes, there is one community who wanted to move there and they asked us and we provided them that housing. So I think if they ask us, they want them, and if those houses are available, why not? So, instead of keeping them empty, sure, for sure we will give to them.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate that. So, at this point, all you've done is really offered them on the retail market through the normal realtor process and not made any direct connection to any of the First Nations involved? So it's—the initiative is really left in the hands of the First Nations? Is that the current status?

Mr. Saran: Yes, you are correct—or the member is correct. None of them have been offered those properties.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. I would certainly suggest that there might be some possible mutually agreeable services available in this area.

I'll move on from there and talk about the process of maintaining and renovating Manitoba Housing units inside the city here. And I know historically you have used the training opportunity and labour pool that is available through a not-for-profit called BUILD.

And I just wondered, are you still using them and how much work are they getting in terms of renovation projects in the city here?

Mr. Saran: Yes, we still use BUILD. And in '14–2014 and '15, \$877,000 has been provided in labour or maintenance, whatever the situation was.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate that, Mr. Minister. They're certainly an organization, I think

it's very highly of because of their ability to train and provide job opportunities for those that are re-entering the workforce. In particular, many of them are out of incarceration, so it's difficult for them to get back in the workplace.

How would that compare to previous years, because they seem to feel that they're getting less work? And I just wanted to verify whether that was true or not.

Mr. Saran: So, in the previous year, in 2013 and '14, it was more than 2014-15. The previous year was \$1,366,718 worth as compared to 2014-15, \$877,000 worth. So there's quite a little bit decline that way.

Mr. Wishart: That is a significant drop. Perhaps the minister could offer some explanation as to why you're no longer using the services of this not-for-profit at anywhere near the same level.

Mr. Saran: They are working on an energy retrofit. That program has been depleted, energy retrofit. That program has been depleted. Now we are looking in other areas, so we can provide them more involvement. So we're working—we are now working when the people vacate and so that they can work to clean it and to paint it, whatever necessity to be done in those suites. Now we are providing that job. So I think because of that energy retrofit program has been depleted, that's why it has come down a little bit in amount. But we are trying to catch up.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, well, I would certainly encourage the minister and the department to work proactively with BUILD because—partly because of the good training they provide, but what you generally use them for, I know there was some retrofits in case for energy efficiency, but they also did provide some service in terms of the—when you turn a facility—when it goes empty and you renew it, rejuvenate, whatever you want to call it, before it's in use again. And you still must have to do that. So, if you weren't using them, was there another company providing that service?

Mr. Saran: Yes, normally the private contractors are doing it, but we're trying to increase that work toward BUILD.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Minister. So the private contractors that are providing this service, how do you obtain that? Is that a bid process or is this a high enough level that you have to go through bids?

Mr. Saran: Yes, we provide it through that public tender.

Mr. Wishart: Is there an amount below which you're not required to go to tender?

Mr. Saran: One thousand.

Mr. Wishart: That's quite a low threshold. So is it possible that I could be provided with a list of the successful bidders on these renovation projects, in particular in the city here? Public information, I believe.

* (15:30)

Mr. Saran: Yes, I'm told is a long list, but we can provide that list.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. I'm sure it is a long list, but I guess we're looking for continuity. And, if not too much trouble, perhaps for two years so we can see what the changes are from year to year, in particular as they relate to the other firm that we talked about, the not-for-profit [*inaudible*] I'm certainly interested in what is developing in regards to that area. So I'd appreciate a couple of years.

Mr. Saran: Okay, sure, we will provide for two years in Winnipeg.

Mr. Wishart: And you did indicate earlier that you had some stuff you wanted to put on record; maybe now would be a good time.

Mr. Saran: Okay. Question No. 1 was number of new co-operatives developed over the past five years. So those are three projects. And I think the member will ask how many units; total units were 117 and total affordable, 81; and total of rented year income, 29.

Mr. Wishart: And the minister made reference the other day to the new tax incentive program that the department had put together, and he indicated that it was taking a little while to get going. I just wondered how successful has it been, how many projects are undertaken under that and how many applications? Sometime—a reasonable indication as to what's going there?

Mr. Saran: I stopped in the way, when I was answering that previous question, provided that information. So those projects I think I can read out which projects were—those three projects: Dugald Estates; Western Manitoba Seniors Non-Profit Housing Co-Op; and Westlands at Oddy. So I think that's question No. 1.

Question No. 2, we can provide the copies that we can seize permanent value after two years.

And question No. 3, number of Neighbourhood Renewal corporations: those are 13, and if member wants, I can read out their names: Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation; Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation; Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation; Daniel McIntyre-St. Matthews Community Association; Dauphin Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation, Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation; North End Community Renewal Corporation; The Pas Community Renewal Corporation; Portage la Prairie Community Revitalization Corporation; Selkirk Community Renewal Corporation; Spence Neighbourhood Association; Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation; West Broadway Development Corporation.

So that the information was asked the last time, and now maybe I will ask the member to rephrase his question because I forget what was the question.

Mr. Wishart: I'm not sure I remember where we were at. [*interjection*] Yes, well, maybe we'll do that at the end, then. I'm sorry, I can't remember the exact wording in that question either. Is it on the record?

Mr. Saran: From the answer, maybe then the member can figure out the question. Rental Housing Construction Tax Credit—

An Honourable Member: Oh, the tax credits.

Mr. Saran: Yes. Fourteen projects and 660 units, and 15—and 15—that's something else, okay. Okay, that's the answer. Now the member can figure out the question.

Mr. Wishart: But you mentioned you had 14 projects under way. How many applications did you have?

Mr. Saran: Well, at this point, no, we don't have a current answer readily available, but we'll provide later.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that.

And the reason I ask about number of applications, I'm thinking back to some other housing programs, particularly for those that were transient housing. In the early days when we had the program, we had lots of applications but we only ever had three or four actually approved applications. And so I'm looking for a comparison. Is this program

receiving general acceptance in the business community, as to are they using it and is it working for them? So I guess I would like to see the number of applications, at least some indication of the number of applications.

I also wanted a bit of an update on the Princess Towers project that's going on in Brandon.

Mr. Saran: Interim occupancy has been granted and going through final commissioning checks, but tenants have not moved in yet.

Mr. Wishart: Just to be sure, and I'm not real familiar—this is a project on—or a question on behalf of my colleague from Brandon West—how many units and of what type of units are we looking at that are in this facility?

* (15:40)

Mr. Saran: Okay, in Princess Towers, there are 76 units and mid-rise, but those are for the seniors.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate that, and I'll pass that update along to my colleague.

I want to ask a few questions about some other particular funding projects.

You contribute towards the homeless strategy and I assume that that's the one that's worked together with the City of Winnipeg. I just wondered what your role was in that. Are you just a funder or do you have an active role?

Mr. Saran: Yes, we provide funds for emergency shelters, No. 1; No. 2, housing hostels like the Bell Hotel; and, No. 3, end homeless Winnipeg strategy, and we provide funds to them. It's centralized intake.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate that, and I wanted to ask a few questions about the Bell Hotel, because Housing First which is joint federal-provincial initiative—but are you—is there any cost-share in terms of the annual operating costs, or is that all carried by the Province?

Mr. Saran: No, it's just the Province.

Mr. Wishart: So do you have any estimate of your annual cost per unit for that type of a project? That's certainly something that comes up all the time when you talk about these types of initiatives. Can you ballpark us a number there, whether it's operating, overhead, you know, tax roll—that sort of thing?

Mr. Saran: Well, we don't have an answer immediately, but we'll provide possibly within the next few minutes; if not, then maybe later.

Mr. Wishart: And I appreciate that. I think it is important to keep track of these initiatives because there's certainly other things we need to compare them with, that they're an—other options.

And I'll leave that alone. I just wanted to move on, then, to talk a little bit about—some would call it the elephant in the room, and that's the CMHC agreements and the expiration that's going on there. And certainly it's already having a reasonably significant impact on your bottom line, with a significant reduction this year in terms of 'recoverial'—recoverables.

Do you have a timeline of when these agreements will expire and, given that, have you taken any steps to put in place some alternative plans that might help soften the blow, if you wanted to put it that way, as this comes down the road?

Mr. Saran: That agreement will expire by 2031. All of them will expire by that time, but we have extended agreement, got extended for RGI units for five years.

And we are also dealing with the other housing providers, with the short-term operational assistance, our capital investment requirement. Yes, capital on the requirement—capital repair requirement, I guess.

Mr. Wishart: So we certainly are aware of the timelines of those agreements as they expire because you're a partner in them all. And I guess the challenging thing is—you provided some assistance, but how much will those bank costs increase in the future and what are the alternatives? Do you reduce the number of social-housing units or reduce the number of rent-geared-to-income units? Will that change the viability of these operations?

I know that's not what your mandate is, but, I mean, the reality is we have to balance the books at some point in the future. Even on project-by-project initiatives here, they have to come to some type of balance.

So are you looking at other alternatives or is it just we'll make up the shortfalls, is the answer?

* (15:50)

Mr. Saran: Well, we'll think about alternatives, but we are also trying to convince the federal government that they should come back and they should help us out and be partners with us.

And with the other matters, I think, for example, if we increase more awareness about granny suites,

and that will take some pressure off, which we are planning to—instead of community come to us, we will go to communities wherever we will see they will be interested, especially in immigrant communities. Like, I think granny suites, the Italian community will be interested, Portuguese community will be interested, Filipino community will be interested, East Indian community will be interested.

So we want to make sure that we change our way of thinking about granny suites so that more people can go towards granny suites so we—whatever unit we have, so we can maintain that and we don't have to build more that's—but also, we can also encourage the private owners to provide those units. But we can provide the home ownership in such a way that more people buy houses.

And also, the other thing we are trying to, we will try to—the way, I think, perhaps if we increase those people are on the social assistance, if we can encourage them to take training and possibly, for example, the Housing Department can provide the wages, hourly wages, when they are taking training. And possibly Jobs and the Economy provide, for example, can provide instructors and space, and similarly, Infrastructure and Transportation accommodation, that department can provide some kind of experience. And with a combination of these three departments, I think we can get those people out of that poverty situation so they can afford their own houses. Sure, not everybody's going to buy this idea, but if they have a kind of skill, for sure they will use it as they may—will feel proud of it. So I think that's one way.

And the other way we can also encourage—maybe encourage the federal government, if they can provide some kind of stability by allowing parents to come to—permanently over here, stay over here so in that way those parents can provide stability to the families or family. And what happens now when somebody gets sick back in their home country, they have to go back, they quit a job, they start all over again. So that's, again, create—keeps people in the poverty line.

So I think we have to think about innovatively and provide those kinds incentives. They're—because it's not only homemade solutions can really help us out, we also think about the other countries, how the people live in other countries, in the foreign countries, how they can reduce their pressure of housing on the government. And I think we can be

very innovative here if we go for the granny suites, then maybe people understand. And also people are—who are being—also, we need a community network too.

Like, homelessness, I—when I came to Canada, I came close to that. We came with only \$240 in our pocket, and that didn't last that long. We were three of us living in one suite upstairs and an immigrant family was living downstairs, they were owning the house. And we ran out of money. Then another three people came and they started staying with us, and although we were not allowed—but we had no choice. So somehow we will put a mattress on the floor and we were staying there, and because that owner was an immigrant, he was able to understand our situation.

So—but there were times when we—well, however, just simply rice and put too much spices so nobody eats more than he really have to eat. And we will keep the tea bags so that we can reuse it. So that was close to—but how we were able to get help, but then we figured out maybe we should go to church, we should go to Gurdwara and they will provide us with some food for the week, and there was no problem. But, on the other time, we will just get food which we will keep for another three, four days. So that's the way we were surviving.

So I think if we can provide a network where people don't stay isolated and they can figure out, they can help ease it, I—help ease a little, I think this is the way—maybe we have to change a little bit of the way we live. Isolation also causes extra stress on people, and that's the other way I'm thinking we can improve on those situations, like drop-in centres. It should be community-sensitive or ethnic-sensitive drop-in centres. People go where they are—they will talk to each other, they will feel better. They might have connections somehow they're going to get jobs. So, in that way, that's the other way of helping people.

