

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 57—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act
(Countermeasures Against
Drug-Impaired Driving)**

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that Bill 57, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Countermeasures Against Drug-Impaired Driving); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (conduite avec facultés affaiblies par la drogue), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: Manitobans are entitled to be safe on our roads and highways. We support the ability of our police to ensure that drivers impaired by drugs, whether illegal, prescription or non-prescription drugs, are not putting themselves and other Manitobans at risk on our roads.

This bill will modernize the ability of police to conduct drug-impaired—sorry, to conduct enhanced testing of drug-impaired drivers, similar to police responses to alcohol-impaired driving. It will allow police to proceed directly to a more enhanced test, to drug-recognition evaluation tests when appropriate conditions are met. Sanctions can include immediate roadside driver's licence suspensions as well as vehicle impoundment. Sanctions for drivers who refuse a police demand to participate in roadside tests will be adjusted to match alcohol-impaired drivers who refuse demands for testing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that this bill is another important tool for our police to help keep our roads safe. Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

(2) In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

(3) The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent needs-for-and-alternatives-to review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

And this petition is signed by M. Rempel, D. Harris, L. Penner and many more 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 Sales Tax Increase—
Effects on Manitoba Economy**

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition's submitted on behalf of R. Ellis, L. Faschauner and M.J. Aysia and many other fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by B. Shaw, B. Shaw, R. Kunfeal and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Employment and Income Assistance— Rental Allowance Increase

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by E. Sabourin, D. Olive, P. Hrycak and many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Effects on Manitoba Economy

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

And the background to the petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

* (13:40)

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

And this petition is signed by H. Elias, C. Elias, J. Paquet and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none, committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): I'm pleased to table the following reports: the Manitoba Civil Service Commission Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for 2014-2015, Manitoba Enabling Appropriations and Other Appropriations Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for 2014-2015 and Manitoba Employee Pensions and Other Costs Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for 2014-15.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I rise in the House today to give an update on the evolving flood situation.

As I informed the House yesterday, an embankment protecting the communities along the Birdtail Creek from high water is in serious risk of failing. In response to this high risk, and in consultation with the RM and the Town of Rossburn, the RM and Town of Birtle and the Waywayseecappo First Nation, our engineers and operational staff are on the ground and have moved fast to address the increasing pressure on the embankment overnight with a small controlled breach 200 metres west of the failing embankment.

The intent of the controlled breach is to safely draw down as much as five feet of water to reduce pressure on the embankment. The controlled breach will reduce the risk of embankment failure; however, the risk of embankment failure remains high. To further mitigate against embankment failure, efforts to establish pumping operations which would reduce water levels have been initiated.

Mr. Speaker, the communities are protected or evacuated to the worst case scenario. At-risk homes downstream have been evacuated. Flood protection has been improved at the Waywayseecappo First Nation. Super sandbags delivered by the Province are being used to protect the community water supply. A further 2,000 regular sandbags were also delivered to the First Nation yesterday to protect homes and infrastructure. In the town of Birtle, 120 Aqua Dams have been provided by the Province to protect homes and infrastructure, and other dikes protecting the water plant and the lift station have been completed.

In the town of Birtle or any of the other local governments, if they suffer a loss of sewer and water service from the flooding or if roads are washed out, we will be there to help them recover.

Our officials have been in constant contact with these communities in preparing for flooding and will remain in contact with them to support them through any needed recovery.

Mr. Speaker, some roads remain closed in the area. That includes PTH 45 from PTH 16 to PTH 476. That includes PTH 359 from Highway 264 to Highway 476, and PTH from 264 to PR 476 is also closed. Again, this is a safety measure. Traffic is being routed back to PTH 16, and the flag staff and signs have been placed in the valley to stop traffic from entering the possible flood plain.

Seventy-three people in Waywayseecappo have been evacuated. The evacuations are co-ordinated by the First Nations and by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Forty-three people remain evacuated from Birtle and the surrounding area. The length of the evacuation will depend on how long the river remains high.

As forecast, the Fisher River did experience over-bank flooding in Peguis over the weekend. An impact assessment of damage has not yet been completed. Water levels appear to have crested in the community.

The federal government, through AANDC, is responsible for flood preparedness and response on First Nations. The Province of Manitoba provides AANDC and First Nations with flood forecasts and projections regularly. AANDC advises that flooding has resulted in the evacuation of 136 people from Peguis First Nation, 29 homes have been affected by flood water and approximately 70 homes are isolated. AANDC is working with the community

and emergency management partners to ensure local emergency response efforts are supported. Evacuations are being co-ordinated by the community. Water levels have crested in the community and are receding. AANDC has not yet completed an impact assessment of damages.

At the first crest, the water has passed on the Red River, but the United States has issued flood warnings for Fargo and Grand Forks due to precipitation they've received recently.

Many rivers and creeks in western Manitoba are experiencing increased flows. Flood warnings are in place for all points along the Birdtail Creek from PTH 45 downstream, the Assiniboine River from Shellmouth Dam to Brandon. States of local emergency continue in the RMs of Westbourne, Hillsburg, Birtle and Russell and the towns of Roblin and Birtle.

And, as always, we will continue to update the Assembly and all Manitobans on these developments as they unfold. We will continue to incorporate the changing weather information into our flood forecasts and communicate that information to Manitoba families and communities.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Thank you to the minister for his update.

The operations in and around the old red-rail bed at Waywayseecappo seem to be reducing the threat of flooding, and I know the Province and community continue to monitor the levels.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the work being undertaken by government officials at all levels to help affected Manitobans cope with the stress of evacuation and potential flood. Even as I left Brandon early this morning, I saw provincial staff measuring the flow of the Assiniboine as I crossed the Thompson bridges.

My colleagues and I are committed to working co-operatively with the members of the government, our communities and our neighbours to tackle the challenges that these conditions create. The MLA from Riding Mountain has been out meeting with evacuees, municipal officials and First Nations, and we know that the impact of the detours on municipals roads is of concern to municipalities, and I'm sure the minister is well aware of this.

As was path-with past national-natural disasters, Manitobans will pull together in times of

need for the betterment of others. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: I want to thank the minister for his update on the current situation and the concerns in terms of flooding around the province.

I think, as I mentioned yesterday, that it is important not just to make sure that we are on top of and dealing with this failing embankment but that there be a longer term strategy in place here to make sure that such embankments are inspected, identified earlier and shored up, we're provided with a—what's essentially a way of ensuring that we don't have failures in such embankments in the future. This is, of course, always a worry, but it's a very big worry if you have a large amount of water released very suddenly because of failure of a structure like this.

The situation on Peguis continues to be a concern with a considerable number of people evacuated. I think it is noteworthy to mention that people on Peguis are still struggling with people who've been evacuated from previous floods, and this clearly needs some combined provincial-federal attention to make sure that there is attention not just to the short-run critical situation that people in Peguis are facing but to the long-run needs of people in the community.

And I would ask that the minister have a look in terms of the other municipalities who are affected, and particularly Westbourne, because there are concerns that there was not adequate preparation. And maybe the minister can report on this situation later on and what he's doing to correct this problem. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Doug Cook and Olha Dasyuk, who are the guests of the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

* (13:50)

And also in the public gallery today, we have from St. John's-Ravenscourt School 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Diane Brueton, Dan Stainer and Heather Ragot, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

And also in the public gallery today, we have with us from the Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School Agassiz 22 grade 4 students under the direction of Mr. Wes Krahn. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Small-Business Income Tax Limit Request for Increase

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, a recent survey of small-business owners in Manitoba show that 8 per cent feel that the NDP government is supporting small businesses here in Manitoba, whereas in Saskatchewan 72 per cent of small-business owners think that that government supports them. And that's a big difference, but it's not difficult to see why there's such a big difference.

Of course, we know in the last election that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and members opposite stood before Manitobans and promised not to raise taxes, Mr. Speaker, and we know that they broke that promise.

We also know that the Premier also promised to raise the small-business income limit to \$500,000. Well, he broke that promise too.

Can the Premier tell Manitoba small businesses when they can expect that this promise—that the government live up to this promise that they made for small businesses in Manitoba to raise the business income limit to \$500,000?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Mr. Speaker, well, certainly, when the member stood up, I must confess, I thought she was going to make reference to the fact that in a survey of small-business owners that there was 100 per cent satisfaction with the fact that we took a small-business tax that was at 9 per cent under the members opposite and brought it down to zero. I was positive that that's what she was going to say.

And if it wasn't going to be that, I felt absolutely certain, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite was going to make note of the StatsCan report today talking about average weekly earnings in Manitoba increasing by 4.4 per cent over February of last year, the largest growth among the provinces. I thought that's what she was going to say.

Mrs. Stefanson: Perhaps the minister would've answered the question. It would be a nice thing.

But I would say that perhaps she has forgotten what her NDP government promised before the last election. They made a promise to increase the small-business tax limit to \$500,000, Mr. Speaker, the threshold. So I will table a reminder, just a gentle reminder for the minister: another promise made and another promise broken by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that three quarters of small businesses reported to the CFIB that high provincial taxes are keeping them from growing their businesses, as compared to 29 per cent in Saskatchewan.

So I ask the minister again, because she refused to answer the last question, Mr. Speaker. I will ask again: Will she live up to her promise to increase the business–small-business threshold to \$500,000, or will she just admit that she doesn't plan to do it at all?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, PCs across the way who purport to be the best cuddly friends of business were the ones that didn't do a thing with small-business 'tac' during their entire reign of terror. The taxes remained at 9 per cent and have been moved down to zero per cent under our watch.

I can say further that Manitoba, I would remind her, is the only province to completely have eliminated its small-business tax, removing 12,000 businesses from the tax rolls. January 1st, we increased the threshold to 425, taking an additional 750 businesses off the tax rolls.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak to small businesses and industry in Manitoba, we hear their sense of optimism. We hear their sense of growing. We know that just this morning there was news of a brand new retail space opening just down the street from her, being that now she can ride her bike there.

Mrs. Stefanson: Here we go again, Mr. Speaker. Another promise made by this NDP government and another promise broken. Shame on them.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government lied to small-business owners in Manitoba. They lied when they said they wouldn't raise taxes and they did. They lied when they said that they would raise the threshold for small businesses to \$500,000 and they didn't fulfill that promise.

This minister continues to evade the question, which leads me to believe that she has no intention of fulfilling that commitment to the more than 3,000 businesses in Manitoba that she promised to take off the tax rolls in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Will she stand before Manitobans today and before those businesses and apologize to those businesses for breaking her promise?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we came into government, our corporate income tax rates were the highest in Canada—I repeat, the highest in Canada. Today Manitoba businesses with \$500,000 income pay the lowest corporate income taxes—I say again, the lowest.

Mr. Speaker, we have StatsCan reporting a 4.4 per cent increase in average weekly earnings of Manitobans. We have Mr. Derrick Chartier, president of CBRE Winnipeg, calling the new model that was announced this morning a tremendous win for Winnipeg, will help bring more destination shoppers and travellers.

We're optimistic about the future of business in Manitoba. Businesses are optimistic. It seems to me that the only nattering nabobs of negativity, Mr. Speaker, are sitting over there.

Personal Income Tax Rates Impact on Manitobans

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, for everything under the sun there is a season, and this is tax season and Manitobans are filing their tax returns.

And the question that's on the mind of many people is how much will they get back on their tax return. So any tax software program allows you to plug in the numbers and to generate tax return scenarios.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ran some numbers for a couple—let's call them Robert and Sheila—both retired seniors earning a pension with a combined income of \$70,000. Because Robert and Sheila live in Manitoba, they will receive a tax return of \$4,648. But if Robert and Sheila were living in Saskatchewan, they would receive \$1,900 more.

If they were in Alberta, they would receive \$2,500 more.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Finance: What does she have to say to Robert and Sheila? Why does this NDP government do nothing to reduce the income tax burden on Manitoba seniors?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): I want to take the opportunity to refer the member opposite to the Saskatchewan budget. And in the Saskatchewan budget, they have a table that looks at a single person at \$25,000 total income.

And as we did yesterday and as the Saskatchewan government does, they take into consideration all of the costs of running a household. And what they conclude is that in Winnipeg, that individual—their total of taxes, utilities and housing is \$12,188. In Regina, that same individual, for all of those costs of living, would pay \$13,641.

And when you look at some of those costs, one of the ones that sticks out is electricity costs. In Winnipeg, that individual can expect to pay about \$410 for electricity. In Saskatchewan, what is it, \$753.

But then the next line is telephone, and here Saskatchewan has an advantage on telephone costs—

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

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the minister wants to talk about Saskatchewan.

Let's run another scenario. Let's run a scenario for another couple, a middle-income family. Let's call them Peter and Stephanie, combined income of \$90,000. Now, Peter and Stephanie live in Manitoba, so their refund is \$2,932. But if they lived in Saskatchewan, their return would be over \$2,500 more. If they lived in Alberta, their tax return would be \$4,500 more.

Why does this NDP government continue to mismanage its spending and make hard-working Manitoba families pay more and more?

Ms. Howard: Continuing to look at the example that the Saskatchewan government gives of an individual and their costs, the—one of the places where Saskatchewan does have an advantage is on the costs of a telephone, because in Saskatchewan, the costs of a telephone for that individual are \$258. In Manitoba, it's \$314.