And I think, again, we have to go back to a granny-suite situation and promote granny suites so that we can reduce the pressure problem and demand for the housing, which otherwise government has to provide it.

So I think we have to have two solutions: No. 1, government—federal government help us out and become partner; No. 2, we become more innovative and—so that we can create more social networks so people can help each other.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): One of the questions I have here is what is the typical turnaround time for units when, say, one renter leaves and somebody else can move into that unit—you know, they need to be painted and spruced up and cleaned up. What is the typical turnaround time for this to happen?

* (16:00)

Mr. Saran: Okay, for example, in October 2014, average 96 days in Winnipeg, and 156 days in the rural.

Mr. Smook: Why would it be that I've heard complaints that sometimes it's taking six or eight months for these units to be refurbished?

Mr. Saran: Well, it depends upon how much damage has been done and how much repairs we have to do. And sometimes it also gives the opportunity to redo that unit for maybe for a different purpose, like if a one- two-room suite, maybe to make a one-room suite, something like that. So—which can suit—*[interjection]* Yes, maybe you can have an extra bathroom; depend upon the family's situation. So those situations—because of those situations, we have to wait and rent out for longer—take a longer time as compared to do it immediately.

Mr. Smook: Do these units get refreshed as soon as they're empty or do they sit around for a while waiting for people to apply for them?

Mr. Saran: It depends on the availability of the tradespeople and contractors.

Mr. Smook: Does the department look at refreshing these units or letting work out, like, say, on off parts of the year, instead of waiting until the busiest time of the year to look for tradespeople? Or do they just do it at any time of the year?

Mr. Saran: We do it at any time of the year.

Mr. Smook: I notice there's a number of, like, the vacancies per month over the last two years—when a unit gets to the point where it's worn out or, you know, damaged almost beyond repairs, how many units have been taken out of service that are not available for rent in the last two years?

Mr. Saran: Yes, we will provide that information later. It's not immediately available.

Mr. Smook: What happens to these units if they're taken out of service?

Mr. Saran: If they're unrepairable, we demolish them and we build on the site.

Mr. Smook: Do they offer any of these buildings up for sale to anybody?

Mr. Saran: Only those on the unit are available for sale which are not—there's no demand for renting them, so they are vacant for a long time, as we already told the member, like at least if they are vacant for six months and nobody—we try to rent them out. If still nobody's willing to take it, then we will put them on sale, and it's evaluated by the proper realtor.

Mr. Smook: What about when units are empty, have not had anybody live in them for a number of years, have been up for sale, been real estate for a couple of years—do you have any set policy as to how long buildings are kept or what they're—what's done with them?

Mr. Saran: Yes, first of all, we try to rent it, then we try to sell it. If still people are not able to buy it, and then we have to decide whether we should demolish it. Because, otherwise, we are just paying for utilities, and so it's better to demolish it and see whatever purpose that property can be—the lot can be used.

Mr. Smook: That was my basic question. Like, do you have any policy as to how long it takes? Like, would they be on the market for a year or two years or three years? Like, what is the department's—do they have any policy towards these homes?

Mr. Saran: Yes, it doesn't matter—a particular time limit. I think you have to see whether, you know, how you can discuss with the community if they have—somehow they can use that property, and discuss with other members. And, if at the end we are not able to use it, maybe we can say about a year or so—after a year or so you can decide to demolish it.

Mr. Wishart: Just a few questions in a couple of other areas. And earlier I just touched briefly on boarding houses and, in particular, Broadway West, and I believe the Chairman has particular interest in that area.

Are there currently any programs to help boarding house owners in terms of upgrading their facilities that are run by the department?

Mr. Saran: Yes, we have a rental renovation program for the rooming houses.

Mr. Wishart: Perhaps you could offer some details on how many applications you have been seeing regarding that.

Mr. Saran: At the current time very few, but I think we can try to find out the numbers.

* (16:10)

Mr. Wishart: Excuse me. I appreciate that, and I believe that that has been the status of that program for some years, so there's been very little activity there. And I know that the number of boarding houses continues to fluctuate, mostly drop, in the areas. Boarding houses are less than perfect housing, let's leave it at that, but they do fill a role that we don't seem to have anything else for at the moment. So I would certainly encourage you to look at improving programs that provide some level of support and improve the quality of housing in the boarding houses.

While we're touching on that, I just wondered if you could give us some information about how many co-op housing projects have been initiated in the last year.

Mr. Saran: At this point there is one that's in the kind of a process to start at the Gas Station, Osborne-Gas Station project at Osborne.

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

If the bells do continue to ring past 5 o'clock, and I note that it is 10 after 4 right now, this section of the Committee of Supply will be considered to have risen for the day. That is all.

FINANCE

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the department-Estimates for the Department of Finance. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): At certain points over the last number of days of

Estimates, the minister made some commitments to provide information as it would become available pertaining to some questions that I-had been asked.

I was wondering, at this point in time, does the minister have any of those responses that he is able to provide?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, I'm afraid we do not.

Mr. Friesen: I will be awaiting that information at whatever time the minister can provide it to us and the following up, of course, to-and I do provide him in-I thank him in advance for providing that information.

I've got a question for the minister pertaining to the balanced budget and taxpayer protection act-taxpayer accountability act. And I wanted to ask him with respect to the provision of that act that originally would include a minister's salary cut in the event that the budget was not balanced: Is the minister expecting to take a salary cut due to his government's inability to show a balanced budget this past year?

Mr. Dewar: Well, as per the 2010 appropriation act, the minister's salary has been reduced by 20 per cent and ministers' salaries have not been increased since 2010. It's an additional remuneration of \$37,000. It was-prior to that 20 per cent reduction, it was at \$46,000.

Mr. Friesen: Well, the minister's, of course, skirting the real issue, and that is, of course, that he's changed the rules and his party has changed the rules when it comes to the penalties that were previously on the books for governments who failed to meet their budgetary targets, who have failed to produce a budget and produce results that would match expenditures to revenues. And, indeed, it was his government in 2014 that moved to remove the debt repayment-recovery-during an economy recovery period and moved to remove the application of the balanced budget requirements, including ministers' salary cuts, during an economic recovery period.

So could the minister just indicate a response? Is the reason he's not taking the salary cut that was initially intended by the legislation because he says it's still an economic recovery period or because he just believes that this law should never have applied to him?

Mr. Dewar: The-there was a decision made to suspend the requirement to balance during the

recovery period, but, nonetheless, the minister's salary was reduced by 20 per cent and it has not been increased since 2010. As I said, the remuneration for ministers over and above the MLA salary is \$37,000; it was previously \$46,000. And they—it was a reduction made of 20 per cent, and it remains that, Mr. Chair, from 2010 to this day.

Mr. Friesen: And the minister made reference to the period of economic recovery; I noticed that on page 11 on the budget. I have a question for the minister pertaining to the duration or the length of time that pertains to the period of economic recovery. I want to just refresh his memory. He might not have been aware of the extensive conversations I had with his predecessor at the Estimates process last year when, of course, we had, you know, a discussion about the fact that the government had identified a period of economic recovery globally. But then the government also moved to artificially prolong or protract that period which they defined as a global economic recovery period.

In last year's budget, in budget papers, there was an explanation early in the budget that referred to the date by which the economic recovery period would end. I see that in this year's budget, on page 11, there's a paragraph and an explanation provided that indicates that the government will now seek advice on more appropriate ways to reflect the current policy and economic environment.

I want to ask the minister whether this explanation is code for the fact that the minister is open to again artificially extending the period that he refers to as the economic recovery period and, in so doing, to provide him additional coverage from the requirements of balancing his budget.

Mr. Dewar: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, to the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen).

The budget that was tabled in the House a few short weeks ago maintains our commitment to a return to a balanced approach to reduce the deficit and projects a return to balance on core government in 2018-2019. It also speaks, of course, to the government's deliberate decision to grow the economy and to create new employment opportunities in a period of sluggish and uneven global growth, which we've had the chance to discuss in great length in this committee over the past number of weeks.

We're doing so based on providing the economy of Manitoba with a fiscal stimulus, and largely in the

form of infrastructure investment. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) stated that I will do consultations in the community, will talk to experts and will come up with an approach that will make sense. We, as you know, Mr. Chair, the—it's the—been the pattern of ministers of Finance to do consultations, usually in the fall prior to the tabling of the budget. I did so this year where I met with a number of groups both in my office and out in the community. I had a chance to travel to Arborg and to Lorette, Flin Flon. I know my predecessor, she was in Dauphin, Swan River, Virden and Brandon.

We also did a—I think, conducted a highly successful telephone town-hall process, which I think you are familiar with, Mr. Chair, where we were able to talk to upwards of 10,000 Manitobans and—where they were able to express their views about what they'd like to see in the budget, and I found that to be very useful. There's individuals out there who take a lot of time and effort when it comes to providing this level of advice to me and to my department, and we value that.

We also stated that if there were any changes to legislation, it would be consistent with the intent of the current legislation which we'll be making sure that there'll be transparency in terms of our fiscal forecast and that they'll still maintain a commitment to balance and a plan to state so, and that ultimately any changes that we make will be fully accountable to Manitobans.

*(1500)

Mr. Friesen: The minister talks about his commitment to balance in the future and yet, of course, we had conversations last week about the fact that he is reporting less than any of his predecessors in terms of his commitment to get the whole budget into balance. And, of course, we indicated last week that, absent from these budget papers, is any forecast in summary budget to arrive at a place that would be considered a surplus or a balanced budget. And, indeed, media sources from the province were picking up on that theme again this last weekend and reporting the same, that there is important budgetary material that's simply not in this budget. His predecessors did it; under this minister, it is not being done.

Still on the topic, though, of deficit, I would just bring the minister's attention to orders-in-council, and I'm looking at an order-in-council from March the 4th of this year, 2015, for Finance, indicating in that particular notice that the Minister of Finance is

authorized to a designated amount of \$28,050,000 as surplus money of the special operating agencies financing authority for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

I notice that a similar amount appears last year in the order-in-council's amount, just over \$24 million as surplus money, and I'm just thinking here that \$28 million is a lot of money, especially when you're trying to paper over the fact that the deficit is so much larger than anticipated. Would the minister comment on this amount being rolled over?

Mr. Dewar: The—this, of course, is a—something that has happened in past years. It's the revenue sharing with the special operating agencies. The amount is included in the estimates of revenue every year and it's reported on page 167 in this year's budget. And the order-in-council is an administrative piece which formalizes a process from transferring the revenue sharing from the SOAs to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Friesen: The same order-in-council, of course, you know, does indicate that the Finance Minister is authorized to transfer this surplus money to Revenue Canada if the Consolidated Fund is general revenue of the government for the fiscal year.

Let me ask the minister then, I don't have that document, his estimates of expenditure open in front of me. Can he indicate who's he taking the money from? Which special operating agencies are contributing?

Mr. Dewar: Well, Entrepreneurship Manitoba, \$2.5 million; Industrial Technology Centre, \$100,000; Manitoba Financial Services Agency, \$11.8 million; Materials Distribution Agency, \$200,000; Office of the Fire Commissioner, \$750,000; VEMA, which is the Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency, \$2.5 million; and the Vital Statistics Agency, \$220,000. In total, works out here, and the number I see before me, \$18,070,000.

Mr. Friesen: I'm not sure if that worked out exactly to the amount of the transfer, but in any case, I think that certainly the minister would acknowledge that the story is that this is revenue that he relies on, if this year's order-in-council and last year's is anything, you know, points to any kind of a pattern.

Does—I guess a question I would have for the minister is does he feel like these transfers in are working to mask the extent of the true indebtedness of the province? Is he expecting these monies to

increase? And is he taking actions to help these amounts increase?

Mr. Dewar: And I'll remind the member that this is a—something that's happened historically. It's not something new to this, to me as minister. For example, in the 2013-2014 estimates of revenue, the amount was close to 17 million: sixteen eight eight zero. Then the amount in 2014-2015 was eighteen million fifty. And this year it's \$18,070,000. So it's fairly consistent over the years. It's been a long-standing practice to share with—the SOAs to share with the Province.

And the order-in-council, as he was referring earlier, was just as I said, the administrative piece which makes it—just makes it legal from them remitting the—if revenue sharing with the Province in the forms of a—in the deposit into the Consolidation Fund.

Mr. Friesen: The minister referred to the amount being transferred as \$18 million. Could he just offer an explanation as to why the order-in-council for March 4th, 2015, indicates that designated amount as \$28,050,000? That was the value of the surplus money from SOAs, financing authority then being transferred to a revenue account at the Consolidated Fund. That's what the order-in-council indicates, but the minister has only identified \$18 million comprising that transfer.

Could he please provide an explanation for the number that he's provided?

* (15:10)

Mr. Dewar: Due to the residual effects of the sale of the Property Registry, it—the member will note there was—these funds remained in the special operating agency financing authority, and it allowed for the smooth transition and payment of the financial transactions that were outstanding in the fiscal year. So it has to do with the sale of the Property Registry.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that explanation, and then if I look back to that previous order-in-council from a year earlier, and I see that number as \$24,880,000 and the minister referred to this—the difference in the number he provided in the total amount as being the residual revenue accruing to government as a result of the sale of the Property Registry unit.

Does that initial amount pertaining to the Property Registry unit sale appear in that 2014

order-in-council? Is that why the difference in those two amounts that he indicated?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, through you to the member, we don't have the '13-14 documents here. We could assume that the member is correct. Well, but that—but—[interjection] Well, we could assume he's always correct, but I don't know if we want to do that. But we will get the details and provide that to the member.

Mr. Friesen: Still on the subject of the Property Registry unit sale, does the minister have an estimate as to the amount that will be realized in that same transfer of surplus monies just pertaining to next year's—I don't know if he would call it a dividend or if it's—whatever revenue accrues to government as a result of that ongoing agreement, what is the amount that he anticipates for the 2015-16 budgetary year, and '16-17, if he has an estimate?

Mr. Dewar: Well, Mr. Chair, I would refer the member to page 167. You'll see a—under item No. 2, property registry royalty, and was estimated the revenue in the 2014-2015 year of \$11 million. And that number is the same in the estimates of revenue from—in this particular year, fiscal year, 2015-2016, \$11 million.

Mr. Friesen: And just not recalling offhand all the terms of that agreement. Can the minister indicate: Over time is it the expectation of his government that that annual revenue will decline? Or is that a fixed amount that the new deliverer of that service will pay to this government?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, through you to the member, the estimated annual royalty payments, as I advised the member in the—in my last answer, is \$11 million, but there is the expectation that'll increase to \$24 million at the end of the 30-year licensing agreement. And that information can be found in the public document, the transfer of Manitoba's public registry through Teranet Manitoba, which was, I believe, available on the Internet.

But, as you can see again, I'll remind the member that they are—annual royalties are \$11 million, and there is the expectation that that'll increase to \$24 million at the end of the 30-year licensing agreement.

Mr. Friesen: Seems to be working out well for a Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) who needs all the sources of revenue that he can possibly find. I wonder: Are there—is he contemplating any other areas of government operation that he would like to

sell off and to realize an annual payment in this same way? Please let us in on the secret.

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, I can inform the member that there are no plans at this moment, but we're always looking at ways to improve service delivery to Manitobans.

Mr. Friesen: I'm not sure how much comfort that answer provides to members of this province's civil service when the minister says there are no plans at this time, but he's—seems to be not effectively ruling it out. So while I appreciate from him we're always—we find it refreshing to find from this government any indication that they are looking for efficiencies but, obviously, at the end of the day Manitobans are also looking for effective front-line services, and that's the kind of service that is threatened by a \$1 billion debt servicing cost every year. But I know the minister's aware of that.

* (15:20)

I'm turning to page C34 of the budget, under interprovincial comparison of tax rates. And while this minister, I'm quite certain, will not—or will avail himself of the opportunity to talk about the fact that he's raised the small-business limit, what I'd like to point out on the page is that it would seem that Manitoba is the laggard of the country. I noticed that BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, Newfoundland all have a small-business threshold of \$500,000. I believe that the feds moved up their amount to \$500,000 some years ago. And Manitoba was stuck for many years at \$400,000 and then just last year raised it to 425, and I believe there's a change pending now.

What was the rationale that the minister used to decline to raise the amount to be consistent with all other provincial jurisdictions in Canada?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the member will note that the tax rate here in Manitoba is zero, and small businesses up to—even up to the current level, even up to the 450, will be paying zero. Decision was made to increase it from 425 to 450 in response to meetings I've had with the small-business, large-business sector in the province. We talked about ways to continue to make Manitoba a competitive place for people to invest, for entrepreneurs, small business and, as the member knows, we came into power, the rate was about 8 and a half per cent and we lowered that to zero. And then we were the first, in fact, we remain the only province that has a—to permanently

eliminate the small-business tax, and the decision was made to make—to increase it from 425 to 450. This will mean an additional 2,000 corporations will pay no provincial tax. And even a small business with \$500,000 taxable income will pay the lowest provincial income tax in Canada, and that was a decision that we made. We'll see how things go.

We're always looking to find other ways to make Manitoba a competitive place for entrepreneurs to invest and to make a profit. We'll see how things go in the months ahead with—you know, we've got many more budgets left in this government, Mr. Chair, and so we're always looking at ways to make Manitoba more competitive, and small business is one, eliminating the education property tax for seniors is another and we're doing that; we're doubling that this year. Just the other day we announced a 10 per cent increase to the caregivers' property—or the caregivers' tax credit, and that'll mean additional money in the pockets of those who decide to provide that service.

So we're always looking at ways to make Manitoba both more competitive both in terms of the business environment but, as well, at the level for families.

Mr. Friesen: The minister uses the word competitive, but I would assert to him that when I look at an interprovincial comparison of tax rates and Manitoba trails the entire nation when it comes to small-business threshold, I would say that if he was focused on competitiveness he would have entertained the notion more seriously of harmonizing Manitoba's small-business limit against that of every other jurisdiction in Canada.

But, on the same subject of declining to come up to the average, I wanted to refer his attention on the same page, C34, to the taxable income range and ask the minister if he could indicate what was the rationale that he used in advance of this budget to decline to raise the tax thresholds in Manitoba?

Mr. Dewar: You know, we've had the—this discussion often in the Chamber about Manitoba's advantage when it comes to being an affordable place to live, and we need to—you know, we need to look at the whole list of items that goes into a household, you know, the provincial income tax. Some jurisdictions charge a levy, a health premium on their citizens. We do not. Some have other benefits, you know, but we like to—when you—when it's necessary, when you look at how—whether a province or a city is—how it compares to other jurisdictions, taxes is just one element. You have to

look at the broader range of what it would—what costs for a household, and that's why we do that and that's why we include issues related to rent and utilities and to public transit and child care; things that when you add up the total bundle, you discover that Manitoba is one of the most affordable places to live in a variety of family composition and income levels.

And I had a chance to read the budget that was presented by the Minister of Finance from the province of Saskatchewan, and you'd see that when they do a similar comparison that Manitoba ranks, you know, in the top three throughout the nation as—when you look at our findings, you discover very similar results, that both either Saskatchewan or Manitoba is—when you add everything together, and I would point to—the member to page C38, The Manitoba Advantage in the budget, and you'd see a number of comparisons again through different family composition and income levels, and you'll see that Manitobans do very well when it comes to living in a province that's very affordable.

* (15:30)

Mr. Friesen: Well, in fact, the minister knows that when you add it all together, the—I mean, in Manitoba, a family pays \$1,398 in PST as opposed to \$662 if the same family is living in Saskatchewan.

And the minister knows as well that, if you add it all together, the basic personal income tax amount to be exempted remains at \$9,100, when in Saskatchewan it's over \$15,000. So the minister should understand that Manitobans understand they pay more under this government.

I would take this opportunity to also add to the record, when it came to our interprovincial comparison of tax rates, that what the minister declined to put on the record this afternoon is that while he has begrudgingly raised by tiny increments that amount, not only is Manitoba at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to that threshold for small-business limit but it was his government's promise in—before the 2011 election to raise it to \$500,000—it was their promise to raise that amount to \$500,000, to half a million dollars, and what it amounted to, of course, is this budget demonstrates another broken promise. He was part of a government; he stood alongside a Finance minister who said to small business, we will raise this amount. We will bring it to match the federal amount. We will bring it to the average of all the provinces, which would have been \$500,000, and they declined to do

it. So I would suggest to the minister that anything he puts in a budget that is south of \$500,000 is reinforcing a broken promise on his part.

But, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to ask one more question in pertaining to specifically revenue, because we have been talking before, just earlier about the special operating agencies financing authority and revenues that were being moved to a general account, a consolidated fund to give this minister access to more sources of revenue.

I'm looking at the Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue, I'm on page 167, and I want to bring the minister's attention to under, other revenue, the section pertaining to sale of government assets. I notice that the estimates of revenue from 2014-15 show the total sale of government assets as \$25 million, while the estimates of revenue for the 2015-16 year show the sale of government assets listed as sundry, as \$50 million.

Is this part of a strategy that the minister has to balance his budget, by selling off the province piece by piece?

Mr. Dewar: Put this in terms of the other issue the member, sort of in his preamble to the—to this question, he talked about the government's commitment to increase the threshold on small business up to \$500,000. And in the mandate—I can advise the member that the government's mandate is not over. So we'll see. We still have another budget to bring down, and depending upon the decisions of the government, that may be where we'll go.

But, you know, we also made a commitment to eliminate the small—the—to—excuse me—to eliminate the property tax—education property tax for seniors. Last year we made the first instalment on that where we were able to reduce the small business—or excuse me—the education tax for seniors to \$235. This year we're doubling that to \$470. And next year we will move to completely eliminate that which will mean over 98 per cent of seniors, if you're over the age of 65 and you own your home and qualify, you won't pay any taxes, education taxes, which will be in the range of well over \$50-million savings that will bring—that this government will provide to seniors, allowing seniors to live with—in their own homes and live in dignity, and we feel that's important.

Now, the member's next question, of course, is—I don't know if it's worthy of an answer—but it's certainly not our intention to sell off the assets of this province to balance this budget, Mr. Chair, as again,

we're always looking at ways to provide better services to Manitobans. And I'm sure the member would agree that that, in fact, is a good thing. And—but I can assure the member that it's not the intention to sell the—all our assets off to return to surplus.

We're doing—we're returning to surplus, as we've said, in a very—in a responsible way, Mr. Chair. We're returning to surplus in a responsible way. We made a commitment to return to surplus in 2018, which is the same commitment the members made when they were out and knocking on doors in the last campaign. Every single year you'll see a deficit shrink. Every single year the deficit will get smaller as the size of our economy—as the economy grows. You know, if the—last year was a 0.71 per cent deficit; this year it's going to be 0.6 of 1 per cent deficit relative to the strength of the provincial economy. And you'll see that years to come that that'll eventually be—will be zero.

Mr. Friesen: The minister chooses his indications of economic performance very carefully. And what he doesn't do, of course, is talk about the fact that his deficit is actually growing. It is going the wrong direction. He anticipated a deficit last year of \$357 million, and that deficit actually clocked in, as reported in Budget 2015, as \$424 million. Then he tables a new budget with a deficit projection of \$422 million, and he uses the \$2-million differential to indicate it that somehow this ship is heading in the right direction. And, of course, any financial person would tell him to apply the same overage to his projection and that would give him a better projection of his actual deficit this year.

Be that as it may, when it comes to the sale of government assets, I would ask the minister: Would he be able at this time and in this proceeding to submit a list that would identify what government assets have been sold under sundry on page 167 and how that amount gets to \$50 million?

I noticed there was a few—there were no government cars parked out front this morning when I walked in, and I was wondering if the liquidation of certain ministerial vehicles was part of the government's anticipated savings for this year's budget.

Mr. Dewar: I'll get the information for the member. But the member did notice the fact that there is extensive work being done to the Legislature in preparation of its 100th anniversary—100th birthday, and only a few short years away, Mr. Chair. So we feel that it's important to do some exterior

renovations, and I think the member would certainly agree that that is a wise investment.

Mr. Friesen: There was a very large crane looming over our caucus room this afternoon; I was wondering if the minister was on the crane peering through the window to see what he could ascertain as to the goings-on in our caucus room, but I understand he's hard-working.