Now, what could be the difference that accounts for that difference in telephone costs? It could be that Saskatchewan didn't sell their telephone system.

* (14:00)

Mr. Friesen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not just seniors and it's not just middle-income earners. The NDP government is also hurting low-income families.

Take, for instance, Michelle, a low-income 'welder'—wage earner with an income of \$35,000. She lives in Manitoba, so her income tax return is \$2,010. But if Michelle lived in Saskatchewan, she would receive over \$720 more. If she lived in Alberta, her tax return would be \$1,100 more.

Mr. Speaker, we know the situation. They have raised taxes once. They have raised taxes twice. They have broke their promise. They've taken \$150 million more in income tax this year over last year.

Why do they do nothing to reduce the income tax burden for Manitoba seniors, for Manitoba mid-income families and Manitoba low-income wage earners?

Ms. Howard: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what we have done, we have increased the wages for low-income wage earners because we've increased the minimum wage every year that we've been in government, a move that the opposition continues to oppose.

But to continue down the path that the member is on, we look at his example of an individual, a low-income individual, which I think \$25,000 income could qualify you for. That person living in Calgary or Regina will pay higher accommodation costs, higher rent costs than in Winnipeg. One of the reasons for that is a continued focus of this government on rent control, something, by the way, in the last election their candidate in my constituency clearly said they were opposed to and that they would end if they formed government.

So it is very clear that when you look at all the costs of running a household, not just taxes but all the costs—electricity, utilities, rent—as well as the tax credits that are provided—in Manitoba, that individual is going to get a \$700 Property Tax Credit even if they rent—

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

**Child and Family Services
Provincial Expense Policy**

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Yesterday, I raised questions with the Minister of Family Services about where child-welfare dollars are being used. And yesterday, this minister charged with the protection of Manitoba's children and family said she had no idea whether these dollars were being used to provide critical services for children or whether these dollars were being misspent outside of her department's mandates and standards.

So I'll ask the minister today: Did this minister approve using child-welfare dollars to send staff to holiday destinations?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I can assure the House that provincial funding that is being sent to authorities and to agencies is for the purpose of supporting children and families across the province of Manitoba. There is no reason for that money to be sent—be spent on extravagant trips.

It is the responsibility of the authorities and the agencies to approve those travel expenses. I have asked officials to investigate what was the travel expenses paid for.

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is especially disturbing that this is not the first time we have questioned this government on issues like this. We have raised concerns about significant holiday bonuses, unwarranted travel expenses and overtime overpayments even while the number of children in care continued to climb, staff workloads were perpetually heavy and front-line service provider shortages remained.

Mr. Speaker, in response, this government committed then to ensuring the money that flows to child-welfare agencies goes to children.

If that was so, I'd like to ask this minister: How many children went to Las Vegas, LA and Cancun?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I've stated previously, that the provincial funding—that I must tell you has increased by \$440 million—goes directly to authorities and agencies to provide services to children and families. These services are essential in providing family support so children can stay at home. These services are essential to provide support to foster families to support the children in their care. These services are going to hire 280 more staff, and also it—have improved the training.

I am confident that we will continue to work with them and they will continue to provide good quality service, and we do not accept spending money on extravagant trips.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, I know Manitobans want to ensure that their tax dollars are well used, but how many times is this going to happen? How many times are we going to have to stand up in the House and ask the Minister of Family Services and this NDP government to explain why money that was supposed to be used to protect the welfare of children is being misspent on everything but the children?

Mr. Speaker, how many children is this minister going to fail by having no idea where her public dollars are being spent?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have worked very closely with community stakeholders, with Aboriginal organizations to support devolution. Today we stand up and we support devolution just as we did when we developed the system. As we move forward, we will continue to work with our stakeholders and then continue to provide good quality service for Manitoba children and families.

I am confident that the money that we have doubled that has gone into Family Services will continue to be used to support families across the province to ensure that families can stay together, to ensure that if a family cannot stay together, that we are providing the foster family with the resources and working towards reunification.

As I've stated earlier, that there are policies in place, and we will ensure that provincial money is not being spent on extravagant trips.

**ER Services (Arthur-Virden)
Suspension of Services**

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, today, there's a sign in the Virden ER door that states: ER shut down indefinitely. For emergencies, call 911.

This government should be embarrassed. It is very insulting and alarming to the residents of Virden that this minister wants them to dial 911 when they arrive at the Virden ER.

What if the—what if there was an industry accident or an injury to many employees or a bus that overturns on the Trans-Canada Highway? What is this minister suggesting will happen to these patients with a locked ER?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question [*interjection*]-notwithstanding his teammates not wanting to hear the answer.

I can say to the member that, certainly, the regional health authority is very aware that emergency care is critically important to the families in Virden and the surrounding area. They continue to actively recruit for physicians.

Mr. Speaker, it's also incumbent upon the RHA to communicate with the surrounding area when there is a temporary suspension of service at the emergency room. Certainly, additional EMS will be put in place for such occasions.

But it is absolutely the goal of the RHA to get that ER back open.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Speaker, today is day one. The Virden ER is closed and will stay closed until Saturday.

This Health Minister and her government have a poor track record at recruiting rural doctors. Our residents are very concerned and are-with-and about a locked ER and a sign that tells them to dial 911.

This Health Minister promised to ensure patient safety. How can this-how can she close the ER while she's talking about patient safety? Will she admit that this is just unsafe?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, there has been an occasion in the past where the Virden ER had a temporary suspension. We worked together with the regional health authority to recruit additional doctors. That ER reopened. So when the member opposite asks such a question, we can say to him that there is indeed a track record to be able to reopen ERs.

As for the issue of patient safety, Mr. Speaker, I can say to the member that you need to have a sufficient complement of physicians to be able to provide that 24-hour service. The issue, of course, is solely on recruitment, and that, in partnership with the doctors in the region, decisions have been made about when care can be provided 24-7 by the doctors, when it cannot, and they have made a plan accordingly. Absolutely, the regional health authority is aggressively recruiting.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that this is not the first time under the NDP government that the Virden ER has been closed.

Each time there is a closure of the Virden ER, more and more Virden and Elkhorn residents are-lose confidence in the NDP's mismanagement of health care. As a result, more and more Manitobans are travelling to Moosomin, Saskatchewan, for out-of-province health care. Moosomin has a very good track record retaining their doctors.

How is this Health Minister able to sit back and watch Manitobans' patients travel to Saskatchewan for ER services? Is this what she means by access to health-care services, or does this mean Saskatchewan health-care services?

Ms. Oswald: The member may or may not be aware that recruiting to rural and northern environments is a challenge for every jurisdiction in Canada, Manitoba being no exception.

The efforts that are being made to attract doctors to rural Manitoba include bringing diagnostic services to rural Manitoba, bringing CancerCare hubs to rural Manitoba, bringing radiation therapy outside the city of Winnipeg to Brandon for the first time in Manitoba's history. There has to be a combined effort to recruit doctors to rural and northern locations.

* (14:10)

I would suggest to the member opposite that the No. 1 way not to attract doctors is to cut the spaces in medical school.

Pharmacare Program Increases Impact on Seniors

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that even the doctors have no confidence in this government.

Seniors in this province deserve to have access to the medication that they need. In the last two years, however, seniors have had to pay more and more for Pharmacare before it kicks in, more and more money out of their pockets of seniors who are already paying more PST, more income tax than any other province.

Mr. Speaker, why are the seniors in this province being hit with yet another door-backdoor tax?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Minister of Health): Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question.

We certainly know that it's critically important to maintain an affordable level for drugs in Manitoba. Certainly, we've worked very hard to ensure that

increases to Pharmacare are at the consumer price index.

But what I can say clearly, the single largest burden for pharmaceuticals for seniors and, indeed, all Manitobans was the highly expensive cost of oral cancer drugs, which we committed to fully fund, Mr. Speaker, we have fully funded.

And I would hasten to add, when members opposite were asked to do it by the Canadian Cancer Society, they refused.

Mr. Graydon: Donna and Grant Connor of Gretna are two of these seniors. Two years ago they paid \$865 before Pharmacare kicked in. Last year it was \$1,040, and this year it's \$1,109 dollars, an increase of almost \$250 in two years.

Couple this with a 14 per cent increase in the PST, and the Connors are feeling a pinch from this government. There are times that they simply cannot afford their prescriptions.

Mr. Speaker, why is this government fueling their spending addiction by punishing the seniors, taking the money off the seniors' table to finance their spending addiction?

Ms. Oswald: Well, it isn't members on this side of the House that want to take \$500 million in indiscriminate cuts across the board, across government, which would most surely, absolutely affect the Pharmacare program in Manitoba. They can howl and wail all they want, but they absolutely know that making such an action in order to balance a budget in one year—no jurisdiction in the land proposing to do such a thing—would have a direct impact on Pharmacare.

Mr. Speaker, we work hard to maintain Pharmacare as a program that is available to all Manitobans, not discriminating against age like in some jurisdictions, not discriminating by disease like in other jurisdictions. We want Pharmacare to be accessible to all Manitobans and we're going to work hard to continue to do that.

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, Grant and Donna Connor need these prescriptions and simply can't afford them. They can't tax somebody to get more money. Thanks to the increased PST and the increase in the Pharmacare, the Connors do not have the money to pay for the things that they need. Those are important things.

But to feed their spending addiction, this government is taking away asthma medication from

Donna Connor. This government is taking more and more from people like Donna who can afford less and less for their medication.

Mr. Speaker, why is this government punishing Donna Connor and all other Manitobans just to feed their own spending addiction?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I would reiterate for the members opposite that Manitoba is one of the few provinces that covers 100 per cent of the drug costs after an income-based deductible is reached, again, regardless of age, regardless of medical condition. We want to work with Manitoba families if they have unique circumstances that need to be addressed.

But, Mr. Speaker, once again I would say to members opposite, in addition to having the income-based Pharmacare program that doesn't discriminate on age or disease, we have also very specifically chosen to fund oral cancer chemotherapy drugs. We've done this for hundreds and hundreds of Manitoba families already, making a significant difference. It was the No. 1 request of the Canadian Cancer Society, and they said no.

Student Financial Aid Information System Government Fiscal Responsibility

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Four and a half years, 15 and a half million dollars and nothing to show for the new student aid online program, Mr. Speaker. It is currently operating on software from 1995. There seems to be a multimillion-dollar cover-up happening.

Will the minister explain: Why is he failing Manitoba families and students, and where has the Manitobans' hard-working taxpayers' money, 15 and a half million dollars, where did it go?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I thank the member for the question.

As I've explained to him on several occasions, were to he apply for a student loan online today, he would be able to do exactly that. That grant—or loan would occur. The member would go on to have a good academic career, I hope, and get a good job and stay right here in Manitoba. That's what we want for him and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's what we want for all of our children in Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, phase 1 of that program has been completed. The second phase, like all the IT programs, has proven to be more complicated. Our idea is that we should solve the problem, make sure

we get to the root of the issues, make sure that students are well served going into the future here in Manitoba.

Student Loan Debt Burden

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, the minister believes that the student aid program is benefiting Manitoba students.

He and his government claim that they are on the side of students, but is he aware that thousands of Manitoba students with post-secondary debt are resorting to questionable sources for money? According to an article this morning from CBC News, thousands of Manitoba students rely on sugar daddies or sugar mommies to pay their student bills in exchange for dates through a questionable website, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if the minister is onside with students, why has 15 and a half million dollars not actually gone to students to help them with their debt? What is he hiding? What is he and his government hiding?

Mr. Allum: I fail to really comprehend where the member's going with that question.

The reality is hard-working students and hard-working pay—the parents work together in partnership in order to ensure that their children go forward and get a good education here in Manitoba. Student financial aid is there for students as well, as well as grants and bursaries that didn't exist when his government was in power all those many tortured years ago.

Mr. Speaker, we have the—among the lowest tuition rates for universities and colleges in Canada, and we have a student tuition rebate program that makes sure that once a student has graduated, they're okay going forward.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, this new minister had promised his constituents in the last election he would not raise taxes. He has already fired 11 teachers and counting, put a gag order—put a gag order—on Safe Schools Manitoba, and he has blown 15 and a half million dollars on a Manitoba student aid program that is still not working.

Now, Mr. Speaker, thousands of students are turning towards a questionable website to help pay off their post-secondary debts.

Is this how this government is striving to help students, or will this new Education Minister admit

he is forcing students to resort to desperate measures to make ends meet?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm out talking with students all the time, and I talk with parents all the time. They're very happy that we provide a quality, accessible, affordable every—education for every single student here in Manitoba.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that's quite in contrast with the kind of educational program run by the other side when the Leader of the Opposition was at the Cabinet table, when tuition rates skyrocketed by 132 per cent, when bursaries and grants were cut to the bone and when cuts to universities and colleges happened year in and year out.

Mr. Speaker, our plan for education has been crystal clear since we first came into government in 1999. The only thing hidden here is the member's—

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

Stroke Patient Care Dedicated Stroke Unit

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, an average of seven Manitobans have a stroke each day in this province, and yet this government continues to drag its heels.

* (14:20)

Nineteen years ago, tissue plasminogen activator, or tPA, was shown to be an effective treatment for stroke, but this NDP government has failed in over eight—14 years to introduce effective, co-ordinated, province-wide treatment all over Manitoba.

Today, Manitoba is the only province without a dedicated stroke unit to ensure high-quality care for patients in the critical hours after the initial treatment with tPA.