But, in any case, I thank the minister for committing to Supply a detailed list that would indicate what comprises the sale of government assets because, of course, what is of note, I believe, when we look at these Estimates of expenditure, is the fact that the list of assets has doubled in size from just the previous year and that, of course, is a concern.

One question I have for the minister is a question that he entertained from media shortly after he delivered his budget this year, and on April the 25th he was quoted in the Winnipeg Free Press as saying, you may ask if our economy is so strong, why are we running a deficit; the answer is that is why we have such a strong economy. End quote.

I wanted to ask the minister if he has a comment on that particular statement that he made to the—media, and if it is indeed his intent to continue to run deficits in perpetuity because he believes that deficits is the way to grow a strong economy.

Mr. Dewar: I'll remind the member that many other provincial governments are still in a deficit situation, regardless of their political stripe. I—we spoke earlier during this Estimates process about what's happening in Newfoundland and where the Newfoundland government, Progressive Conservative government, is running a \$1.1-billion deficit this year, and on an economy of—I think its total revenue is around \$7 billion. And they also decided this year to raise their HST by 2 percentage points from 13 to 15 per cent to—because they felt it was necessary to continue to provide the services that their residents of Newfoundland count on.

They also made a decision to bring in a surtax on wealth, and I think it was the other governments make these decisions to provide the services that Manitobans count on. And, you know, we made a decision this year to continue to invest in the economy and, you know, the member knows very well that several indicators—several leading indicators and forecasters have predicted that Manitoba will either lead the nation or will be

certainly one of the top performers in Canada and the fact—as well that Winnipeg will be one of the fastest growing cities in western Canada. That's—I think it's an indication of the commitment that we made and the decision that we made.

* (15:40)

Remind the member that the—his party at the federal level, just post the great recession, decided to go into deficit—50- or 40-billion-dollar deficit they're running for a number of years—to respond to the great recession. I remind the member that every year you'll see the size of the deficit here in Manitoba get smaller and it will be a lesser, smaller share of the economy, because, as they economy grows and the deficit shrinks, it becomes a smaller percentage of the overall revenues of the government.

We're not apologizing for investing in health care. We're not apologizing investing in education; 16 straight years of either economic funding at either the rate of economic growth or beyond many years. We make no apologies for supporting our university, the post-secondary education. We make no apologies for investing 5 and a half billion dollars over five years into core infrastructure which will see improvements of roads across the province. So, no, we—you know, this is a part of the—our strategy. It's not uncommon. It's not—other jurisdictions across the nation are doing very similar, I think, a very similar approach to dealing with economic growth. It just appears that ours is more successful than others and we make no apologies for that.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, I understand the minister doesn't like apologizing, but Manitobans do expect him and his Premier (Mr. Selinger) to apologize for lying to Manitobans about the PST increase and failing to allow them to vote on it.

But, nonetheless, I want to go back a little bit on talking about infrastructure and things that are moving between departments, which are making things a challenge to track. And, when we look at expenditure—infrastructure and expenditures, there are a couple of different reports. And am I now to understand that with things like super structure moving into the Department of Finance—like, community colleges and that type of thing—that we now have to come to ask questions about that type of super structure in Finance as opposed to in MIT, and then how do we go and look—well, I'll ask the next question when I listen to the government's response here.

Mr. Dewar: The Accommodation Services do hold assets in the community colleges. But, if the member has specific questions about the operations of the colleges, he's best to forward those and raise them with the minister responsible, which is the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum).

Mr. Helwer: So, when I'm asking about the particular structures in the colleges, do I ask the Minister responsible for Education as well, or is it Minister responsible for Finance, or is it Minister responsible for MIT?

Mr. Dewar: If the member has issues related to the physical structure of the colleges, then he can ask us. If he's asking about the educational programs that are provided at the colleges, he's best to direct those questions to the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning. But, if he has an issue related to the, like I said, the physical structure of one of the colleges, he can ask us.

Mr. Helwer: Well, at one time—and I know it still did exist last year—the—since the structures were owned by MIT and managed by MIT, the colleges would have to call MIT to ask if they could have a light bulb replaced. So do they now call the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) to replace the light bulbs?

Mr. Dewar: Those services that will be provided—that the minister—or the member referenced will be provided by Accommodation Services, and Accommodation Services are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance. So I guess the answer would be yes.

Mr. Friesen: The Minister of Finance wasn't the only one who put confusing statements on the record with respect to rationalizing his government's budget for 2015. The Premier (Mr. Selinger), the former, former, former Finance minister of Manitoba, also put some comments on the record that caught the attention of the press, not just in Manitoba but across the country.

And The Globe and Mail was one of those media agencies who reported asking the Premier about the reason for his anticipated higher-than-last-year deficit, and in response to that, the Premier of the Province of Manitoba said that Manitoba was no different than other provinces when it came to the fallout from lower oil prices. And the Premier indicated: Have you noticed the oil prices in the last few months? There's been pretty dramatic changes all across the country in what the forecast for the economy is.

My question for the Finance Minister is does he stand onside with his Premier? Is he rationalizing that the downturn in oil prices will present additional challenges to this Province when it comes to trying to balance this budget?

* (15:50)

Mr. Dewar: I can assure the member that the forecasts of revenues, we've already taken into consideration the price of oil. What the Premier—I mean, you can ask him in his Estimates, but it's my understanding he was referencing what's happening across the nation and the impacts that the fall in the price of oil was having on more of the oil-producing provinces. The member will note the—what this impact this will have on the province of Alberta, and I mentioned earlier to him how this will have an impact on the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It has—it will have an impact on the province of Saskatchewan. And the Conference Board of Canada in their most recent report speaks to that, speaks to the fact that it'll have an impact at the national level.

Now, we export 50 per cent of our—or 50 per cent of our exports go to other provinces; 50 per cent of our exports go internationally. We do export some items to some of the provinces that'll see sluggish growth, but we also export to provinces that'll see a rebound like the province of Ontario which will be not quite—will not see the robust growth that we'll have here in Manitoba, but, nonetheless, they'll be one of the leaders in terms of economic growth, and this has been anticipated and predicted by economists over the last number of months ever since the price of oil fell from \$105 down to 45 or 50 dollars per barrel.

As I said to the member, the Finance minister in Newfoundland said, you know, he woke up one day with a \$300-million deficit and went to bed, you know, having to deal with a \$900 million—ended up to be a \$1.1-billion deficit. That is what the fall of the price of oil will have on an economy like Newfoundland and even Alberta which had—saw their revenues fall dramatically. And the previous government announced that they'd be running a deficit of about \$5 billion; now the new government has taken over and discovered that the books perhaps aren't as healthy as the previous government had suggested they were, and, in fact, their challenge now will be even greater to deal with the effects of the fall of the price of oil.

When you have an economy that's based on one resource, when you—when your revenues are, again, derived from having, in particular, one resource—and they've done quite well. They've done well and Canada has done well. So there'll be an impact nationally.

But the—we've—Mr. Chair, the—as I can let the member know that we've written the—those—the—any impacts that the price of oil may have has already been factored into our calculations of revenue.

Mr. Friesen: If there are no further questions from the members of this committee, I would recommend that we move to the consideration of these Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

I will now call resolution 7.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,007,000 for Finance, Fiscal and Financial Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,279,000 for Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,005,000 for Finance, Priorities and Planning, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$138,567,000 for Finance, Central Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$62,750,000 for Finance, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ended—ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,033,000 for Finance, Net Tax Credit Payments, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding sixty-three million, one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars—[interjection]—one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for Finance, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 7.1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 7.1.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Chair, the last number of days of the Estimates of Finance has revealed again to Manitobans that this is a government that is headed in the wrong direction, that the deficit is indeed increasing, not decreasing, and the evidence of that, of course, one needs look no further than the past year's deficit that was originally reported to be \$357 million but now as reported in this budget will \$424 million, missing it by 20 per cent or more.

Mr. Chair, of course, Manitobans also know that this is a government that is taking in more revenue all the time, even as they continue to get to deficit after deficit. It's a government that still takes in \$125 million more from Manitoba Hydro than what they expected last year and \$19.9 million more from MPI, and Liquor & Lotteries giving another \$6 million more than last year.

But it is a government that has made its focus on tax hikes. And even under this budget, the government continues to hike taxes. They have hiked taxes on corporation capital taxes, on financial institutions, which Manitobans understand will mean to them more out-of-pocket for user fees.

At the same time, we understand that the government expressed no greater fidelity to the intent of raising taxes than when they widened the RST in 2014—let's see—hang on, no, in 2012, and then increased the tax to 8 per cent from 7 per cent in the following year. These changes alone net the government more than \$500 million a year, and as an opposition party we have continued to express this is money that comes out of taxpayers' pockets. It's money that goes away from front-line services; it's money that cannot be allocated to produce and to improve the front-line services that Manitobans depend on.

We know, Mr. Chair, that this is a government that has expressed deficit after deficit, but, more than

that, we have discussed in these Estimates the fact that there are real implications of this government's record, and one of the primary indications—implications is the rising debt servicing costs and, indeed, that this is a government that now spends almost \$850 million per year just servicing the government's debt.

* (16:00)

In lieu of the fact that the government has not made headway, we know that bond rating agencies continue to express concern, and they—the concern they have is that this government will not execute a plan to get into balance, that this government will continue to go after taxpayers for additional revenue. This government will continue to overspend and, as a result, the ability of this province to borrow is threatened, and there is every likelihood being expressed, even now by bond-rating agencies, that the price of borrowing money for this province in the future will be greater.

I would add, Mr. Chair, that this is a government that has presided in doubling the province's debt in just a few short years from about \$18 billion to now over \$36 billion, an increase of \$3 billion in just this past year, an increase of \$8.3 million every single day. The debt has grown a staggering 87 per cent under this First Minister alone.

And, Mr. Chair, I would want to take this opportunity, as well, to mention the fact that even now for 2016, a BMO provincial comparison is expressing concern about the net-debt-to-GDP ratio where, again, the government is going in the wrong direction. The government has a very wobbly basis for the decision they are making, and these decisions have real implications for Manitobans who pay more as a result—twice the taxes of a same family living in Saskatchewan.

So, on the basis of those and other indictments, I would move that line 7.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), that line 7.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

The motion is in order. Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, I just want to thank both my critic and all members who participated in this process. I especially want to thank the staff, the

Department of Finance and the Treasury Board secretary for their advice and their guidance during this Estimate process and, ultimately, I do urge members to vote against this resolution.

An Honourable Member: Question.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Chairperson, a recorded vote.

Mr. Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested by two members. This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess to allow this matter to be reported and for members to proceed to the Chamber for the vote.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now come to consideration of the Estimates of—for Executive Council.

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

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

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Chairman, I wanted to give the opportunity to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to clear the air on a couple of these issues related to this paramedics'—the assertion by some, and including the MGEU, that there was some influence dealing going

on around the time of the leadership, specifically following the outcome being—determine the leadership. The MGEU allege that the Premier's then-chief of staff Heather Grant-Jury and Health Minister Sharon Blady had struck a deal with the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg President Alex Forrest, to secure the support of about two dozen delegates which, of course, was pretty pivotal in determining the outcome. So I want to—wondered if the Premier wanted to just clear the air on that and put that to bed.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes, I believe I answered the member. There was nothing that occurred.

Mr. Pallister: Well, there—yes—so, I understand that the MGEU communicated with the Premier. Did he communicate back with the MGEU the fact he's just put on the record there?

Mr. Selinger: What was the—could I ask for the question to be repeated?

Mr. Pallister: Chairman, no, I understand there was a letter sent by the MGEU to the Premier asking for clarification. Was that letter responded to?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check my records on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, part of the letter was—got a copy here which, I guess, again, we can table if need be. But it just—it was—it—I'll just—I'll reference the piece and if need be, we can table it. It just says, I'm writing to—this is to the Premier from Michelle Gawronsky, MGEU president. It just says, I'm writing to ask for your confirmation the government will proceed with self-regulation for paramedics and to ask that you provide the timeline for this important initiative.

That was really—I just wanted the Premier to put on record if that was the case. Was it communicated to the MGEU?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to check my records on that.