Why is Manitoba's NDP government such a laggard when it comes to introducing proven, cost-effective approaches to improve the health of Manitobans?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, we know from our medical professionals that the moments after a stroke are critical in terms of the kinds of treatment that is administered, and timely stroke care, as the member

has rightly pointed out, including drugs like tPA, can be the difference in the stroke victim's quality of life.

I would let the member know, in fact, that it—when it does come to rapid access to this life-saving drug, Winnipeg has recently, by the Canadian Stroke Network, been recognized as having the best door-to-needle time in the country. That is to say, HSC had a time of 15 minutes compared the national average of 74 minutes.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, but the dedicated stroke unit is needed to ensure excellent care after the needle is put in.

In a recent CIHI survey, 10.9 per cent of stroke patients in Manitoba died in hospital within 30 days of being admitted, compared to a lower death rate in the rest of Canada and much lower death rates in many other countries.

Under this NDP government we've had 14 years of wasted time as they failed to prioritize stroke care. Manitobans cannot conveniently put their ischemic events on hold while this NDP government puts its priorities elsewhere, as the Health Minister said last night.

I ask this government: Where is the long overdue and desperately needed co-ordinated, dedicated unit to provide optimum stroke care?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member—he seems to have neglected this in his analysis today—that in 2011 we did, in fact, launch the Manitoba Stroke Strategy, which is working to prevent disability, improve quality of life.

We are also seeing that our focus on prevention and healthy living has seen a decrease in the number of Manitobans who suffer with a stroke. Over the past decade we've seen a 25 per cent decrease in the amount of Manitobans who suffer a stroke.

Mr. Speaker, within the context of that stroke strategy, certainly we recognize that there is more to do, but by creating the integrated stroke project and other initiatives, we're seeing tangible results and we're going to continue to work to get even more.

Northern Manitoba

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, excellent treatment for stroke has been shown to save lives and also to save dollars, be cost-effective, and yet it's not available all over Manitoba.

A Manitoban having a stroke is an emergency in which time is of the essence. Why is it that after

19 years after tPA was proved effective that adequate, contemporary care is not available in Thompson and for people in northern Manitoba? It's vital to have care in the North in the light of flight times to southern Manitoba.

When will the government ensure the ability for citizens in northern Manitoba to get adequate stroke care in northern Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I thank the member for the question.

We certainly acknowledge that, through a variety of efforts, we have seen a 25 per cent decrease in the incidences of stroke. We have seen Winnipeg be recognized as being a centre that has the best in the nation response time—door-to-needle response time for tPA.

We know in the context of developing the stroke strategy and working with our families with lived experience, as well as our doctors, that there's more work to do. We know that stroke centres in other jurisdictions have had some success. We're very willing to look at those and develop them, but the comprehensive strategy is showing tangible results and we're going to keep working on that.

Homelessness in Manitoba Reduction Strategy Announcement

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): I know that the Minister of Housing and Community Development participated in an historic announcement today for an incredibly important initiative aimed at reducing homelessness in our province, which I know our side is very interested in seeing.

So can the minister please expand upon this announcement and how it builds on what we've already done and the number of partners that are involved in working on this issue?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I was absolutely delighted to be at the United Way today with the co-chairs for the task force to end homelessness. And, in fact, the entire task force was there to talk about a strategy over the next 10 years where we are going to co-ordinate our efforts with a number of community partners, all levels of government to address the issue of homelessness in Manitoba.

Since 2009, Mr. Speaker, we've added 220 more dedicated permanent housing units with supports for vulnerable persons. We've added 136 transitional or emergency units that address the needs of youth and

the homeless. And, of course, the Bell Hotel, which I toured recently, has 42 units to address permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless.

And what was really exciting today was the recognition that this is something that we all have to work together to achieve and we have the commitment from all stakeholders to do so. I was very proud to be part of that announcement today.

ER Services (Lac du Bonnet) Opening Hours

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Lac du Bonnet constituency is a beautiful area of this wonderful province of ours. As such—thank you—as such, we attract many visitors to our communities. In fact, our population increases by at least 300 per cent starting Easter long weekend right through to November.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) if she can assure the residents of the Lac du Bonnet constituency, permanently or seasonally, that the ERs will be open 24-7.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Minister of Health): Yes, Mr. Speaker—

Point of Order

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

I refer to the House of Commons Procedure and Practice. Page 432 says: In general, most ministers are present during question period. If a question is asked pertaining to the portfolio of a minister who is absent from the House, it may be answered by the Prime Minister, another minister or a parliamentary secretary.

Had several questions today that have gone to the Minister of Health. Certainly, the option is for the Minister of Healthy Living to actually answer a question. I know during Estimates she indicated that she works very closely with the Minister of Health. She said that's why there are two ministers under that particular department.

I've lost hope that the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald) is actually going to be able to answer these questions. I have little hope that the Minister of Health can answer the questions, but she is getting paid as a minister under the department, so maybe she can give it a try.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Well, I'm surprised, a little disappointed to have this question from the member opposite, because he's well aware that when a question is posed to the government, any minister of the Crown is able to answer that question. Although I'm pretty sure today that—I'm pretty sure today it wasn't his leader who forced him to ask the question today.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order—[interjection] Order, please.

On the point of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader, and I thank the honourable Government House Leader for advice on this matter as well, I want to refer all honourable members to the—page 509 of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, and I will quote for the members of the House: "Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which Minister responds to which question, and the Speaker has no authority to compel a particular Minister to respond."

Seems pretty clear to me, so I must respectfully rule that there is no point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now, on the response to the question, the honourable Minister of Jobs and the Economy.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I for one thought I was giving blockbuster answers, but there you go.

I would say to the member opposite that, indeed, the regional health authority is working closely with each facility to ensure that emergency care is available whenever possible, as I've said earlier today. Recruiting to rural facilities and northern facilities across Canada in every jurisdiction is a challenge.

Mr. Speaker, the regional health authority takes their responsibility very seriously to ensure that emergency service is provided at ERs, by EMS, and, indeed, family physicians are available for good primary care. The region continues to work on that, and we'll support them in doing that.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, some of these answers I've heard before. It is, in fact, this minister that started this mess in the first place.

I would like to hear from the Minister of Health, and I would like to see her table the study that her

department has taken over how they decide what ERs will be open during peak times.

* (14:30)

Really, Mr. Speaker, peak times? This statement by this minister does not give any assurances to Manitobans.

Can she please table the study, or is she purposely shutting down ERs?

Ms. Oswald: I'll reiterate for the member because I might humbly suggest he didn't hear me the first time when I said to him that the regional health authority is actively recruiting for more doctors in rural Manitoba.

Certainly, it's a challenge in every jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, and, in fact, we know that the Canadian Institute for Health Information points to Manitoba having, as a proportion, more doctors in rural environments than other jurisdictions in Canada. So we're going to continue working on that.

But, again, I must hasten to add, Mr. Speaker, that these members, when they had their hands on the wheel, made a very direct decision to save a little cash by cutting the spaces in medical school. And when the repercussions from that exist, they wander around acting like they don't know a thing about it.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I have asked time and time again to this Health Minister and to this government about staffing the ERs so that Manitobans can be assured that when they have an emergency in their community they can count on their ER and not just have staff call 911 for them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister for Healthy Living today to table the document about the study of peak times for when ERs should be open. Or would she like to apologize for the statement that her minister put on the record just the other day? Or is she purposely shutting down ERs?

Ms. Oswald: I'll say very clearly for the member opposite, the No. 1 way to bring doctors to rural and northern environments is to grow them and teach them at home. What did the members opposite do? They cut the medical school from 100 seats down to 70.

The second best way that you can get doctors to work in rural environments is to ensure that there are professionals to work at their sides. What did they do, Mr. Speaker? Fired 1,000 nurses and drove another 573 out of the system.

The third way you can recruit doctors is by building great facilities. What did they do when times got tough? They decided to stop all building, including in rural Manitoba.

Family Doctors Availability (Neepawa)

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I have had a family doctor all my life. Now, in the last seven months, I've been without a family doctor.

The doctors in surrounding communities around the towns of Neepawa, Minnedosa, Gladstone are taking no new patients. The closest walk-in clinic is 80 kilometres away.

When may I and many others residents of Neepawa and area reasonably expect to once again have access to a family doctor in the Neepawa area?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Acting Minister of Health): I can say to the member opposite, and I say this quite sincerely, that we have had a discussion outside of the Chamber concerning his personal circumstances with connection with a physician. We want to ensure that we connect him and other individuals in the Neepawa area with a family physician.

We do have an enhanced family doctor connection line, but, again, as I've said to the member in the past, I'm very happy to work with him, with the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby), one on one to ensure that he gets the care that he needs when he needs it.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Week of the Early Childhood Educator

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): We all know that children benefit from the strong foundation that comes with early childhood education. These services support families and provide children with the right start to be successful later in life. But what about the people who make all of this possible? We give them a huge responsibility, and each day, they pour their heart and soul into their jobs, into building better lives for our children.

This week, Manitobans are celebrating the Week of the Early Childhood Educator. It is an opportunity to recognize the contribution ECEs make to our province and to the everyday lives of our children and families.

In St. James, children's centres are the heart of our community. The wonderful staff at Assiniboine Children's Centre, Discovery Children's Centre, Horizons Children's Centre, Linwood Child Care and Strathmillan Children's Centre are so devoted to what they do. They fill our children's lives with care, guidance, understanding and discovery on a daily basis.

If you were to visit a child-care centre this week, it would become immediately clear how important ECEs are to the community. Families and centre board members often take this opportunity to express their gratitude. I've spotted stacks of delicious baked goods, boxes of chocolates and even flowers being delivered for centre staff. It is a clear sign of just how valued ECEs are. This is well-deserved, and it brings me great pleasure, both as a parent and a legislator, to see ECEs recognized for their work.

Through the child-care consultations, Mr. Speaker, I discovered just how much ECEs love what they do. Their passion and commitment to caring for young children, the creativity with which they approach curriculum development and project planning and the fun that they have with the children in their care was evident to me at every meeting.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Manitoba's early childhood educators for their fantastic work. Thank you very much.

Gas Prices in Manitoba

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, like many Manitobans, I found myself recently filling my gas tank and being shocked at the cost. One of my constituents noted that gas prices were brutal. When she used that phrase, brutal, I thought to myself, somebody else has used that very word to describe gas prices—somebody in political office who has made a career of glib comments followed by a flip and a flop. Yes, our very own Premier (Mr. Selinger) on CJOB just two years ago, when asked what he thought about gas jumping to around \$1.26 a litre said, quote: Brutal. We're going to write a letter to the federal government. End quote.

But, Mr. Speaker, in a classic example of the NDP say-one-thing-do-another, the Premier, mere weeks after his mock outrage, turned around and raised the provincial gas tax by over 20 per cent or \$70 million per year.

But, in the interest of fairness, I thought we could all collectively hop into the Premier's

DeLorean, travel back to 1999 and see what the NDP, while in opposition, said that—what they would do about high gas prices should they form government.

Here, from Hansard, is that platform. Number 1: The NDP promised tough monitoring and the regulation of fuel prices, as, quote, it is fairly clear to people that there is 'conclusion' going on with gas companies, end quote. Number 2: The NDP promised to develop, quote, some sort of comprehensive attack on the fuel-price question, end quote. Number 3: The NDP promised that the heads of Canada's gas and oil companies would attend public hearings at the Manitoba Legislature to justify the then 55-cent-per-litre cost of gasoline. And No. 4, Mr. Speaker, the granddaddy of them all, which, in light of the MLA for St. Norbert's PMR this morning railing—pardon the pun—against OmniTRAX, the NDP promised to work with OmniTRAX, as, quote: There is probably only one answer for Manitobans. In the Port of Churchill, there are gasoline storage tanks. It is certainly technically feasible to bring in a tanker of gas to Churchill in the tanker, and you can bring in gas and basically flood the North with gasoline and bring it down south. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, like yourself, I remain patiently waiting.

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Yesterday I gathered with workers, students, community members, union representatives and MLAs of all parties to commemorate those who were killed or suffered an injury as part of their work. The national workers' day of mourning is a time when we come together to remember how important it is that everyone has a safe workplace. It also calls to mind our commitment to protect all Manitobans from workplace tragedies.

In Flin Flon and many communities in my constituency, there are dozens of unions that have come together with industry to protect the rights and safety of their members. Thanks to the hard work of these unions, provincial safety regulations and the flexibility of industry, I know workers in my community benefit from some of the strongest workplace safety legislation in the country.

I'm incredibly proud to say our government is dedicated to making Manitoba the safest place to work in North America. Our robust workplace safety

laws mean workers have the ability to say no to unsafe work without penalty and that workplaces throughout the province are filled with safe and healthy Manitobans.

The theme of this year's Day of Mourning was Visions of Tomorrow. High school students come together to envision what we would call a truly safe workplace. Ten students from Tec Voc spoke of their vision for the future of workplace safety, the realities of workplace safety and what needs to be done to achieve this goal.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank SAFE Workers of Tomorrow, who organized the Day of Mourning leaders' walk, and SAFE Work Manitoba, which works tirelessly to protect the safety of Manitobans.

One death or injury is too many. Everyone deserves to return home safe after their workday is done, and in Manitoba, we're making that a reality.

Thank you.