Mr. Pallister: The letter—well, we'll table the letter and get a copy over there. And it's dated March 9th and I'll refer back to it once we get the copy over to the Premier. In the meantime—what? *[interjection]* Yes, good.

So, during the leadership race itself—which I guess we could just say I don't know when the official dates of these things are. I think the Premier didn't enter it until later on. But let's just say in

December, January, February and March, before the leadership, did the Premier meet with the firefighters—whether Mr. Forrest or representatives of the firefighters in that approximately three-and-half-month period?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check my records on that. I don't believe so, but I have to check my records.

But the fact of the matter is this, regardless of whether we did—or I did or did not meet, there was no commitments made with respect to paramedics' self-regulation. That was a report that was in the hands of the health professionals advisory committee and they were—had not yet tabled that report for public consumption. And until that was done, I was not aware of the specific contents of it.

Mr. Pallister: I understand that the report was tabled in December. Does the Premier know the date that it was tabled?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to get the records on that. I think the report was made available to the Ministry of Health, but I have to check the dates on that. It only became public, I believe, this spring.

Mr. Pallister: I don't know the exact dates it was made public either. I think it was made public only after we had called for it. And I know the paramedics association had called for it after the leadership race. But there were questions, of course, about why it wasn't being released during the leadership race as well.

Did the Premier have a chance to read the report in the first two months of the year prior to the report being made public in mid-March?

Mr. Selinger: I was not in receipt of the report.

* (15:00)

Mr. Pallister: So the report was in the hands of the Health Minister only, but the Premier did not see the report.

Mr. Selinger: Correct.

Mr. Pallister: Then I'm—I guess I'll have to ask the Premier, can he communicate as to why he would believe that the Health Minister would sit on that report for that length of time?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm not even sure about the language that's being used here as being correct. The report is received. It's being reviewed by the department. I don't believe the minister—it's reasonable to consume the minister was sitting on it.

It's a big report. It's about a complex issue. Presumably, the department's reviewing it as part of their normal due diligence.

Mr. Pallister: Well, maybe the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could share with us a little bit of the history about this debate around this proposal, this self-governing proposal. I understand it's not new. Would he recall approximately when the proposal first came forward or was brought forward for self-governing status for the paramedics?

Mr. Selinger: I don't have dates on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, my understanding is from historians on our side that this is a position that's been advocated for for at least seven or eight years, and this study, then, I'll ask the Premier that he speaks of, the health professional advisory committee, who—was he the premier at the time that the study was supposed to be done and the recommendations crafted as a result of the study.

Mr. Selinger: You know, I'd have to check the record on that, but it sounds like that report would've been initiated during my time. But it may have been prior to that, I'd have to check. We'll get some dates on that for the member, but I think the report has been done over the last few years by the health professionals advisory committee and then provided to the minister and the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I guess my point in asking these questions is in part to establish this is not a new issue, that it's been something that's been discussed for a considerable length of time. And also we know, in hindsight, that the report itself contained recommendations that the discussions continue. And, that being the case, it's puzzling as to why the—a report recommending further discussion would be delayed in its release, and I would submit it was delayed in its release. But also that the minister, as of last week, made no commitment to commence with any sense of urgency, any dialogue around advancing this self-governing debate until fall.

So can the Premier explain why, to all appearances—and we know Alex Forrest's position on this on behalf of his union members is that this isn't a good idea; that's clear, a matter of public record. But it does create the impression that the government is somehow ragging the puck or delaying the process or, you know, allowing nothing to happen over an extended period of time.

Maybe the Premier could clarify, given that this is not a new debate and has been ongoing for some

years, why it is—why there seems to be nothing—no commitment on the part of the government to proceed for months to come.

Mr. Selinger: I believe the minister received the report and has requested that the health professionals advisory committee advise on an appropriate dialogue and consensus-building process with stakeholders about self-regulation and its implications. And I believe she felt that the health professionals advisory committee could act in an impartial way to bring all the parties together to have a respectful dialogue on how to go forward.

I believe this is not dramatically different than the process that has unfolded in Ontario as well, where similar issues are under discussion and debate, and I think they're proceeding in a similar manner to build more consensus before they fully enter into self-regulation legislation.

Mr. Pallister: Well, so the Premier is saying that—he's not answering my question, actually, because I've asked why the Health Minister has told this House that she's not going to proceed in any manner to make the discussions advance until fall of this year. I'm curious about that.

The interests of Manitobans would seem to me to be better served by having a discussion advanced on the assumption that we were moving towards a self-governing council, but that doesn't appear to be the commitment of the government. And, again, it creates the impression that Mr. Forrest is the winner in this debate, because in his view this shouldn't proceed. So this just allows the dialogue to continue, more discussion to continue, but nothing of substance to happen as a result.

I will go back now, I think the Premier has a copy—if he could table a copy of the document he just referred to for me, that'd be good, too—the document you just quoted from there a second ago.

Mr. Selinger: Just my notes that I have for a response to the member. I don't have any particular public document form, I just have background information to give him a more informed answer.

I do have the letter that he has tabled with me, and I'm simply saying that the Health Minister—and I believe she's put this on the record in the House in previous questions, as a matter of fact, has asked the health professional advisory committee advise on an appropriate dialogue and consensus-building process with paramedics and stakeholders, both self-regulation and its implications. And I think that's a

similar stage to where things are at in Ontario as well.

Mr. Pallister: Mmm hmm, well, that sounded like—suspiciously like we're going to have dialogue based on further dialogue. And that isn't what the MGEU was asking for.

We'll go back to that letter now. They say—and I'll quote from it, paragraph 3 on the first page of the document that the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) been copied on: I'm writing to ask for your confirmation that the government will proceed with self-regulation for paramedics and to ask that you provide the timeline for this important initiative.

And has the Premier responded to this correspondence, which was dated March 9th, so essentially it's a couple months old? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —has responded on behalf of the government subsequent to receiving the health professionals advisory committee report. The report recommended that self-regulation occur, but only after further consensus building among all the stakeholders. And she has asked the health professionals advisory committee to facilitate that dialogue in bringing people together because they can act as an impartial forum and deal with the issues at hand.

Mr. Pallister: Mmm hmm, well, the second last paragraph, again, from Michelle Gawronsky, MGEU president, says: When the Health Professions Advisory Council held hearings on the self-regulation proposal, it heard from hundreds of front-line paramedics about the importance of modernizing and respecting the paramedic profession in Manitoba. And it goes on to say: The Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) has now received the recommendations from HPAC on how to proceed. It is time for the government to make its intentions clear.

Perhaps the Premier could do that in his response. Could he make the government's intentions clear beyond just having another committee have another discussion?

Mr. Selinger: The government is following the recommendations put forward by the health professionals advisory committee. They said that there should be a move towards self-regulation after there's further dialogue and consensus building among all the parties involved. And the minister is proceeding

to follow-up that recommendation, and she's asking the health professionals advisory committee to play a role in facilitating that discussion to build a greater level of consensus so that self-regulation can move forward.

Mr. Pallister: So Alex Forrest, it's reported, and the firefighters, play a big role in election campaigns. What kind of a role do they play in election campaigns?

Mr. Selinger: Presumably the role that any other group of citizens plays; they volunteer and support candidates.

Mr. Pallister: So there would be certain seats, I read in one report, that are specifically beneficiaries of this.

Would the Premier like to outline a couple or three that he thinks would be particularly likely to be influenced by the presence of the firefighters as quasi volunteers in the campaign?

Mr. Selinger: Again, they choose which individuals running they'd like to support, just like the paramedics do and other citizens do in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Mr. Forrest hasn't been as shy as the Premier is about saying where he had great influence, and he has said quite clearly that he influenced the win in Kirkfield Park for the Health Minister. So it creates an impression of an obligation back, and I think that's the optic that's concerning to a lot of people, including the MGEU president and others within their organization.

Does the Premier understand the difficulty of perception in politics in respect of something like this?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: People get involved in election campaigns just like in the last election there was the paramedics group that supported the Leader of the Conservative Party of the day and were very active in that campaign in a very visible way, supporting the leader of that party.

And this is why I think it's important that this issue stay in the hands of the impartial health professional advisory committee. Their people have views on this, and those views should be reconciled with the group that had made the original recommendation to have a greater degree of consensus building and can play a role in facilitating that and bringing all parties together. And so that's why we're fortunate in having the health professional advisory

committee that can play that role, and that's why the minister asked them to continue to play that role.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've a little trouble with that holier-than-thou answer, Mr. Chair, because it doesn't reflect any awareness of the real circumstances here. We have, at the end of the day, on the day of the leadership ballot, we have the Health Minister for the province of Manitoba in deep consultation with Mr. Forrest, the head of the firefighters union who has previously promised to support the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) on the second ballot, repeatedly promised that. She is deep in conversation with him and then parades him across the floor, convention floor, to support the Premier. Now, that—now the Premier's talking about non-partisanship; that's a little rich.

Now, is the Premier not concerned that when you see an optic like that that the general public will lose faith in the integrity of decision making within his government?

Mr. Selinger: I would just have to dispute the facts that the member put on the record. That's not an accurate portrayal. The member's making these things up, which is not uncommon for him. He's completely not acknowledging the role the paramedics played in the PC election campaign last time.

And the point is this: the health professional advisory committee gave a recommendation long before there was the leadership contest. They were working on this. They brought their report forward. They tabled it with the minister's office. The minister's officials did their due diligence on it and they tabled the report, and the report recommendations were followed by the minister. That's completely acting in good faith with the professional advice she got from the health professionals advisory committee, and I think that is the appropriate course of action, is to follow their advice and, indeed, to encourage them to play a role in taking that advice to the next level by bringing people together to look at how greater consensus building can occur. And my understanding is that's a very similar process which has occurred in another jurisdiction such as Ontario, where they've had similar issues and they're working them through in a similar fashion by acknowledging the need for self-regulation, but building a greater degree of consensus among all the stakeholders before they proceed in that fashion.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's go through this then step by step, because I want to be clear. The Premier's just put on the record that I have put misinformation on the record. So I want to go through one at a time, so we can determine where I put misinformation on the record.

Now, Michael—where he asserts that I did. Michael Balagus was the former chief of staff to the Premier and he was supporting the candidate for Seine River, and he has said openly, and it's been reported in various media, that he had talked with Mr. Forrest several times on the leadership weekend—first weekend of March—and that he had been assured that he would have UFFW or firefighters support by Mr. Forrest. Am I right in that assertion?

Mr. Selinger: I have no evidence to suggest that that assertion is correct. That, at best, is hearsay, and I—so I'm just not aware of any of those conversations that may have occurred in another leadership campaign or any specific comments would—that would've been made. And I'm surprised the member has a knowledge of that. Where did he get that knowledge from?

Mr. Pallister: Well, a very reputable—apparently, reputable newspaper reported this on March 11th of this year. In any case, so that Premier disputes the accuracy of that assertion, so we'll leave that out there.

Now, I also asserted that there was a conversation which took place, and I'm not going to bring the video log here, but I want to know if the Premier wants to dispute that there was a conversation after the first ballot involving the Health Minister and Mr. Forrest, and that it was readily apparent to everyone there that that conversation was happening prior to this second ballot. Is he asserting that that conversation did not happen?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I don't have information on that, as I do not have on the first conversation. All I know is that there were no commitments made from my leadership camp or myself to any particular party with respect to any of these matters. That I know for sure because that would've been my decision, and I didn't do that.

I do also have the letter that was response—in response to the president of the MGEU, a letter that was sent out on March 12th by the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) in response to her letter to

myself. And I'm prepared to table a copy of that with the member.

Mr. Pallister: Sure, well, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was clear on this, and I want to acknowledge that what he's just said coincides with what he said in an interview with the Free Press on March 10th. He said, in answer to a question that was asked of him about this pre-second ballot deal proposition that's the MGEU was asserting happened, he said no firm promises were made from my level.

Was the Premier aware of any promises made at another level?

Mr. Selinger: No, I do not believe there was any. Now, does the—I just want to confirm that the member has received a copy of this letter. *[interjection]* You're getting a copy of it?

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Right now we're getting copies made.

Mr. Selinger: Okay.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I look forward to getting a copy of that when it's made.