*(14:40)

Funshine Day Care Centre

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to honour and commend the fundraising team of the Funshine Day Care Centre in Virden, Manitoba.

Funshine Day Care Centre Inc. is a non-profit charitable organization offering—opened their doors—opened the doors on April 1st, 1999, offering 35 licensed daycare spaces. Funshine is licensed daycare facility offering quality childcare from ages 12 weeks to six years of age in the town of Virden.

On 2011, Funshine Day Care started a preschool program offering—successful launch by expanding their program to include and before-and-after school programs, as well as a full-time care during the summer months. The past Thursday, Mr. Speaker, Funshine officially launched its expansion project which—with the committee had over 50 local residents in attendance. They professionally produced architectural drawings and fundraising brochures.

Funshine Day Care expansion is very much needed in our local area. Virden and area has over 150 children on the waiting list representing 115 families. With Virden's growing economy there are many individuals who would like full-time work but many employers also need full-time employees

but without daycare spaces many of these individuals cannot fill those vacant positions. Daycare spaces are desperately needed in the area.

Thanks to the partnership of the land with the Fort La Bosse School Division, on December 2012, planning design was started. For the proposed new daycare will include a 5,400-square-foot facility, 38 preschool spaces, 12 infant spaces, 15 school-age spaces, creativity centre, natural light for every room and fully equipped kitchen. This is going to be a major building project in my constituency with the cost of the building being over \$1.6 million with furniture and equipment over \$100,000.

As to date, the committee has raised over \$175,000. This group has worked very hard over the last three years raising—much of their money was raised by organizing two nights of Christmas parties for small- and medium-size companies called get jingled. The Funshine Day Care provides a great meal and entertainment that evening and this happens the first week in December for the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I again would like to take this time to congratulate the Funshine Day Care Centre for their hard work to provide much needed daycare spaces in my community.

Citizens Helping All Nations Grow Equally (CHANGE)

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I would like to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to a group of young men and women from Minnedosa Collegiate that are making an impact on their own community, as well as in Ethiopia, the Philippines and Haiti.

The C-H-A-N-G-E, the CHANGE, as is indicated, Citizens Helping All Nations Grow Equally, group has been active since 2007 and has raised more than \$75,000 for projects such as constructing a school in Ethiopia and hurricane relief in the Philippines. This year, their focus has been on the Blanco's children project in Haiti, where they are sponsoring 35 orphan children. The group has also made an impact locally. The students volunteer for a variety of community organizations such as the Minnedosa palliative care, Christmas Cheer Board, the Minnedosa Lions Club and the Minnedosa food bank.

On March 16th, hosted—they hosted their 2014 benefit. The event featured a variety of speakers that shed light on the group's activities this

year, as well as live and silent auctions and refreshments. All of the profits from this year's benefit will go to Blanco's children. Additionally, there has been a competitiveness—competition between each of the homerooms at MCI to see which school—classroom can raise the most money.

The children that benefit from the efforts of the Blanco children have all experienced extreme poverty, hunger and a lack of access to school or health care. Many children that are born of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic are refused birth certificates and therefore have no legal status as citizens of either the Dominican Republic or Haiti. Recent changes in Dominican law now permit Haitian children to attend public school through to grade 8, but for many this is impossible as students are required to buy uniforms, school supplies and pay subscription fees.

Mr. Speaker, this outstanding group of students was recently recognized with the Marquis Global Citizenship Award from the Marquis Project. The annual award recognizes a person or a group for an outstanding voluntary contribution to promoting an understanding of development issues and for contributing in an outstanding way to global citizenship by their involvement in international issues.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the House to join me in commending this group of students on their exemplary work and ask permission to have the names of the students added to Hansard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to include the names in today's proceedings? *[Agreed]*

CHANGE group members in the 2013-2014 school year: Sarah Brown, Fiona Cavilli, Alex Enns, Levi Gregorash, Seth Gregorash, Amy Kreshewki, Madison Kuchner, Ryan McLenehan, Shay McLenehan, Elyse Peckover, Emilio Perez, Jordan Randall, Kirstin Surovy, Sara Taylor, Linnae Topham, Julia Tomlinson, Daniel Vasquez and Josh Woychyshyn.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

JUSTICE

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

As previously agreed, questions for the department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just catching up with some items from last day.

First of all, institutional rate of capacity, I'll read through this very quickly. First of all, in the youth side: Agassiz Youth Centre, 110 youth in custody as of this morning; the youth unit at Brandon Correctional Centre, one youth in custody; Dauphin youth unit, three; Manitoba Youth Centre, 138; and The Pas youth unit, seven, for a youth total of 259 individuals.

On the adult side: at Brandon Correctional Centre, 332; Dauphin Correctional Centre, 80; Headingley Correctional Centre, 752; Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, 527; The Pas Correctional Centre, 127; the Women's Correctional Centre, 183; the Women's Correctional Centre in the federal units, or annex, or whatever we want to call them, 16; and the Winnipeg Remand Centre, 352, for a total adult population of 2,369.

And then there was a good discussion last day about section 810, orders and other vehicles available to try and supervise individuals coming out of prisons and jails, and the member had some questions about the number of people being supervised. We had a little chat about that, and I do have some additional information I think is useful.

Both the dangerous offender designations and long-term supervision orders are supervised by the federal parole system so Manitoba Corrections would not be involved in supervising these orders. Manitoba Corrections is involved in the supervision

of section 810.1 and 810.2 designations, and I'll just provide a brief description of the two types of orders this could be. Let me just make sure I've got this right. In 1993, section 810.1 of the Criminal Code came into effect targeting offenders who, police believe, pose a risk to commit a sexual offence against someone under the age of 14 years. If such an order is granted—it must be asked for and granted—the offender is often restricted from, for example, attending areas where children are known to be present, along with other supervisory conditions. In 1997, a federal bill came into effect creating a new form of peace bond, section 810.2, which focused on offenders believed to pose a serious likelihood to commit violent or personal injury.

Most of the applications are initiated by the Correctional Service of Canada when an offender is soon to be released from custody. What happens in that case is the Manitoba integrated high-risk police sex offender unit reviews the referral and proceeds with an application to the court. I'm told the peace bond can have a duration of up to two years, but it is subject to renewal. In these cases it is Manitoba Adult Probation Services who supervise these offenders. Violations of orders of this type can result in imprisonment of up to a further two years. It frequently results in the court for ordering the offender to be under the supervision of a probation order with similar additional conditions of the original section 810.1 or 810.2 peace bond.

* (15:00)

Mr. Chair, the snapshot, as of today, the Corrections Offender Management System indicates that community Corrections is supervising 36 cases that came to us as an 810.1 or 810.2 order. Of these, 20 cases are now under a probation order due to these individuals having breached the conditions of their 810 orders and 16 cases would be considered, appear, 810.1 or 810.2 orders. In other words, they have not breached. And, additionally, there are seven 810.1 or 810.2 orders which are currently under remand sentence—remand status or they've been sentenced to custody as a result of having breached their orders.

There was a request for some historical data. I'm not able to provide that today. It will require some additional time to compile that.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): The minister and his staff are compiling that information. Can—you provided the current populations for the different institutions. Could you provide the rated capacity for

each of them as well? It might be the same as what we've gotten in the recent past, but just in case it changed.

Mr. Swan: Well, hopefully, as quickly as with the in-house population: Agassiz Youth Centre, 128; Manitoba Youth Centre, 150. The document I have in front of me does not have the rating for the three youth units, but we will get that to the member, so youth-centre-rated beds, 278, not including those three youth units.

With the adult population: Brandon Correctional Centre, 252; Dauphin Correctional Centre, 61; Headingley Correctional Centre, 549; Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, 524; The Pas Correctional Centre, 114; The Women's Correctional Centre, 196. The federal units at the Women's Correctional Centre, 25; and the Winnipeg Remand Centre, 289; for a total adult-rated capacity of 2,010.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the minister for that response.

When we left off yesterday there was questions around intermittent or weekend sentences, and the minister had described how individuals who have a weekend sentence report to the Remand Centre, I believe, and then, if I'm correct in understanding, do they always report to the Remand Centre and then, if there's not room in those facilities, they go to other options as those run by the John Howard Society, or are they told at some point early on that they'll always be serving at a different location and they should just report there directly?

Mr. Swan: Thanks. I think this is where we were where the lights didn't go out but the sound went out yesterday afternoon.

Currently, all offenders who are ordered to serve an intermittent sentence that live in or close to the city of Winnipeg report on their first occasion to the Winnipeg Remand Centre—for their first day of sentence and thereafter, and depending on the particular arrangements, offenders now report to either Headingley Correctional Centre or the Native Clan Organization facility at Regina House on Mayfair Avenue or at the new Native Clan facility located on McGregor Street.

Mr. Goertzen: A couple of questions related to the Auditor General's report. I—and I promise to provide my friend from River Heights—I promised him yesterday to give him some time and then the mics went out and I thought that might have been it for his, but he's going to hold me to actual real time, so I'll provide that to him in a couple of minutes. I just—

on the Auditor General's report, on page 248 of the section that deals with the adult offenders in Manitoba: it talks about the serious incident security events at our correctional facilities. Can the minister give a description of what a serious incident security event is defined as?

* (15:10)

Mr. Swan: Well, these incidents can arise in a number of different ways. The general way that they're counted in the correctional system is they're considered to be code calls. And I guess the best way to describe that is whenever an officer believes that they need assistance, for whatever reason, that would be counted as a code call and that would be counted as an incident. In the most serious cases—that can be when a correctional officer believes that he or she needs assistance, even if they're not in danger, if they believe that there's a fight or there's been a threat that's been issued from one inmate to another, it can be those. Thankfully, many fewer situations where an officer needs assistance and they have concern about the safety of themselves or another officer. These code calls can also include medical issues and medical emergencies. When an officer is aware that an inmate is in need of assistance, that is also a code call that gets logged as one of these incidents.

So there can be a wide range of different circumstances that are included in the code calls, which then were included in the Auditor General's report as incidents.

Mr. Goertzen: How many serious incidents, security events, were there in 2013?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I don't have that information with me but we can undertake to provide that. And that's for fiscal year 2013-2014?

Mr. Goertzen: Now looking at the Auditor General's data, it seems that she probably didn't do it by fiscal year; it looked like she did it by calendar year, I think. But I'll take what you have, so if it's by the calendar year or if you have it by the fiscal year that would go into 2014, that would be fine.

The other thing the Auditor General talks about is the amount of overtime that is paid to staff FTs within the correctional centres as being, on average, \$6,034 for fiscal year-end 2012.

Are there statistics on how much the average overtime is paid to the FTEs within our correctional centres up to fiscal year ending 2013?

Mr. Swan: Certainly, the cost of overtime is a concern and it is something that is managed. I think

it's fair to say we aren't happy with some of the past performance of the amount of overtime that's been there. At the same time, we believe and we take very seriously the need to properly staff correctional facilities, so we make sure that there are people there, even if it requires paying overtime.

One of the challenges that I think you can see, if you look at the budget documents, is that there has been an increase over the past four years of a great deal of positions within Corrections. It is the case that there have been challenges in making sure that we're able to staff up, as we've been adding capacity over the past couple of years. And, again, because we don't take safety lightly, we make sure that those facilities are staffed.

There are many variables in how much overtime is required. Obviously, population has been a major driver of it in the past. I'm pleased to say that in the past year and a half, the pressures have eased somewhat. The counts are down over the past 18 months, which helps us. The numbers of positions in Corrections have accordingly not increased greatly over the past two years, which has allowed us to stabilize numbers but there continue to be pressures.

We know that there continues to be turnover. There are individuals who may leave Corrections to take on other challenges. Some of them move to the federal system. Some move to other forms of law enforcement, and we wish those individuals well but that can create challenges. We have been doing our best to improve the quantity and the quality of our staff training and when training is going on, that does mean we have overtime costs that we need to bear because we won't leave units understaffed. And, of course, we know that from time to time correctional officers have illness and injuries, and we want to make sure that, again, those units are staffed.

So I think the number that was set out by the Auditor General is a concern. I am pleased that I think that is a number that's well back in the rear-view mirror now as we continue to move along. We know we'll continue to have overtime costs, but I know that my officials are working very carefully and very hard to reduce those overtime costs.

Mr. Goertzen: But the minister didn't answer the question. So the question was: In the Auditor's report in 2012, at the end of the fiscal year, the average overtime cost was \$6,034. What was it at the—for the fiscal year ending 2013?

Mr. Swan: Yes, the books are really just closing on the current fiscal year, so I don't have that

information with me, but I will provide that to the member once it becomes available.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure how the minister could say how things were so much better if he hasn't seen the numbers yet, but rather than get into a dispute on that, I'll—I promised my friend from River Heights his time and I will reluctantly cede the floor—not reluctant because of the questions he'll ask but because of the short amount of time that's left. But I'm sure he'll use it wisely.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Thank you to the MLA for Steinbach.

And my first question has to do with the Drug Treatment Court. There has been uncertainty. I have heard that the uncertainty has created a situation where there may not be new people be able to taken in to the drug treatment court. So let me ask the minister what the current situation is.

Mr. Swan: I thank the member for the question. The Winnipeg Drug Treatment Court has been, I think, a very successful program. It's been in operation for several years now and, I think, as the member's aware, it has changed lives. And we know that the re-offence rate for individuals who actually get into and then complete the drug treatment court program is very low. The re-offence rate last I saw was in the range of, I think, between 14 and 16 per cent.

*(15:20)

One of the challenges—we are grateful for the federal government coming forward, we think that's a fair partnership for them to provide some assistance with that. The federal government comes up with some support in excess of \$600,000 a year. The Province provides support by having a judge in place, by having the court officials as well as a lot of the background supports to help people, whether it's housing issues, whether it's mental health issues coexisting with their addictions, and, of course, their addictions issues.

Unfortunately, it has been a challenge getting the federal government to give us the long-term commitments that I think everybody involved with the Winnipeg Drug Treatment Court would like. So, indeed, I received a letter from the chief judge of the Provincial Court of Manitoba saying that the federal funding is not guaranteed beyond March 31st, 2015, and given the length of time that people are in the program, which is often 12 months, 15 months even 18 months, that there's a concern that, unless some further notice is received, that there will be a point at

which they'll stop intaking individuals into the program.

I'm certainly very concerned about that and I've signed a letter, and I believe it's already gone to Minister MacKay, to ask the federal government to continue to commit to the Drug Treatment Court. We are certainly going to continue the partnership, but we would like to hear from the federal government. It is a little bit frustrating because we and the other provinces where there are drug treatment courts of this type have uniformly shared our successes. I know that other provinces that don't have a drug treatment court of this kind have wanted it. I've mused publicly, as the member has—is well aware, that I'd love to see it expand to Brandon, maybe a place in the North like Thompson but we've been unable to do that at this point.

One of the frustrations, of course, is that Bill C-10 includes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offences. We believe that for those who are involved in drug trafficking or drug cultivation or manufacturing for their own greed, tough sentences are entirely appropriate because of the damage that drugs can do. We also believe that there is appropriate diversion for individuals who become engaged in illegal activities to satisfy their own addictions. Bill C-10 specifically allows for diversion and the avoidance of mandatory minimum sentences if there is an approved drug treatment court in existence, which is one of the reasons why we don't just believe the federal government should give us more satisfaction and longer term support; it's why we think that we should work with them to expand drug treatment courts not just in Manitoba but across Canada. It is a concern, certainly.

Mr. Gerrard: The—in the last year, it's my understanding, and, I think, this year, that the money for the Drug Treatment Court flows not through the Province but through the alcohol—the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. And would the Premier—or the minister confirm that and indicate whether, in fact, that's the case and whether, you know, why is that, why does it not flow through the Province.

Mr. Swan: Yes, it's a successful partnership in Manitoba. The member's right. The federal funding actually goes directly to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. They use that money to provide the treatment services. The government of Manitoba, through Manitoba Justice, provides the legal and judicial services, and, as I say, there may be other services that are provincially funded in the community that help those individuals.

It's been a partnership that reflects, I think, the level of co-operation in Manitoba between government and agencies and certainly the courts. And, again, it's a partnership that we want to not just preserve but we want to continue to expand.

Mr. Gerrard: Would there—I ask the minister: Would there be a major difficulty in, since the Drug Treatment Court is a creature, as I understand it, of the Province and the responsibility of the Province, for that money to go through the Province?

Mr. Swan: Again, it's been a very successful partnership, so we're fine with the money flowing from the federal government to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. I know that there have been—there's been some work done to deal with the successes of the program. I believe the federal government—I suppose I can't speak for the federal government, but I'm not aware of any concerns they have with the use, the proper use, that AFM is making of that money. We're certainly happy to partner with the AFM and use our resources to make sure that the court succeeds.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has spoken rather glowingly of the success of the Drug Treatment Court. The minister has spoken of his wish to have drug treatment courts in, I think, Brandon and Thompson—could have been elsewhere as well. But my understanding is that the Drug Treatment Court—its cost is relatively small in the overall Department of Justice budget and the savings are quite large; they're probably significantly larger than the costs. And so I'm curious as to why the minister is not—and his government is not—proceeding with setting up the courts in Brandon and Thompson.

Mr. Swan: Well, we do have a partnership with the federal government on public safety. And, look—we can look at drug offences alone. Drug offences are actually not prosecuted by the provincial Prosecution Services. Drug cases in Canada are prosecuted by federal prosecutors, which is why I know that our federal Crown attorneys are very engaged in the program and very supportive.

As well, many of the individuals who are referred into the drug treatment program—they may have serious, serious drug offences against them in addition to, in many cases, other offences. Some of these are individuals who, if convicted, will be going not just to a provincial facility; they will be going to a federal penitentiary to serve time.

As well, as I've mentioned, the federal government has brought in Bill C-10. Again, we favour many provisions of that law. We do believe that those who, for their own greed, prey upon others in our society should have a serious consequence. We do believe that it is appropriate to look for ways to divert other individuals if they're going to seek appropriate treatment. Again, the federal government has specifically provided for these kind of courts as being an off-ramp, if you will, to some of the minimum sentences.

I've also—I'm also aware the previous minister, Minister Nicholson, spoke many times very favourably about the successes of these types of courts. I know that Minister MacKay as a former Crown attorney is also well aware of these benefits.

These are areas where we want to continue expanding the partnership, and, frankly, we want the federal government to be an equal partner, not just in bringing in laws but an equal partner when it comes to enforcing them and making sure that we're getting the best outcomes, one of which, of course, is a success rate of some 85 per cent for people who graduate from the drug treatment program.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the aspects of the Drug Treatment Court as it's been running, integrated within the efforts, has been the housing component. And, clearly, for many of the individuals who would be seen at the Drug Treatment Court, housing would be a prerequisite in order to be able to be followed and be treated in the court. And yet my understanding is that the housing component has now ended. Is that correct?

* (15:30)

Mr. Swan: I understand there was a small and distinct two-year program that was funded by the federal government to assist some individuals with transitional housing. I understand there was a 90-day limitation on the period of time. That funding from the federal government has now ended and it's not being replaced.

Having said that, I don't think—there are other places where federal funding cuts are a subject of criticism, loud criticism where appropriate. We actually think that among the levels of government in the AFM we can do better.

I understand that the AFM has actually taken on more responsibility for trying to assist people with finding appropriate housing, of course those

individuals have access to Manitoba Housing and AFM would also help them with other alternatives.

So, Mr. Chair, the member's correct, there was a housing component; that was federal money, it was short-term money. That period has now come to an end and I think everybody is prepared to move on and continue trying to get the best results we can.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the—one of the cases which is—has been looked at federally is a case of Deveryn Ross from almost 20 years ago and there has been a recent ruling on that case which—and I'm wondering whether the Minister of Justice will do what was done in the Driskell case and ask for this to be sent back to the Province to now look after.

Mr. Swan: Yes, so I am aware of the case, and I think it's important to be aware that this was an application under section 696 of the Criminal Code of Canada, and that allows any individual who wants to question their conviction to make an application to the federal Minister of Justice, and in Mr. Ross's case that was done. The federal Minister of Justice denied the relief that was being sought and that case was then taken to the federal court. Recently, the federal court of Canada judge issued a decision saying that he was going to allow Mr. Ross to retry, I suppose, to take that application back to the federal Minister of Justice. That case has recently come down. I'm advised that the appeal period continues to run. I don't know what the federal government will do. If the federal government does not appeal, then Mr. Ross will be entitled to take his case back to the federal Minister of Justice. If the case is appealed, then, I suppose, the Federal Court of Appeal will have to make a decision on whether a further application to the federal Minister of Justice is allowed or not.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has been involved in providing, as I understand it, through his department, legal services where other ministers are being taken to court and—for example, over the case of the Jockey Club. And on page, you know, 51 there is a line here which is the civil—this is of the Justice Estimates of the Civil Legal Services. Is that where such costs would be listed or would they be listed elsewhere?

Mr. Swan: Yes, let me just give a little bit of history. I guess, about 20 years ago or more, Civil Legal Services were moved into a special operating agency. My understanding is that before that time government lawyers, if I can use that term, would simply do work for various government departments without recovery. Back in the 90s—and I know the

members are chuckling. This is not a—this—there will be other days for political statements; this isn't one of them. The government of the day decided to set up a special operating agency which then required departments to pay for the cost of their legal counsel. So what would happen is that if a particular department needed advice or needed either to bring an action or to defend an action, they would then hire, retain, Civil Legal Services to do the work for them. In this budget we're actually bringing Civil Legal Services out of a special operating agency back into the department, although they will continue to provide advice to various departments and they will continue to effectively bill departments for the legal expertise they provide.

So I think the member is looking at page 51 of the Estimates book. You will see that there is an amount set out for salaries and some other expenditures. You will see underneath the recovery from other appropriations, meaning the total subappropriation is zero, in other words, Civil Legal Services is intended to operate and they're intended to operate on a break-even level with their revenue being derived from the advice they provide to government departments.

Mr. Gerrard: And of the recovery, the \$8,681,000, what proportion of that would be in defending the government from lawsuits or the ministers from lawsuits or to addressing instances where the government is taken to court?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I'm not really in a position to speculate over where the anticipated recovery from various departments will come from in the upcoming year.

* (15:40)

Mr. Gerrard: I note that with respect to one of the bills that has been dealt with, Bill 17, which is The Consumer Protection and Amendment and Business Practices Amendment Act—I know this is the responsibility of another minister—but this is dealing with the justice procedure in terms of this has been, I understand, proclaimed, but it is not listed under Manitoba laws. And I'm just wondering, you know, what happens when a bill is proclaimed but not listed under Manitoba laws, what's—what the bill status is.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'll try to help out the member, but can you give a little bit more information on which bill this is and when you say it was proclaimed and enforced?

Mr. Gerrard: Bill 17, the Second Session of the 40th Legislature of Manitoba, The Consumer Protection Amendment and Business Practices Amendment Act dealing with motor vehicle advertising and other information disclosure or another amendment.

Mr. Swan: We'll take a look at that situation and get an answer for the member.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, just in terms of government, has Prosecution Services—the government provides, you know, assistance to defendants who can't—don't have sufficient financial capacity. What proportion of the cases would involve defence lawyers who are with Legal Aid?

Mr. Swan: Well, it's—there's a number of ways to answer the question. Maybe I—because I think the member is already looking at it, I turned to page 49 in the Estimates book. Legal Aid Manitoba is—I suppose we deliver hybrid services for legal aid. There are staff lawyers at Legal Aid Manitoba. There's also private lawyers who agree to take Legal Aid certificates. And, as you'll see, the estimate for the upcoming year is that professional and technical salaries will be about \$9.5 million, as well as some amount for managerial administrative support and employee benefits.

You will also see under Other Expenditures, it's estimated there'll be just a shade more than \$12 million being paid out in fees to the private bar. It won't necessarily be a direct correlation between the number of cases. Every case is not equal. Some cases are more complex and would result in a higher level of fees. But, generally speaking, we have a healthy balance between Legal Aid lawyers, staff lawyers and lawyers who take on certificates. So I hope that's helpful.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister, and if he can arrive at a number of proportion that—of cases which involve Legal Aid and let me know at some point, that would be very helpful.

Meanwhile, I'm turning this back to the MLA for Steinbach, who, I think, is eagerly waiting to take over the floor again, so thank you.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for River Heights. He was a spot on, half an hour. I—not that I didn't—I always trust Liberals—not that I didn't trust him, but I was expecting it might go a little bit longer than that. *[interjection]* Just a few more questions, and then I reluctantly cede the floor to the—to others.

The question regarding Civil Legal Services, is the department expecting the lawsuit on the PST, which I understand is going to court on June 4th, is that being dealt with in-house, or have the—is it within Civil Legal Services, or have those lawyers been hired externally?

Mr. Swan: To date, I can advise that our Constitutional Law branch has taken primary oversight for dealing with this matter and for providing legal advice to date.

Mr. Goertzen: Does the minister have any numbers in terms of what this has cost so far, in terms of defending this matter to date and if there is—what the expectations of the costs might be to bring the matter to conclusion?

Mr. Swan: No, I'm not able to provide that. What I can say is that the good folks over in the Constitutional Law branch, that is one area that does not bill separately for its services, so they are providing their advice among many other things; for example, their advice on trying to get the Senate abolished, their advice on many other, we think, important matters. This is one of the other ones that they're working on.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'm not sure what success they're going to have on getting the Senate abolished, given the recent court decision, nor do I know what success you're going have on June 4th. But I won't be there to give them advice on either event.

The other questions relate to the Auditor General's report. Now, I'll have a lot more, I suppose, in concurrence, when we get to that portion with the Attorney General, but in concluding some of the questions today, the Auditor General, on page 257 of the report, indicates that by her analysis the shortfall in beds within our correctional system in 2019-2020 would cost the Province about \$600 million to see us go to the capacity that's expected by that date. Has the department done an analysis? Do they believe that that figure of \$600 million is correct?

* (15:50)

Mr. Swan: The Auditor General's comment is that it could cost as much as \$600 million. I think the key thing to notice is that there's a lot of different variables that go in to jail population. And, again, since the Auditor General gathered the information to begin preparing the report we've actually seen a relatively different result in our correctional system. The number of folks in our provincial jails is actually down over 100 in just the past 18 months, which is

positive, as long as we're satisfied that we're getting better outcomes.