So, just to go back, then, to the assumption—so, we've established that the Premier does not or is not aware that the firefighters gave any assurance to the Seine River candidate's team about second ballot support. He says he's not aware of that, and he has gone further and said he is also—no, he didn't respond on my question about the awareness of a conversation happening between his Health Minister and Mr. Forrest, so let's go back to that.

Is the Premier asserting that he was not aware of any conversation that took place between his Health Minister and Mr. Forrest after the first ballot and before the second ballot at the NDP leadership convention?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I—no, I'm not aware of it, and I do not believe anything occurred, and there was, as far as I understand, no commitments were made and I do not believe any commitments were made. I wouldn't do that. I do want the member to be aware of what the letter said. Do you have—the member—has the member a copy of it now?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Selinger: The letter is dated March 12th and the second paragraph, the last line: The council is an independent body and the report they have submitted has not and will not change in any way.

In other words, the report was prepared before the NDP convention. The advice or the recommendations in the report have stayed consistent with the original recommendations and they have been made public and they have been followed up on, so there's no connection between anything that came out in this report in terms of recommendations and anything that happened through the convention process. So the member needs to have comfort on that and so does the public, and this letter confirms that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we know now, having had access to the report, finally, that the report—had the report been released earlier in the year, it would have placated Mr. Forrest to no end because it simply refers to more dialogue being necessary. So it would seem that leverage would have been lost if that report had come out in terms of using the Premier's office as the body that would offer greater protection to Mr. Forrest and his union members in their opposition to self-governing counsel. It would seem that it would benefit the Premier's campaign to suppress the report's release, but he says he wasn't aware of the report and didn't read it, so clearly—nor was he aware that his minister was in conversation with Mr. Forrest so it's pretty clear that he wasn't aware of what was going on in his campaign that much.

Who ran his campaign?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member's characterization of the process is just completely inaccurate. The letter very clearly indicates that the report was prepared before, the recommendations have stayed consistently the same and have not been changed in any way, shape or form as a result of the convention. And the report indicates that self-regulation is recommended. And the Leader of the Opposition's saying that one group was opposed to self-regulation. Well, they would not benefit by a recommendation that says self-regulation is recommended subsequent to further consensus building among all the people involved, very similar to the process in Ontario.

* (15:20)

So, it's an independent body that made the recommendation and said further work needed to be done in a move towards self-regulation, and he's trying to characterize that as a win for one party. I don't believe that's the case. I think the report recommended a move towards self-regulation with greater consensus building. So I think the member is

misinterpreting the—both the recommendation and the findings of the report.

Mr. Pallister: Well there's two issues in respect to the timing that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) appears to be oblivious to. First of all, the commitment he refers to is soft and fuzzy in the report. He knows that and, certainly, the commitment as revealed by the lack of action from the Health Minister, is softer and even fuzzier than that, to moving forward on this so-called dialogue exercise.

The second issue that I've raised, which he hasn't responded to except to say it's normal course of events in his government, is it's a report that is on the Health Minister's desk in December is held until March, middle of March, held. Had the report been released, it would have placated Mr. Forrest to no end and maybe, you know, it calls for a little bit of thought here, but maybe it wouldn't have allowed the kind of leverage that the Health Minister or the Premier's campaign team might have wanted to use to get Mr. Forrest's support on that second ballot. It's an interesting consideration one could give as to the motivations that may have been at work.

So I'll ask the question again because it appears that the Premier is just, you know, not quite aware of what has gone on in his campaign. Previous questions I've asked him, he said that he had a laser-like focus on being Premier, so I can understand he may not have been much involved in his own leadership campaign. But who ran the campaign?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member's mischaracterizing the entire process.

The report from the health professionals advise committee was prepared by them in advance of many of these procedures and tabled with the department who do—did due diligence on it. And I indicated that it's similar to what actually—it actually goes beyond, now that I have this letter here, which I'll also table a copy for the member. But in a letter to the health professionals regulatory advisory council in Ontario recommended that paramedics not be regulated because the application did not meet our primary criterion threshold for risk of harm and because self-regulations of paramedics is not in the public interest. And so it goes on to say, although paramedic practice entails a degree of risk of harm to the health and safety of the public and the current oversight system is overly complex, the oversight system as a whole is sound and adequately addresses risk of harm to patients. The report by the health professionals advisory committee in Manitoba goes

in favour of self-regulation subject to further consensus building among all the stakeholders.

So for the member to characterize this as a win for one group is completely inaccurate. This—the report of Manitoba went beyond the recommendations of the report in Ontario who recommended against paramedic regulation at the current time because they thought there was adequate oversight. So it's really a mischaracterization of the member opposite of what was recommended by the health professionals advisory committee. And the timing of that, obviously, had to do with the fact the report was tabled, and the department wanted to do due diligence on it, and they did that. And then the report was released publicly without any change in the recommendations, which had been done before the convention process was under way and the leadership contest was under way.

So, in terms of the question, yes. So I have further information that suggests that when you're going to move towards self-regulation there's lots of issues that have to be addressed with all the stakeholders and lots of complexities in that. And that's not that different to—that's not that different than some of the points that were made in the Ontario report, but the Ontario report have recommended against self-regulation. The report in Manitoba recommended in favour of it. And I don't know how you can characterize that as being in the interest of one party, knowing that there's complexities and things that have to be sorted out as you move towards the self-regulation process, particularly with these important front-line services.

So, in terms of the question, the question the leader asks about who's running the campaign, there were a variety of people involved on a voluntary basis to be involved in the campaign. And many good people stepped up and got involved in all the campaigns.

And, presumably, the Leader of the Opposition had some people involved in his campaign when he was running for leadership as well, and he might want to indicate who they were.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Alex wasn't that much involved in mine, but—well, apparently, Mr. Forrest went into this convention concerned about this issue, mightily concerned, in fact, enough so that he raised it as an issue with other campaigns, if not the Premier's.

Of course, not knowing who, you know, was running his campaign makes it difficult to know who

it mattered—whom—you know, if he raised it with somebody like the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady), for example, we don't really know if she was involved in the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) campaign.

I understand she was a supporter, though. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I believe that was one person that was a supporter. Yes, I believe that.

Mr. Pallister: Good, good. So we're getting somewhere. Now we know that the Minister of Health was a supporter.

So she might have, in engaging in deep conversation with Mr. Forrest, she might have been actually working on behalf of the Premier in a negotiation she was having.

Would the Premier accept that that was a possibility?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe there was a negotiation. I don't believe that was occurring. And I think the member is trying to create a fictitious scenario that, in my view, did not exist.

Mr. Pallister: Well, maybe the Premier would like to advance an idea on what they were talking about. What do you think they were talking about?

Mr. Selinger: Again, that's a purely speculative, hypothetical question. Whether they had a conversation of any length or depth at all is simply conjecture on the part of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: It must have been something that mattered to him, because, according to Michael Balagus, he had numerous conversations with Mr. Forrest throughout the weekend, and each time Mr. Forrest confirmed he was going to move to Oswald if the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) didn't make it to the second ballot.

So they must have had a conversation about something that mattered to Mr. Forrest, you'd think, for him to change his mind like that. Wouldn't the Premier have to agree?

Mr. Selinger: This is purely conjecture and hypothetical statements by the member opposite. He seems to be going on a witch hunt based on speculative information and second-hand information, what is often called hearsay.

I do have now the document that was released on March 17th where the Minister of Health released

the report on paramedic self-regulation, and I can provide a copy of that document to the member if he wishes.

The minister is quoted: The chief concern of any regulatory college must be self—public safety and protection. The council has kept this responsibility to Manitoba families at the fore throughout the process and I trust they will continue to do so.

So—the health professional—Health Professions Advisory Council was established in 2011. Its mandate is to provide an independent, impartial forum for a group of persons representing a health profession to apply to become a professional regulatory college under The Regulated Health Professions Act. The release of the Paramedic Association of Manitoba's application is the first report to be released by the Health Professions Advisory Council.

So the Health Professions Advisory Council reviewed their application, released a report, made recommendations for follow-up, and the minister has asked them to follow up and to facilitate bringing those recommendations into action through greater dialogue and further consensus building on a move towards self-regulation.

It seems to me that that's an appropriate process to be played by a body that has been set up to provide that very function of to give impartial advice on these kinds of applications.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier characterizes my questions as a witch hunt. I think that's grossly unfair to the MGEU, because they asked exactly the same questions I'm asking today. It's really unfair to the paramedics, because they're asking the same questions I am today. And it's quite unfair to his own colleagues who supported other leadership candidates, because I have no doubt whatsoever that they are asking these same questions. So let's get to the bottom of it, shall we?

Mr. Balagus is no stranger to the Premier, certainly was not supporting the Premier in this effort. I understand he was an Oswald—I'm sorry, he was a Seine River candidate supporter. But he does say, and again, in a Free Press article: I went up to him—and by him, he's referring, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Forrest—and said—went up to him, just as we agreed, and he told me he had changed his mind because he thought the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) was too close to the paramedics.

* (15:30)

So, clearly, if—unless Mr. Balagus is lying for some reason—and I have no idea why he would lie—does the Premier have any idea why Mr. Balagus would lie on the record about something like that?

Mr. Selinger: Again, who's—nobody's suggesting that he did or did not lie. Nobody's suggesting even that this information that's being forwarded by the Leader of the Opposition is even accurate. I'm suggesting to him that he's pursuing these lines of questions because he's got a view on this matter which isn't accurate. There was no commitments made to any particular group.

The commitment made was to set up the Health Professions Advisory Council in 2011 to act as an independent—an impartial body to review applications for professional regulation of health professions, and that's a very appropriate way to proceed. And this group of people brought forward a report and they made a recommendation in that report well before there was any convention process in place, and that report after being reviewed by the Department of Health was tabled publicly on the date—I believe it was the 17th of March—after it was reviewed by the minister. And she accepted entirely their advice and then followed up with asking them to implement some of the recommendations around bringing stakeholders together to look at—for their steps towards consensus building around self-regulation. And that's—that seems to me to be an appropriate process because it's—keeps it in the hands of this independent and impartial body that was put in place to bring forward recommendations on self-regulation by health professions.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier is not putting on the record that he thinks Mr. Balagus is lying. I just want to be clear on that.

Mr. Selinger: I'm certainly not making a statement one way or the other on that. I don't know what was said and I don't know how accurate the member's suggestions of what is said are. What I'm saying is that there was an independent process that was put in place to review these regulatory applications for the health professions to people appointed to that Health Professions Advisory Council did their work. They provided a report. They provided recommendations. Those recommendations have been followed by the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) and, indeed, she's asked them to follow up on those recommendations by facilitating a dialogue to build a greater consensus on a move towards self-regulation.

That seems to me to be a consistent approach based on the role that the Health Professions Advisory Council played in doing the review of the application and making a recommendation on that, and I think that has been an impartial process by this independent body and it has been respected and followed by the Minister of Health, and I think that's the appropriate course of action.

Mr. Pallister: So let's just summarize then. So the Premier is saying nothing to see here. The report sitting on the Health Minister's desk for over three months not distributed, not known to anyone, not known to Mr. Forrest, that that wasn't by design, that's just a normal course of doing business in his government. Is that what he's saying today?

Mr. Selinger: Not saying any of those things. That's the member's usual attempt to try and characterize things, and it serves his political purposes.

I do want to put on the record the recommendation that the Health Professions Advisory Council put in their report on page 47, and I can provide a copy of this for him, the council recommends that the profession of paramedicine proceed to regulation under the RHPA by a college of paramedics of Manitoba only after PAM, presumably the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, provides the Minister of Health with evidence of a satisfactory level of support among Manitoba paramedics for self-regulation. This evidence should be based on a dialogue and consensus-building process that PAM—again, the Paramedic Association of Manitoba—organize this for the purposes of exchanging information and opinions with practitioners and stakeholders about self-regulation and its implications for paramedics including its costs and responsibilities.

So that's what the report recommended on page 47 in their first recommendation based on the analysis they did of the application by the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, and the minister has followed that recommendation and, indeed, has held—has asked the health professions advisory committee to play a role in bringing people together to build that consensus.

I think that's appropriate and it follows-up on the independent, partial report by—made by HPAC, and asked them to continue to play a role in furthering their recommendation towards implementation.