As I know we've talked in the past, there's many factors that can put pressures on the system. There's many things that can relieve the pressures on the system. We believe that the decision of the federal government to end the two-for-one credit for time spent in custody on remand was the right thing to do. We believe that, overall, that will result—as long as other resources are there—that will result in cases moving ahead more quickly. We also believe that will result in more individuals being sentenced not to provincial correctional facilities, but to federal prisons.

We know that certain laws will put more pressure on the system. Some of the elements of Bill C-10 and other bills, we're not complaining about that. Because when people hurt children, when people are involved in serious drug offences, when people decide to use guns in committing crimes, when people decide to be involved in violence as a member of a gang we believe there needs to be an appropriate result. At the same time, we want to do what we can on others to come up with better outcomes.

So one of the things that I know we've talked about in the past and will be happy to talk about again is ways we can move cases through the system more quickly.

As the member knows, we've got Irene Hamilton, who is now working on the innovation side to see what we can do to increase the velocity of cases moving through the system. We also are very happy with things like the Mental Health Court and the Drug Treatment Court to try to divert appropriate cases out of the system. We continue to invest in bail supervision programs and we hope to expand the availability of bail supervision programs to try and bend that arc and have fewer people going into the system.

On the other hand, we've done some things which put pressure on the system. Our Warrant Enforcement Unit is extremely successful. As the member knows, it's a joint operation of the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP funded by the provincial government. That puts some short-term pressure on the correctional facilities, but we know that if these are individuals who are not following the law, who aren't responding to warrants, we want them to deal with it. And if that results in them spending time in jail, so be it.

So there's a lot of factors that work in various ways. As the member knows, last week I introduced The Restorative Justice Act to increase the availability of restorative justice practices in appropriate cases, which can impact on the numbers. I'm hopeful that we'll be able to see similar results in our correctional facilities. There's no guarantee that's the case, though. We know there is still a gap, and we need to continue working to make sure we've got not just capacity but the right kind of capacity.

Mr. Goertzen: So has the department done any analysis on that figure of \$600 million, if they believe that that is in the ballpark of what's the expectation is for—to meet the capacity in the time range that the Auditor General set out?

Mr. Swan: Well, it's—again, it's a challenge. And in the Auditor General's report, she speaks about how other jurisdictions have spent a lot more time and a lot more money than Manitoba on trying to predict the future without, really, any greater success.

If we are able to continue the kind of results that we've seen over the past 18 months, which has been—and I heard Councillor Scott Fielding speaking just the other—just today about the reductions in crime in Winnipeg. If we're able to continue with those kinds of positive results, if we move cases through the system more quickly, if we continue to invest in bail supervision and diversions, and if we continue for those offenders who are truly violent and who commit serious crimes in moving them through the system more quickly, that is going to assist us in avoiding some of the capital costs.

Having said that, we know that the Headingley Correctional Centre is an old facility. Even if I could snap my fingers tomorrow and bring our entire system down to rated capacity, I think there is an acceptance by everybody, including, most importantly, the individuals that work in our correctional system, that Headingley Correctional Centre—the centre blocks are no longer best practice for trying to get positive results for people in our correctional facilities, and they will need to look at that at some point in the future.

Mr. Goertzen: And I recognize the need to move people through the system more quickly for a lot of different reasons. That's—you know, it's—I think that's part of Justice, that's part of making the system run better. I think the government ran on that in 2011 with their promise for weekend courts which lasted barely a weekend and then went away. So I know that the minister understands the challenges and it's

been difficult for him to undertake initiatives to meet those challenges.

The Auditor General, on page 262 of the report, talks about how, in looking at a sample of 60 offender files, only 20 per cent had the required number of monthly meetings with their designated officer. Why was there such a lapse, right, in terms of the number of meetings that were required for the offenders and their appropriate risk rating?

Mr. Swan: I just—I want to start with sort of a throwaway comment by the member about weekend courts—the weekend bail court. You know, we did, in good faith, put the resources in place to allow that to happen at the request of the court on the understanding that—or the hope that there would be more use of the court. It turned out, after some time, that the numbers weren't there, and the court came to us and said that they thought that the resources we put in could be better used elsewhere. So I don't know if it was the member's opinion that we should still be running and using court resources for a couple of offenders coming through every weekend, or if he would agree that it made more sense to reallocate those resources where they can be used to the greatest benefit of the system.

*(16:00)

In terms of the Auditor General's concerns about the level of supervision, I think it's really helpful to look at the big picture. We accept fully the Auditor General's concerns that there have been challenges for workload. Those challenges haven't been equal everywhere in the province. Winnipeg has, generally speaking, for a number of reasons, had the best results. There have been some real challenges in some of our regional areas, and, at the outset, I can say that the department is going to continue to work on the items which have been raised by the auditor and make sure that we continue to improve our processes by strengthening quality management.

Now workload analysis has commenced. I expect that it'll be completed in the next month or two and the analysis is going to be very broad. It's going to include a review of probation officer caseloads. It's going to look at risk level by caseload and also urban versus rural caseloads.

The member's aware that not every caseload is created equal. Mr. Chair, we expect some of our probation officers to take on a more difficult caseload because of the nature of the offenders and the offences that they've committed.

There's other factors that contribute to workload including contact requirements, pre-sentence report preparation, supervision of conditional sentences, program delivery training, especially it's in travel. We're going to make sure we take all of that into account in making sure that, first of all, before we do anything else, we use our staff most effectively.

I would expect that the result of that workload analysis is going to be a rebalancing of some caseloads, and it's going to result in the shifting of some resources from some subject areas to others. We're also going to take a look at how we do things—I should say we are looking at how we do things in the regions to determine using the existing resources, how we get the most out of it.

So I know that there's meetings undergoing—under way with area directors and the views of those directors and of employees out in the field are very important as we keep going. So we will be working on making sure that we use our existing probation officers to the best benefit of public safety.

Mr. Goertzen: Actually, my comment wasn't really a throwaway comment. I—whether it's the weekend in court which the government promised in election to try to speed up the court system and then it didn't work; whether it's the electronic monitoring which they promised to expand during the election to other offenders and now we find out there's only been one offender other than a car thief who's actually had it. I just expect the government or any political party, when they're running on something, that they would do a little research beforehand. So it's not as though the court said, let's have a weekend court, then it didn't work out so they decided not to do it; this is something that you ran on and promised Manitobans that it would speed up the court system. So my expectation is that you know what you're running on and that you actually do some research prior to making promises to Manitobans.

But I digress, Mr. Chairperson. The question on the issue of 20 per cent of the meetings actually happening for those offenders ties into another issue the Auditor General raised on page 264 in terms of the monitoring by telephone.

Now we've had this discussion in the past before about the effectiveness of monitoring individuals and their orders by virtue—or by way of telephone, particularly in a day where a lot of people don't have land lines and the court may or may not order an individual to have a land line, but the government's been pretty clear in saying they think this is an

effective way to monitor individuals. They've said that in the past in past Estimates process. But the auditor discovered in looking at her files that where the supervision was supposed to be done by telephone, it took on average 44 days to actually request the telephone monitoring and so almost two months had lapsed before the monitoring actually began by telephone. Is that something that's been addressed and has that been corrected since the Auditor General's report?

Mr. Swan: Okay, I know the member always wants to get the last word in, but I'm not going to quite give him that satisfaction. I am a little troubled by his view on the court system.

Manitoba Justice, across the system, is working very hard to find ways to improve the delivery of justice, to find better ways to get better outcomes, and, frankly, not every one of those attempts is going to result the way that we would like.

We promised to introduce weekend courts; that was done. Judges came back to us and said, you know, we're not getting the take-up of people, and we decided to use those additional resources elsewhere.

I don't know if the member's view is that you just continue doing the same thing and not allocating the resources in the best possible way; we don't think that's the case. And I know I've got great staff in the department who are going to keep coming up with ideas. A lot of them are going to be very successful; some of them may not be as successful for matters beyond our control. But I think it's really important to continue to get better results.

The electronic monitoring pilot project, we said we would expand it; it has been expanded. The member knows from yesterday that we have other individuals in the system for whom electronic monitoring might be appropriate. I leave it to my independent Crown attorneys to decide if a case is appropriate, and it's ultimately up to a judge to decide if that's a suitable result.

In terms of the questions being asked about the technology, I agree with the member that technology is certainly more challenging than when the only method of communication by telephone was through landlines. We know that through the availability of three-way calling and the use of cellphones, it's much harder to be confident that when you're making contact with somebody by telephone that they are where they are supposed to be or, equally

importantly, they are not where they're not supposed to be.

And, Mr. Chair, we are investigating alternative technologies to support curfew monitoring. We accept that the current approach to automated curfew monitoring is not optimal. We would agree that the current system is out of date and it doesn't meet the current standards of technology. So we will be conducting a review, and I'll look forward to seeing those recommendations. The question is whether we'll need a system—a newer updated system-based approach—and if that is the case, what the cost will be. But we are aware that it is a concern as technology changes.

Mr. Goertzen: Could the member clarify, was the recommendation on weekend court, was that a recommendation from Manitoba Justice or was that an election promise by the NDP?

Mr. Swan: Well, you know, unlike certain others, we base our promises on what people actually want and need. And we had some good discussions with people within the justice system who said that they thought that having the availability of weekend bail courts would be a good way to move more cases through the system. So, actually, that recommendation came from a number of individuals, including those working in courts, including those working in the sheriff's area, as well as other areas of the system.

* (16:10)

So, again, I don't apologize for listening to individuals in the justice system to try and make things work better.

Mr. Goertzen: I just wanted to ensure, because it sounded from the minister's answer and even a little bit on this answer that it was the bureaucracy that was helpful in putting together their election platform. And I know that there's been many places where we've seen the merger of the—or the government's attempt to merge the civil service together with their political end of their organization. So that would be, obviously, very concerning.

Perhaps, Mr. Chair, we'll pick up that line of questioning during concurrence. I think we're reluctantly ready to move to the appropriations, because my colleague from St. Paul is eager to move on to his appropriations, which he's been waiting weeks for.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Order. Order. Order, please.

Seeing no further questions, I will now deal with the resolutions.

Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$38,739,000 for Justice, Criminal Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,004,000 for Justice, Civil Litigation and Advisory Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$383,666,000 for Justice, Community Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$61,144,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,016,000 for Justice, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,831,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 4.1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 4.1.

The floor is open for questions.

Seeing no questions.

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,815,000 for Justice, Administration, Finance and Justice Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection.

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

The committee recessed at 4:16 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:22 p.m.

TOURISM, CULTURE, HERITAGE, SPORT AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): I do. Yes, thank you.

I just want to take the opportunity to thank the staff that has now come together as Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport, Consumer Protection, Liquor and Lotteries. And so this new department certainly is all-encompassing in the sense that there are many different aspects to tourism and culture and heritage and sport that need to be dealt with. And I know that the department as a whole has done a tremendous job over the last, roughly, six months in ensuring that there's a lot of—there's harmony between the different areas of the department, and they should be thanked for that. And I'll take the opportunity to introduce the staff shortly. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I'm sure we really want to get into the questions, and I know that the minister's eager to provide answers, and that's why it's called committee and not question period.

And I'd like to congratulate him on his new promotion to Manitoba Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection. Certainly, I know he is pleased that we made an issue of the fact that heritage was something that was being neglected and thankfully for the opposition to have raised that issue, and now it's part of the department. We're pleased about that and look forward to asking some questions of the minister.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 14.1.(a) contained in the resolution 14.1.

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

Mr. Lemieux: With me today is Terry Goertzen, who's my Deputy Minister; Veronica Dyck, assistant deputy minister; Michelle Wallace, executive director of Tourism Secretariat; Jeff Conquergood is a financial analyst. I think that's it—oh, and Alexandra Morton is here, as well, from Consumer Protection branch. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister.

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

Mr. Schuler: Probably come as a surprise to the committee, could we have this a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: It's agreed? Thank you, it's agreed, then, that the questions for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once the questions have concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and thank you very much, and could the minister tell us where the stadium is with the repairs that are being done to the flooding issue that happened a couple weeks ago?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Chair, I'd be pleased to. First of all, let me just say that Investors stadium is one of the finest, if not the best, stadium in all of Canada. Regrettably, the opposition voted against it; then often we hear them supporting Saskatchewan's

Saskatchewan Roughriders. That's a real shame. And, quite frankly, this stadium, Investors stadium, is, as the president of the Canadian Football League said, the finest stadium, and when we hold the Grey Cup here it will be probably, if not the best Grey Cup, it'll be close to it.

And so this stadium, like others, and if anyone's been involved in construction at all, you'll soon know that no, that not everything goes as planned, regrettably. And having gone through some construction with my daughter building her new home over the past number of months, I certainly can attest to that. And you can imagine where there's a more complex stadium compared to a house, things do happen. And there were a couple of problems at the stadium, and my understanding is that if it's not rectified—I've been advised that it would soon be rectified and that it'll be ready for the US women's and Canadian women's soccer, which is going to take place on the 8th of May, I believe, and approximately 24,000 tickets have been sold for that. Hopefully, it'll be a sellout. And it'll certainly be ready for the football season, which is going to be upon us shortly.

And there's going to be endless amounts of concerts taking place there. I know Zac Brown, Beyoncé and many more will take place there. And I know that—hopefully members opposite will attend some of these events—and I know that the public in general is very, very supportive of a new stadium. I think one thing I should put on the record, Mr. Chair, is that had we kept that old barn in place, there would have been put—we would have had to put millions upon millions upon millions of dollars into that old place, 50-year-old building, which was falling apart. And the best thing that ever happened, and I believe Manitobans feel that, is that we built a new stadium.