Mr. Pallister: But over two months later the Health Minister still hasn't involved the paramedic

association in any dialogue of any kind. Can the Premier (Mr. Selinger) explain why that's the case?

Mr. Selinger: Well, I think the minister is following the recommendation on page 47 of the report by the Health Professions Advisory Council, a report to the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) on the investigation of the application for the regulation of paramedics under The Regulated Health Professions Act. And that recommendation, it says the evidence should be based on a dialogue- and consensus-building process that PAM, the Paramedic Association, organizes for the purposes of exchanging information and opinions. And I read the rest into the record. And then the minister has asked that the Health Professions Advisory Council play a role in facilitating that dialogue among all the stakeholders because of the impartial, independent role they played in coming to this recommendation.

I think that's—the minister's objective is to have the Health Professions Advisory Council, which is seen as an impartial body that has made a recommendation towards—going towards self-regulation, to facilitate that process.

Mr. Pallister: So a big thing here with getting the Premier back in that chair was this—these blocks of union delegates that were allocated to various—the firefighters were allocated 25; I think they ended up with 22 or something like that. But then CUPE had 288 originally; I don't know how many they netted out at. And they sent a letter. This was a letter that went out in December from the national president of CUPE, Mr. Paul Moist, and it said: Our Premier's been attacked by five members he appointed to Cabinet—no integrity, high moral standards or spirit of our party's heritage at play in their public abandonment of Cabinet and caucus solidarity.

Does the Premier agree with those observations?

Mr. Selinger: Again, letters sent out by other parties stand in their own right. My view has always been that we need to find a way to bring everybody together to serve the people of Manitoba, and that was the role that I played, and I encouraged everybody else to play a similar role, and that's what we've all worked towards and that's where we're going.

Mr. Pallister: So the bringing-people-together thing, that's—that monastery retreat, that must've been a pretty important part of that exercise. That was about a month after the leadership race, wasn't it?

Mr. Selinger: I think it was about then, yes. I'd have to check the exact dates, but it was a few weeks after, for sure.

Mr. Pallister: And since that time, instead of Kumbaya, it's kind of been kumbye-bye, right? There's the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) announced he's leaving, and member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), I think maybe within a couple of days of that meeting, he was leaving. Now, he said he was in part leaving because he had asked for his nomination meeting to be scheduled, I think, several times, if I recall, and got no response.

Could the Premier explain that, because if he's reaching out to build his team, it doesn't seem to make much sense that he wouldn't respond to a request from a colleague in his caucus to have a nomination meeting. I'm curious about how that came to be.

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member has had several members in his caucus announce they're not running either, for various reasons, I'm sure. And so I don't think that the experiences are that significantly different. In every election people decide whether they want to run again, that's completely appropriate, and they do that based on their discussions with their own families and colleagues.

And then, in terms of nomination meetings, there is a committee of the party that looks at all those applications and requests and decides when it's the appropriate time to do that, and they have scheduled many and will schedule other ones in the future.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, that's quite a fair observation, I think. There are always HR challenges, but this one I asked him about specifically was in respect to a non-response to a member asking for a nomination meeting. I wonder if he could address that specific issue.

Mr. Selinger: Again, that—I wasn't involved directly in that request one way or the other. That would be between the member—if it occurred that way as described by the member, Leader of the Opposition—and the provincial office, and they would've sorted that out among each other.

* (15:40)

But presumably the member he's referring to, the member for Assiniboia, decided to make his own decision, which we've all respected. He's served very honourably in this Legislature as an MLA since, I believe, at least 2003, and also as a minister, and has

brought a lot of good ideas to the fore, and that needs to be acknowledged today; that he has done many good things for the—his constituency and for the people of Manitoba, and now he's decided that he wants to pursue other avenues in his life.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, well, a non-response to a repeated request for a nomination meeting would be a pretty good way for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to send a message to the member from Assiniboia, that he doesn't want him to run. So again I would ask—maybe he was too focused—laser-like focus on things that matter most—whatever—that he wasn't able to get back to the guy. Is that—was that the reason that he didn't—his—he and his office didn't respond, or do I misunderstand the process here? Is this a party process and I'm asking the wrong person the question?

Mr. Selinger: The party has a nomination committee that responds to requests and decides on the appropriateness of moving forward with them at that time, and I don't have the details of when the request was made or when it was responded to or if, in fact, those procedures—how they occurred and at which time. That would've been at the party level with that committee.

Mr. Pallister: So a couple of weeks after the leadership race, the Health Minister wouldn't say in a report—she wouldn't say in the Free Press whether she'd be in a position to make a decision before the next election on this issue. She said that she didn't want to impose any timelines on the advisory council—sounds like ragging the puck again.

And, when they asked Mr. Forrest about it, he was pretty happy about the whole approach the government was taking. He said, it'll take years.

Is that the position? Since I've asked—a couple of times I asked the Premier for a timeline, and he's failed to respond. It makes me suspicious that Mr. Forrest might be right. Is—am I right to assume that this process is going to take years, given the non-commitment by the Health Minister to proceed, given her lack of initiative in respect of moving a discussion forward before fall? That's the earliest that she would undertake to proceed with anything. Is Mr. Forrest right in saying that this self-governing discussion recommended by the committee is going to actually take years?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe that we can comment on that.

What we can say is that the minister has, upon tabling the report in public on March 17th, has asked the health professionals advisory committee to bring the parties together to have a consensus-building dialogue to move towards self-regulation, and that's what's occurring. And that will depend on the willingness of all the parties to collaborate and work together. And I'm sure that the health professionals advisory committee, as an independent and impartial body, will do a good job in facilitating that discussion.

And on the recommendation, it says the evidence should be based on a dialogue and consensus-building process that PAM organizes for the purposes of exchanging information and opinions with practitioners about self-regulation and its implications for paramedics, including its costs and responsibilities.

And it also says the self-regulation of the profession of paramedicine should proceed only after PAM provides the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) with evidence of a satisfactory level of support among Manitoba paramedics for self-regulation. So the recommendation's clear. It's provided by the health professions advisory committee, and the minister has helped, instead of just leaving it in the hands of PAM, to do that, which may have resulted in other challenges. The minister has asked the health professions advisory committee to play a role of facilitating that process which actually goes beyond the normal recommendations in the report. They didn't volunteer to do that; they were asked to do that by the minister in order to facilitate the recommendation moving forward.

Mr. Pallister: Well, this issue of perception, again, it's a tough one, Mr. Speaker, because you've got the same minister who, to all intents and purposes, was elected because of Mr. Forrest's work in her riding, engaged in deep discussion which the Premier wasn't aware of, but which everybody else was, and then a few minutes later, she's ushering the head of the firefighters union across to support him, but he doesn't know of any deals that were made, but the outcome of this is that we have a non-commitment by the government to proceed in any timely manner on any—in any real way towards progress on establishing the thing which Mr. Forrest fears most.

We also have statements which the Premier does not dispute or agree with, that the commitment Mr. Forrest had made to the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) was revoked because he thought that

the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) was too close to the paramedics, which means, I guess, if you believe that—if you believe Mr. Balagus's comments, that must have been the issue that would be the straw that stirred his drink in your direction, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) direction, in the leadership race.

So that, on the surface of it, the Premier's got to agree that creates a powerful case for the perception, at the very least, that the person in charge of the Premier's health policy making in respect of a self-governing paramedical governing body is not him or the Health Minister but rather Mr. Forrest. Isn't that a dangerous perception to not address fully? And I'm giving the Premier ample opportunity to do that today.

Mr. Selinger: So many inaccuracies and distortions in what the member said, I'll start with just a few of them. There's—the member really likes to spin things in a way that serves his view of the world. First of all, the member got elected because of the citizens in her constituency, not because of any one group. The citizens in the constituency voted for her, and it's an insult to suggest that they didn't exercise their own independent judgment, which they did.

Secondly, he's suggesting that there was some deep discussion between the minister and a member of one particular group at the convention. I'm not aware of that and I don't believe that occurred, but he's characterizing it that way as if he was there, which he wasn't.

And, thirdly, he's suggesting that then that MLA or minister then ushered support across the Premier—I don't recall that happening. That did not happen. They made their own independent decision. The member's actually assuming that we were seeking their support. They made that decision on their own.

And then, fourth, he's suggesting that the recommendations are somehow being delayed by the minister. The minister's following exactly the advice that was put forward on page 47 of the report. And that advice, I've read it into the record, I'm prepared to provide a copy of that recommendation to the member opposite so that he can peruse it at his leisure, but the advice is very clear that the—even though they recommend that the profession proceed to regulation, they make that conditional upon the paramedic association providing the minister with evidence of a satisfactory level of support among paramedics for self-regulation. And that evidence should be based on dialogue and consensus building initiated—that PAM organizes, the paramedics

organize, for the purposes of exchanging information and opinions with practitioners and stakeholders about self-regulation and its implications for paramedics, including its costs and responsibilities.

So the health professionals advisory committee is saying we—you need to do more work in making the people who practise paramedicine more fully aware of what self-regulation will mean for them in terms of their ability to regulate themselves, in terms of the requirements that they will have to follow under self-regulation and including the cost.

The minister takes that advice and then goes beyond that advice and asks the health professionals advisory committee to play a role in facilitating the recommendation that they made. So an independent body that made the recommendation is asked to play a role in facilitating that recommendation, which keeps it impartial and independent. I think that is appropriate.

So the member's characterization of it somehow being linked to the leadership race, I think, is completely false. I think the member and the minister followed the advice of the health professions advisory committee, plain and simple.

Mr. Pallister: Was the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) aware that the firefighters had committed to supporting the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) on the first ballot?

Mr. Selinger: When they publicly declared it, we all became aware of it.

Mr. Pallister: Good, so he was aware of that and—but not aware—he was now claiming that he wasn't aware that the firefighters had committed to the member for Seine River on the second ballot. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: I saw no public information in that regard.

* (15:50)

Mr. Pallister: Okay. Well, if the Premier's defence—rather aggressive defence lacks much common sense—and I'll just go through some of the points he's made here, Mr. Speaker, but he says that it's an insult to the people of Kirkfield Park to suggest that anyone other than them elected their MLA. And I would say it's an insult to the common sense of anyone who has ever been remotely involved in politics to suggest that organization doesn't matter in a political campaign, and I'm sure the Chair would agree to that.

The fact of the matter is that that is not a defence at all. And, clearly, it's well known that the firefighters rather aggressively, as is their right, participated in organizing for the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) in her campaign. So this creates a perception that there's something owed back to the firefighters by the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady). And this is why it's particularly unseemly for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to now deny or imply that there was no role played by the firefighters in determining the outcome of the election because, clearly, volunteers on campaigns do a great deal to determine the outcome of elections. Wouldn't the Premier agree?

Mr. Selinger: The member suggested that somehow the firefighters were the ones that got a particular member of the legislator elected. Is he acknowledging that that's the case when the paramedics supported his political party in the last election? Was it the paramedics that got members opposite elected in certain constituencies? And, indeed, is that the reason why they now support self-regulation by the paramedics because they feel they owe a favour to that group that helped them get elected last time? Is that what he's saying?

Because I don't think that it's quite as simple as that. I think people participate in electoral processes, and then people do their job when they're given the honour of serving the public as ministers.

Now, the member suggests that this report by the health professionals advisory committee somehow favoured the firefighters. The—Eric Glass, the administrative director of the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, said his organization was pleased with the outcome of the report in its pursuit of a regulatory body. I have to admit, I'm pleasantly surprised, but I'm also optimistic in the sense that I think the council has done its homework and I don't think there's anything in the report that we could really argue with, he said by telephone.

So, you know, the paramedics think they did very well in the report. They think they were—that the report gave them a recommendation that they could not find anything to disagree with. So the member is tilting the conclusions of the report to serve his own political purposes.

Mr. Pallister: Well, hardly, Mr. Chair. The Premier's tilting his response because he's overly defensive about this issue. The reality is that the issue is the one of timing, and the inaction of the

government makes it very clear they have no intentions whatsoever in proceeding in anything less than a snail-like pace—anything more than a snail-like pace, I should say, in the direction of a self-governing agency. So it's pretty clear that this is a promise that is being kept, whether the Premier was aware of it or not.