And so, having said that, we look forward to a new football stadium and a new football team, as such, and a great season.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister give us a figure of how much the damage costs to repair?

* (16:30)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, as I mentioned in my previous comments about the stadium, I've certainly been advised that everything has been taken care of and—or is being taken care of, and we'll know, certainly, soon that it has been for sure. Currently, we're just looking at estimates, roughly, as to what the costs

are, but there is an insurance policy that would cover, indeed, all, I understand, if not all.

Mr. Schuler: So how much is the cost to repair that damage?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, that's what we're waiting for. I mean, right now all of that's being put together, and once it's completed and once it's finished, once the job's done, then we'll have a more accurate figure. I mean, I am hesitant to give you an approximate because I know my critic is very, very precise, and if I'm one dollar too low, he'll be reminding me of that, and so I just want to make sure I'm accurate once it's done. But, once it's done, I'll be one of the first people to tell you that it's completed and what the costs—exact costs are.

Mr. Schuler: Well, normal practice would be if you have a car accident or something happens in your home, an insurance estimator comes in and gives an estimation and tells you what you are allowed to spend for repairs, so, usually you don't just have a blank cheque from an insurance company. They want to know how much they have to put out. So can the minister tell us what was the estimated damage on behalf of the insurance company, because the minister did say it was all covered by insurance?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, it's more than \$100,000 and it's less than \$500,000.

Mr. Schuler: Well, yes, that really narrows it down.

I have a question for the minister also. Why was no media allowed to come into the stadium and view the damage? Was there a particular reason why no media could've covered it?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, you could ask Wade Miller that. The Blue Bombers are the custodians and they're responsible for that building, and my understanding is that there was construction taking place and we don't want anyone getting injured, anyone going into that facility, and that would be the last thing I think anyone would want, but, you know—but I would certainly want to state again that the Winnipeg Blue Bombers are the custodians of that particular facility and it was their call to make.

Mr. Schuler: So Wade Miller said no?

Mr. Lemieux: I'm not sure who said no. When the media came to me, the media said, Minister, would you allow them to go into the stadium, and I said I'm not going to second-guess whoever made that decision.

Mr. Schuler: Yet, when the building was under construction, the minister and his government were more than happy to tour people through the building. So—and the thing is is when the damage happened, I think it took a couple of days for the insurance company to come in and assess the damage. I doubt they were repairing the damage before the damage happened, so as soon as it happened, to have toured the media through wouldn't have been a hazard because there wouldn't have been any construction, which the minister knows. Anyway, they toured people through the stadium even when there was construction.

And, all of that having been said, was there something that the government, other than bad publicity, that the government feared that the media might see that would keep the government, who actually owns the building, from allowing the media to tour the facility?

Mr. Lemieux: No, I mean there's nothing to fear. As I mentioned in my preface in my comments earlier about when you're dealing with construction, things do happen, and I believe most Manitobans know that. And, when the member opposite, my critic, mentions about how people are really eager to tour and to be there, I know that members opposite will be there, you know, waving a flag.

I mean they were opposed to the MTS Centre, but when it came time to cutting a ribbon, not necessarily these members, but other members were more than happy to be there at the ribbon cutting, even though they opposed the MTS Centre.

I would just say, though, that it is a partnership. This building is a partnership of the Bombers, the university, the Province and the City of Winnipeg.

Mr. Schuler: To the minister, did no one in the partnership know that we have snow in winter and that it melts in spring?

Mr. Lemieux: I know the member opposite must be saying this tongue-in-cheek, but, again, facilities, no matter what facility it is that you can point to, often end up doing additions or renovations or fixes once a complex or a building is open, and whether that is simple as fixing the eavestroughs or adjusting eavestroughs on a new home or if it's a matter of a larger project having to alter initially what has been put in place to deal with the circumstances of the day, and I would say that that's exactly what happened here. I don't have all the specific details. I wish I could comment further with regard to exactly

what the problem is but I'm going to get an update as soon as everything is rectified and as soon as I'm advised that everything is taken care of. And they'll give a full reporting.

Mr. Schuler: And, Mr. Chair, the minister talks about, you know, periodically you have to have your eavestroughs adjusted. This is a—potentially, half-million-dollar damage eavestrough-adjusting project. That's pretty pricey. And, you know, the first—the question that I had asked was, you know, how could nobody know that we have snow in winter and that it melts in spring and that the water has to go someplace? And was—did the minister ask how is it that we could not have prepared ourselves for the fact that we have snow melt in spring and the water has to go somewhere?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I'm not an engineer and I'm not a designer and I don't pretend to know what exactly the concerns are or were or what needed to be rectified. I said, once I find out I'd be more than happy to tell everyone on what I know and what has been repaired. The critic is presuming that it has to just do with snow. I don't know if it's just snow or what the concerns are. I'm not sure how he knows that or how he surmises that it's, you know—*[interjection]* Okay, well, you know more than I do then, apparently, that it's snow.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister tell us what could potentially keep Wade Miller—because the minister said it was Wade Miller who said no to any media coming in. What could potentially keep the media—because, I mean, I understand we can't run, you know, 1.2 million Manitobans through a facility and that's what—you know, the media does an article, takes some pictures and explains to the public what happened and what the damage was. And perhaps the minister answered it when he says, actually, it may not even have been snow melt, that it could have been something else. So maybe it was sewer backup; maybe it was something else.

What was so terrible about this incident—and we understand it's a half-a-million-dollar damage bill by the minister's own words, and Wade Miller says no, but what is it that was so terrible that the media wouldn't be allowed to come in, do a little article, take some pictures and inform the public what was happening to their building that they paid for? The minister mentions it was a partnership and basically

everybody in that partnership is government or non-profit.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, first of all, I didn't say \$500,000. I said it's more than a hundred and less than five. But, and secondly, I didn't say it was Wade Miller, I said the Bombers are the custodians of that particular building and Wade Miller, being their general manager and person in charge, he was the one, I believe, that in one of Mr. Brodbeck's columns mentioned that, I think, he was the one who was in charge and maybe made a statement. I may be corrected.

But I—but having said that, if the critic thinks that anyone is happy about this, no one is. The Bombers are not. The City's not. The university's not. I'm not. I mean, you know, we've invested taxpayers' dollars on behalf of taxpayers into this facility and we have a facility that we should be proud of. No one wants to see a building leaking or problems with a building and I know the member opposite doesn't either. I mean, no one does, and so we're going to get down to the bottom of it. We have engineers, we have the company that was responsible for it, the architect. People are looking at it, professionals. They're going to fix it. So, hopefully, they fix it so it never happens again.

* (16:40)

And I would just say that we're fortunate, again, to have one of the finest stadiums in all of the country. You don't have to go very far west where they're looking to build a domed stadium, I think, that was, you know, around \$500 million-plus, and then they soon changed their mind on that. And then, now they're going to build another stadium, which in my understanding—I've been advised that's it's going to be less bums in the seats and it's going to even be more—this particular facility. So less people are going to be in their stadium, and it's going to cost them more.

And so—and you know—and so all I have to say is that we are really fortunate to have this facility, and we built it when we did because now costs are starting to escalate on steel, on concrete, because of all the infrastructure that's going on, so we're really fortunate that we made the investment when we did.

And I know that the member opposite—I was saying it tongue-in-cheek about, you know, cheering for the Roughriders all the time and wearing a watermelon on his head, and—but I know that he's a

Bomber fan, and he wants to see this stadium be successful.

Mr. Schuler: We appreciate that people aren't happy with this. And I am no more happy when a seal breaks on a window in my house and I have to repair it. That doesn't mean I don't allow the kids into the house. I mean, we get the not-happy part.

Is the minister saying that there was a general unhappiness in the government, or—he tried to pin this on to Wade Miller; maybe it was Wade Miller who was so unhappy that that was the reason why the media wasn't allowed in. Why would the media not be allowed into a building paid for by taxpayers when there was a leaky roof, and they weren't allowed to come in and cover the story, other than it's a bad-news story and the now the minister, by his own admission, that people weren't happy. But that, in and of itself, should not be enough to keep the media out of a building that has basically been paid solely by taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Lemieux: Safety, safety, safety. I mean, I certainly didn't know, you know—and I'm not sure if anyone else knew exactly the extent of what was happening there with regard to construction. And anytime you have a construction site, you have to be concerned about people coming in.

Now, you know, if there's photographs or something that people may want to share later, once it's all done, I mean, I certainly would be open to something like that. I mean, sharing photos of, you know, what the damage is—I'm sure that, you know, people may want to see that.

But I'm sure that my critic wouldn't want, as he pointed out, 1.2 million people tromping through and walking through the stadium and touring the stadium every time something may happen there, and that's certainly not reasonable.

And, again, safety, safety, safety. It's a construction zone, and you want to ensure that people are safe. The last thing you want is something—they're trying to fix something, and then someone would get injured or someone slips or someone hurts themselves while they're going—touring a construction site. And so I would—I mean, I'm presuming that it's safety-related, and I can see that as being, quite frankly, the only reason why—is because of safety. And I'm not pinning anything on Wade Miller.

Essentially, that is a construction site and that area—you don't want people going in there with the

possibility of being injured as a result of going through.

And I wasn't there. I didn't see it. I'm not sure, again, what the damage is or what's happened there, but that I can reassure the member—that I believe it's because of safety, and I understand that's the reason why it was not allowed for the general public or anyone else.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, so following the minister's logic, first of all, he tries to pin it on Wade Miller. Then he tries to pin it on a construction issue which—there was no construction because the damage had just happened. Then he pins it on—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order please.

Yes, okay, go ahead.

Mr. Schuler: Then he pins it on that people were unhappy. And now he says it's safety, safety, safety, which is surprising to hear that after over \$200 million for a new building that has just been built, the building's not safe. So either we can't have the media go in because of—it's Wade Miller's fault, or it's a construction zone, or people aren't happy, or it's a 200-plus-million-dollar unsafe building because every time the roof leaks, it's unsafe.

Could the minister please tell us—he's given us four different answers to the same question—what could conceivably keep the media—and I don't think they were looking at, you know, 50, 60 people; it could have been four or five representatives, they decide amongst themselves who goes in—would have had a tour of the building, would have looked at the damage, would have reported on the damage, would have reported how it's proceeding, and that's the story.

What conceivably went so wrong in this 200-plus-million-dollar brand new building that you couldn't take the media in to see the damage?

Mr. Lemieux: No, there's not five different positions, there's one. Safety is the position. One position; it's a safety issue. When you're repairing something it becomes a construction zone and safety has to be the reason why. I mean, you don't allow people just to come in to view a damaged site, and you want to ensure that it's safe. I mean, it's very simple; there's only one answer and that's what the answer is, it's safety.

Mr. Schuler: However, every newspaper and newscast you could go back and—through the archives and they showed every angle in every part

and every moment of the construction of the stadium. In and out, and they were issued a hard hat and they were given work boots and they were pulled through. And I can remember when the sod was supposed to be laid, the AstroTurf, and on and on and on; they pulled more media through that building during construction—[*interjection*] Now—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please. Order.

Only one person should be speaking. I will request to the other member to just to keep silent. If you want to discuss, just go somewhere else, and otherwise—[*interjection*] Okay. Go ahead, honourable member for St. Paul.

Mr. Schuler: The point is, is that it's—when it's a good news, positive story—construction—then it's a good tour and all the media can be toured through. When there's a leak in the roof—and we're only talking about a leak in the roof—then all of a sudden it's a safety issue.

And again I would like to ask the minister—and he keeps giving a—different answers. And it started off, blame Wade Miller, and then it was a construction zone, even though there was no construction. Then it was unhappy people, and then, Mr. Chair, it was safety, safety, safety. A 200-plus-million-dollar building paid for by the public, paid for by Manitobans, and it's now unsafe because the roof leaks; because we have spring, that makes it an unsafe building. So Manitobans should equate spring thaw with unsafety because of the stadium having a leak in it. I mean, how could that be unsafe when you have a leak in the roof, yet it was safe to take people through when it was under construction?

Minister, could you—through the Chair—could the minister please focus on one answer. What was it that was so bad about what took place during the spring thaw that would have had the minister or Wade Miller or unhappy people or whoever it was disallow the media from entering the stadium at that time?

Mr. Lemieux: I'm really beginning to think that the member from St. Paul is unhappy. He's the one that's not happy and he's quite upset, I guess, that, you know, we have this outstanding stadium, the best in the country. To quote Chuck Davidson of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, the Grey Cup will create over \$100 million in economic impact. The CFL commissioner, Mark Cohon, announces

215–2015 Grey Cup, and he says this gives us a great opportunity to showcase the modern CFL in our premier event—a beautiful, modern Investors Group Field. And so—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

I think other members are also interested to ask the question. Maybe I can ask a member of—from Steinbach, but obviously he can ask a question first and then the minister can answer the question for member St. Paul. [*interjection*] Okay. Okay.

Mr. Lemieux: Maybe I'll just conclude by saying that this stadium is among the best, if not the best, stadium in the country. It's home to the Bombers, home to the Bisons. It's a great outdoor concert facility, you're going to see many concerts take place there. It's a fantastic facility. It'll be packed. You'll see 50,000 people in there for the Grey Cup, it'll be a great success story.