In respect of the assertions the Premier made earlier, he also suggested that Mr. Forrest made the decision himself and that there were no influences exerted on Mr. Forrest's decision. That's not—anyone who knows Mr. Forrest—impression of Mr. Forrest, he makes his decisions based on logic and reason, not on fancy. So the fact that he made a decision to change—as the Premier now disputes but is well known—made a decision to change his support following a discussion with Heather Grant-Jury, who, I believe, played a role in the Premier's campaign, and the Minister of Health on the second ballot, and this has been reported and is verified by Michael Balagus, who the Premier has said he won't—he does not attest that the Premier—the Premier's not attested that Mr. Balagus is lying about this, and I see no reason why he would. He has said that following that discussion the firefighters' representative changed his view. Now, to suggest that he changed his view based on his own and no one else's input is naive at best and deflative certainly in its tone.

So I have to ask him again, with a fact that the report was delayed for three months, that the government has not put out any timeline for proceeding on this discussion, that there is no evidence of any immediacy, doesn't this provide those who, such as the MGEU, who have asserted that the government is dragging its feet on this issue, after many years—and I should note for the Premier, this is not a new position. Apparently, my party—and I come into this not knowing what the background position was, but I am told that it was eight years ago that the PC Party first asserted support for a self-governing council for paramedics. So his assertion about partisan position taking is, of course, not based in any fact.

His—why delay a report for that length of time, then have a meeting with the firefighters before the second ballot and discuss nothing? What sense does that make?

Mr. Selinger: The member's assuming that we were seeking the support of a particular group. That's his first assumption.

The member is also refusing to understand what the recommendation on page 47 of the report said. The recommendation said that they proceed to regulation of the profession only after the Paramedic Association of Manitoba—the onus is on them—provides the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) with evidence of a satisfactory level of support among paramedics for self-regulation—all the paramedics, which, I should note for the member, are 1,500 strong in Manitoba now, not the 280 that were around on a full-time basis when the members opposite were in government. That profession has grown dramatically under this government as we try to provide better service to Manitobans all across the province. So the onus was on them, and the evidence should be based on a dialogue and consensus building that the paramedic association organizes.

So, again, the onus was on them to generate this dialogue and consensus building among its own members. And that it should—the dialogue in that process should include its implications for paramedics, in terms of standards they have to meet, presumably, although it's not clear about that, including its—oh, it is—including its costs and responsibilities. So standards relates to issues of responsibilities, and costs speaks for itself, what will it cost them to do that. So the onus was there.

The minister goes beyond that, just doesn't leave it in the hands of the paramedics. The minister asks the health professions advisory committee to facilitate this dialogue and bring the parties together, so they can understand the responsibilities and the costs of self-regulation. And I'll provide three copies to the Clerk, so they can be distributed. And the member can have the ability to look at the recommendation on page 47.

I don't think that, in any way, is trying to hold things up. I think the argument is, and the evidence is, is that the minister's facilitating the dialogue, going above and beyond the call of what the health professions advisory committee itself recommended. She could have left it entirely in the hands of the paramedics to have that responsibility, which was what was recommended by the health professions advisory committee.

So the allegation that the member makes that the minister's trying to stall is completely inaccurate and unfair to the minister. She went beyond the recommendations of the health professions advisory committee. She facilitated a dialogue by using the health professions advisory committee as an

impartial and independent body to facilitate that dialogue.

The member completely ignores that. He pursues his preconceived notion of conspiracy here to make his own political points without reading the report, without looking at the evidence and without understanding what the folks said from the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, that they believed it was a report that they could not disagree with.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier (Mr. Selinger) just said that the minister's taking action to facilitate a dialogue by facilitating a dialogue, and he couldn't have described her inaction any better than that. This report that he refers to was commissioned on March 2nd of 2012. Its release was a full three years later, and now he's just put on the record that the minister's facilitating a dialogue to facilitate a dialogue—now if that isn't a definition of inaction, I don't know what is.

This statement by the Premier that caught my eye, after he was asked this question, specifically, about this influence allegation, the MGEU's concern about—I won't call it influence peddling; I'll call it something softer than that—but the fact that their concern, which is their concern and therefore real, which was big enough in their minds that they wrote the Premier about it to ask, you know, for some specific timelines, and we still, after 40 minutes of this, haven't got any indication whatsoever from the Premier of Manitoba as to a commitment to anything other than facilitating a dialogue to facilitate a dialogue.

* (16:00)

Now, this question the MGEU raises is based, at least in part, on their perception or their fear that a deal was made by the Health Minister of Manitoba that would further cause delays in a cause they've been advancing at the MGEU for some time. And then the Premier responds, when he's asked about it, by saying there's been no firm promises made from my level, and that sounds like a double qualification in the answer. No firm promises made from my level.

Now can he assure the people of Manitoba there were no promises made from his level at all?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. And I would like to expand on my answer if I could. Yes, I can, and I can further assert to him that he has missed the import of this report—the importance of it—because the report was a

carefully—was a process that started and the health professions advisory committee was put in place to facilitate this kind of a review by putting independent people in place to do that, that would bring impartiality to the process. And I think that's important, particularly when there's complex issues that have to be addressed, very similar to the experience in Ontario where they actually came to the conclusion after literature reviews, jurisdictions and jurisprudence reviews, consultation where they talked to all kinds of different parties. They recommended the paramedics not be regulated under their regulated health professions act, because the application did not meet our primary criterion threshold for risk of harm and because self-regulations is not in the public interest.

The Manitoba health professions advisory committee recommended the opposite. They recommended that it does be regulated, and the member's trying to portray that as something—somehow a win for one particular group.

Well, in fact, the paramedics association administrator went on the record as saying he was pleased with the outcome of the report, and pleasantly surprised. I believe the council has done its homework, and I don't believe there's anything that we could argue—really argue with. It goes on to say: I think that they want to ensure that the minister has unqualified consensus among the 2,500 or so EMS licensed providers that there are in the province. We accept that as a fair statement.

So, you know, I think everybody but the member opposite seems to accept the report as being impartial and fair in terms of advancing a proper approach to self-regulation.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Michael Balagus doesn't think it's fair when a premier uses his power to influence the outcome of a leadership contest that was tilted to begin with.

And it is reported that Mr. Forrest's resolve peaked just before first ballot results were made known. Oswald's supporters spotted Mr. Forrest deep in conversation with the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) and Heather Grant-Jury, sending a number of those supporters off in search of the firefighters' leader. Unfortunately, the next time Balagus saw Forrest was when he made it clear he was pledging support to the member opposite.

Now, Mr. Forrest doesn't make decisions lightly, and he had previously—despite the Premier's

(Mr. Selinger) declared naivety to the fact—had declared previously his support on numerous occasions on second ballot for the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald). His shifting of support determined the outcome of the entire leadership race, and I submit it is an important—it's an important question to clear up.

The Premier is doing his best to attempt to do that. He's claiming it's a win-win-win situation. Everybody wins because of his avowed support for the paramedics. But, at the same time, he's able to keep his promise to the firefighters by dragging his heels. And that's what the minister's doing.

I'll give him a chance again to lay out the timeline for this dialogue—moving towards a dialogue process he referred to earlier. But, if he comes back with later this fall again, I think he's going to be helping make the case that there is no real commitment to moving forward with this in any timely manner.

If there is such a commitment, I don't understand why the paramedics were not contacted for weeks after the report was released. They were—the report was suppressed for over two and a half months, so I don't understand why the Premier is trying to make the case he's making when the evidence is so stacked against that case.

Mr. Selinger: I would simply say that the member continues with his particular view of the world based on his faulty analysis of the evidence.

The minister, on the same article where the administrator for the paramedic association says, I think they want to ensure that the minister has unqualified consensus among the 2,500 or so EMS licensed providers that there are in the province—we'll accept that as a fair statement.

The minister later on in the article says, with respect to the firefighters, they never asked for intervention and I never offered any intervention. So the minister is very clear about what role she played.

The health professionals advisory council was set up to deal with matters of applications for self-regulation under the health professions act—the registered health professions act. They were a new body. They took their time to do their due diligence, review things. They looked at the experience elsewhere, presumably with what was going on in Ontario. They came back with a recommendation that there should be self-regulation once sufficient level of consensus has been achieved. They put the

onus on the paramedics themselves to facilitate that dialogue. They did not put a hard deadline on that out of respect for the role of the paramedic association.

The member wants to impose a hard deadline for other reasons presumably. They said, you should go out there and make sure you have a dialogue in consensus building for the purposes of exchanging information, opinions with practitioners and stakeholders about self-regulation and its implications for paramedics, including its costs and responsibilities. That's what they recommended. They did not put a timeline on it.

Why would the minister then impose a timeline beyond the recommendations of the health professions advisory committee? If they're not imposing a timeline, why would the minister then go against their recommendations and impose a timeline, like the member is demanding for his own political purposes?

What they did—what the minister did do instead of leaving the entire onus on the shoulders of the paramedic association, she asked the health professionals advisory committee to facilitate the process, because they had played an independent and impartial role up to that date. And she thought they'd be well positioned to facilitate the very dialogue that was recommended by that committee itself, the health professionals advisory committee. I think that's a completely positive and constructive response on behalf of the minister, and I'm surprised that the member opposite doesn't see it that way.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it doesn't surprise me either that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) would defend inactivity on a file in which it so clearly advantages one of his best and strongest supporters to take no action. That doesn't surprise me one little bit.

The report was three years in the making. It's a consultation process that's most extensive in its preparation. The report is then covered up for three months. Only after we call for it to be released is it released. But no action follows its release. No contact at all with the paramedic association themselves to begin the dialogue recommended by the dialogue group to begin the consultation recommended by the consultation process—none. And now the Premier tries to make the inactivity that his government has pursued, his Health Minister in particular, a defence as if he is following recommendations of inactivity, which is not the case.

The report did not recommend inaction; of course, it recommend action. And the government is not pursuing any action. It has no time frame. It has not outlined a time frame today. And the Premier has refused to recognize and has played the duck somewhat in respect of what he knew and didn't know about delegate support that came about as a result of a negotiation clearly undertaken by his Health Minister with the firefighters union head at a leadership contest.

Now his party, again, has decided to continue with this archaic practice of granting slates to various unions in significant number so that this can happen. These union bosses are put in a position because of the outrageous and antiquated approach of the party—where's that list?—which gives delegate support to a few public sector unions, including not just the firefighters with 25 delegates, but CUPE with 288; Teamsters Local 979, 17; IBEW Local 2085, 15; steelworkers, 60; Unifor, 116; UFCW, 160. Altogether, talking about 25 to 30 per cent of the power to determine the outcome of the leadership contest for the NDP rests in the hands of the bosses of these unions.

* (16:10)

Now I know there was a resolution brought forward at the NDP meeting about changing this. But I'm curious as to what the Premier's view is on that resolution, because I see this concern, as expressed by the MGEU and many others across the province, that policy decisions are unduly influenced by favourites of the government. I hear it a lot, and I want to know what the Premier's view is on changing the reality of the leadership process in his own party.

Does he support continuing with this power brokerage structure that gives six or seven union boss leaders the opportunity, as was just presented to the people of Manitoba through this last leadership contest in which the Premier was successful, does he propose to continue that practice? Does he support the continuation of that practice?

Report

Mr. Jim Maloway (Chairperson of the section of Committee of Supply meeting in room 255): Mr. Chairperson, in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255, considering the Estimates of the Department of Finance, the honourable member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) moved the following motion: that lines 7.1.(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

Mr. Chairperson, this motion was defeated on a voice vote. Subsequently, two members requested that a counted vote be taken on this matter.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

All sections in Chamber for recorded vote.

Recorded Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Order. In the section of Committee of Supply meeting in room 255, considering the Estimates for the Department of Finance, the honourable member of Morden and Winkler moved the following motion: that line 7.1.(a) be amended so that this minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

All those in favour of the—oh, sorry—the motion was defeated on voice vote, and, subsequently, two members requested a formal vote on this matter.

The question before the committee, then, is the motion of the honourable member for Morden and Winkler.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 16, Nays 32.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The hour now being past 5 o'clock, committee rise. Bring in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 1, 2015

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