* (16:50)

But the member from St. Paul seems to be quite, I guess, upset that this stadium—I'm not sure, maybe he wanted a different location for the stadium, but that's another story—and so, you know, it's built where it is. It's a fantastic stadium. We didn't need the old stadium; it was falling apart. Great investment on behalf of Manitobans and their tax dollars going into this particular facility. And, yes, like any other project, there are and can be problems and you're going to have some issues that need to be addressed, and that's exactly what happened.

So we're assured—we're assured—that the drainage issues will be resolved and they are resolved and—between the builder and the architect, and that's the way it is and I understand that, in fact, insurance will take care of the whole cost. So you have leaking that's taking place in the stadium, has been described by the member opposite—he has different theories as to what happened there—but I will get, I'm sure, a briefing as to what exactly happened and what the costs are and I'd be more than pleased to let the member opposite know. When I get that, I'll pass it on.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, the minister said that the old stadium was falling apart, roof was leaking and then—[*interjection*] Like this one—and then the minister and his government toured the media through the old stadium which was unsafe and falling apart to show them that it was unsafe and falling apart and the roof was leaking. Now we have a 200-plus-million-dollar

brand new stadium and we are told that it is unsafe, they can't tour the media around in it. That is a remarkable argument and we're not going to get anywhere with this, so I have another question for the minister.

As of 2013, and perhaps it has already taken, there are front-line subtrades that had not been fully paid for the work on building Investors Group Field. And I was wondering if the minister could tell us: Was Allmar Distributors, were they finally paid out for the work they did on building the stadium?

Mr. Lemieux: I can certainly look into that and find out that, whether or not they were. I'm certainly not privy to that one way or another.

Mr. Schuler: And can, when the minister is doing that, could he also look into was JD Penner, who was also a subtrade, were they finally fully paid for the work they did on the stadium?

Mr. Lemieux: I'm sorry, can I ask what JD Penner does? What kind of a company are they? What do they do?

Mr. Schuler: J. D. Penner is a subtrade, Minister, and I just know that they were not fully paid. They're one of the subtrades at the building. And, while I have the floor, could the minister also tell us, Master Roofing, were they one of the subtrades that was finally fully paid because, as of 2013, they hadn't been fully paid yet? Have they now been paid out?

Mr. Lemieux: Again, I'm not privy to that. I'm not privy to the subcontractors or subtrades that have been paid or have not been paid. But I certainly can inquire into it.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister also look into Alpha Masonry, Antex Western, Bituminex, B-i-t-u-m-i-n-e-x-Bituminex. Another subtrade, Spray On. The next company would be Western Millwork. The next one is Westwood Mechanical. The next one is Tatra Ornamental Iron Works. Next one is SimplexGrinnell. Next one is called Hay Decorating and another one is QSI Interiors? There are 13 companies or subtrades that worked on the Investors Group Field who hadn't been paid as of 2013.

Can the minister tell us, have they been paid? I mean, these are really front-line construction companies. They're—a lot of them are smaller family-operated and, from what I understand, is some of them are financially struggling because they were not paid for the work that they did. So, to be very clear, they did the work. They did a great job.

These are great Manitoba companies. They're great individuals, great families. They paid their bills, paid their employees and have not been paid and are struggling for it.

Could the minister tell us, these 13 companies, have they now been paid?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, if I could ask for a complete list, I'd appreciate it, of—you know, I'm not privy to this. But it's—the members opposite—the members—certainly the member from West St. Paul mentioned about how all these are great trades and do great work, and that's why we have a great stadium. And it is a great stadium. So kind of goes against his logic about the stadium not being a very good stadium. But it's a great stadium. I mean, we had great trades working on the stadium. So—but if you would provide me with a list, I can certainly inquire and find out. I'm certainly not privy to the subtrades that have been paid or have not been paid or why not.

Mr. Schuler: If it would please the committee, I'd be prepared to table the list, and as of June 2013 they hadn't been paid. If I could—*[interjection]* Yes, you're not a page. I didn't know that I was going to be tabling the list, so I did not make three copies. The minister asked for it.

I think these individuals do a great job. And, Minister, we think the stadium is a great facility and we have not criticized any of it. What we are saying is that after 200-plus-million dollars, the roof is leaking and there's something that happened in the building that the government is not allowing the media to see. There's something that happened in that building that the government doesn't want people to see, and there is a problem with that; 200-plus-million dollars was paid. All the subtrades, 13 of which I have tabled the list, haven't even been paid yet, and the minister is saying there's \$500 million-plus damage or up to \$500 million in—*[interjection]*—\$500,000 in damages to the building that nobody's allowed to see, nobody's allowed to view. There is no explanation given other than that there was snow accumulated and it melted. And subtrades are sitting there and saying, and we haven't even gotten paid. Now, they might have gotten paid since I found about it. Certainly, we would like to see them paid.

Yes, it's a great building. Yes, it's got a leaky roof—*[interjection]*—no insulation. There's other deficiencies. And the minister won't even allow Manitobans through the media to see a building that has water evidently pouring into the building and creating considerable damage, because up to

\$500,000 is a lot of damage and, frankly, I think that people should be up in arms, that they should be able to see what happened to their building and what's going on there. I think there's an accountability deficit here and, frankly, that people do have a right to have the media—which is an unbiased, non-partisan group—to go in and view the building and report to the people on what's happening in their building. And not that government isn't to be trusted, but, you know, government's not to be trusted. And—anyway, that would be my suggestion to the minister, is that he not block the media from having access to see what kind of damage took place.

Mr. Lemieux: There was a question in there, I think, some place, or I'm not sure. But, on the one hand, the member opposite is saying about all the great trades and the fantastic trades there are and what great trades we have in Manitoba, and yet it's a terrible stadium. I mean, I'm not sure where that logic comes from. But we are saying this is the best stadium in the country. Yes, there are some issues. And, if the member opposite thinks that I'm happy or other people are happy with this, I would indeed argue that the architect and the builder and the contractor's not happy either. No one is happy at this. And so the idea is that you fix it and you repair it and you take care of it. I mean, that's also why insurance is purchased, for occasions like this.

So this repair will be taking place. If it's not completed by now, it certainly will be shortly. And when I'm advised of what exactly took place or the amount, I'll be more than happy to let the—you know, let my critic know and others know what exactly took place there and what happened.

So, again, the subtrades that—I've just received the list of subtrades that were responsible for doing some work and companies that—

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

ABORIGINAL AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and

wouldn't you know it, the floor's now open for questions.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Chair, I just have a couple more questions.

The Northern Association of Community Councils, I believe, fall under Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. And, when I used to be involved in the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure committee through my role at the AMM, we dealt with some of their capital projects under the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure committee.

The first question, I guess, is: What is the capital budget for the Northern Association of Community Councils now, for capital projects?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, the overall budget is \$8,857,065 for 2013. This includes matters relating to: the Bissett water-treatment plant, which is in the neighbourhood of \$2 million; a plant, in that region also, of—worth a \$1 million; the Gods Lake Narrows sewage water truck, which is valued at \$103,535; some upgrades relating to that, totalling about \$100,000; the Matheson Island waste-disposal site, which is \$200,000; the Moose Lake waste-disposal site, \$1.2 million; the Norway House heat trace man—heat trace replacement unit, valued at over \$450,000; the Norway House truck—now this operates as a two-way plow as well—valued at \$224,000; and some other miscellaneous items including replacements, generators and the upgrade of the Wabowden playground site. So the overall budget is eight point eight, five, seven, sixty-five dollars.

The Northern Association of Community Councils was created to facilitate and dialogue with the government of Manitoba under The Northern Affairs Act. It has been in existence for quite some time. It operates on a regional basis with vice-presidents and, overall, they have a president of the organization, which is Mr. Reg Mead, who's also the mayor of the town of Wabowden. So, Mr. Chair, it's been in operation for quite a number of years, and it functions as the lobbying organization for the Northern Association of Community Councils, which number 52 communities, I believe. *[interjection]* Fifty communities.

Mr. Briese: They must have lost a couple because I remember when I was dealing with them, there were 52 at that time.

My question was more specific to—what I recall from that time, we—I was on the selection committee for the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure, as was Mr. Meade and a couple of others. There was three from the Northern Association of Community Councils and there were three from the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

And we did the allocation under that part of the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure program. And at that time, the capital budget, if I remember right, for the Northern Association of Community Councils, was \$2 million a year. So, really, all they could access out of the Canada-Manitoba infrastructure fund was \$6 million a year because of their \$2 million that they had in capital budget, and then the other \$2 million came from the Province of Manitoba and \$2 million from the federal government.

So I'm just curious, with another Building Canada Fund just starting, hasn't actually even got put in place yet, what their—what the portion of their capital budget is that they will be able to access bigger projects through the Canada—the Building Canada Fund?

Mr. Robinson: There's been no announcement to my knowledge as to—we do have a group that sits on—that's called a capital management group, I believe, the capital management advisory committee, which recommends projects for communities. As the member can appreciate, the needs are tremendously high in some of these northern affairs communities throughout the province of Manitoba.

We do not know yet in the coming year what the budgetary requirements will be for the northern affairs communities. But, certainly, the NACC is part of the recommended projects that take place.

And I know later on today, I'll be meeting with the northern affairs—or the AMM, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. Certainly, it'll be a question that I'll raise with them as well. And I know that there's collaborative efforts with the NACC, with AMM, on several of the projects that are approved under that joint management arrangement that we have.

Mr. Briese: One more question, and then I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The \$8.865 million that you stated previously, is that the total budget that goes to Northern Association of Community Councils, or is that a capital budget, simply a capital budget?

Mr. Robinson: That's simply the capital budget in 2013. As for the operation of the organization itself, I'll try and provide that information before we conclude with the—[interjection] The entire budget of the organization, I'm told, is \$323,000. That's the operating budget to maintain the office of the Northern Association of Community Councils and the staff that they employ.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I didn't want to miss an opportunity to sit across from my old friend, who we've had the opportunity of working on a number of issues together.

* (15:00)

And I just wanted to touch base on one of those issues that has come back to my attention, and that's with regard to the suicides with the children and youth within our province and the reduction strategy that he and I had a good conversation about in, I believe, 2007, 2008. You know, for a point—for a period of time, we saw the numbers decrease, but we're seeing the numbers rise again.

Just want to know if the minister would share with me what he has learned from his Cabinet colleagues with regard to the challenges. I know that we want to look for—and the minister had agreed—that we need to look at evidence-based strategies that work with—work for these young children. Just wanting to know if he could provide me with an update on what he has learned from his colleagues over the last several years with regard to this initiative.

Mr. Robinson: As an elected person of this Legislature—and I certainly want to join with the member from Riding Mountain the concern that I have on the high number of suicides that we have in communities. I don't think it really matters now whether it's northern, southern or somewhere in between, but sometimes these suicides occur in clusters.

And the prevention work has been ongoing by this government, including some that I pointed out in my introductory remarks to the member from Agassiz, including the water swim program that we have initiated that has affected many of our young children throughout the province of Manitoba.

With respect to the broad issue of suicide, this remains a challenge not only for the provincial government, indeed, the federal government but also the local leadership, and that's something that—we're very much aware of that.

Some of the things that we have invested in have been the Cross Lake Cadet Corps, which has taken a lot of young people from the streets, if you will, and have made positive role models. And a huge congratulations to Bob Smith and the people up in Cross Lake for doing that sort of thing.

Quite recently, as well, we had the Island Lake Winter Games, which operate under the Manitoba Aboriginal sports and recreational council. The Shamattawa Waysak [*phonetic*] Corps, as well, we made a number of investments, which numbered with-numbered 60 participants from the local community—some of this I'm doing by memory—and the Northlands youth cultural camp. And I think that—it's been my experience that a lot of these cultural camps that are held go a long way in addressing this unfortunate matter that's in our society.

The Wapasi Days [*phonetic*] in Red Sucker Lake, as an example, is a campout which enables our young people and elders to get together and interact with each other, to share stories on some of the things that the young people are troubled by, the lack of activities in the communities. And the local leadership is there to hear about some of these challenges that they have, and the elders are there to provide some traditional knowledge about the land and how to—simple things like how to clean a duck or a goose or properly fillet a fish. Those are some of the teachings that occur.

I, personally, have been involved in the Grand Rapids cultural camp, which has annual spring gatherings and fall gatherings for the fall and spring ceremonies, which is a tradition that's held sacredly among the Cree people. And the camp and the fall—or the spring fast is soon going to be upon us in the month of May, and then after that, of course, the fall ceremonies will occur in October.

Mr. Chair, these are some of the activities that go a long way in addressing this issue, but the responsibility has been primarily transferred over to the Department of Healthy Living, and Children and Youth Opportunities have also embarked upon a number of initiatives relating to this matter, and I'm sure that my colleague the honourable minister will be gladly answering questions with respect to that. But I thank the member for Riding Mountain because her and I do share some concern on this very topic.

It's something that's not pleasant to talk about nor is it a pleasant matter, period, in any community

in the province of Manitoba that we're having to face. But certainly recreational activities, cultural activities to restore that sense of pride among Aboriginal children and youth goes a long way. And I just want to be very clear that it's been my experience that suicides and suicide attempts are not strictly just restricted to the young people in our communities but, indeed, to many people.

I'm aware of one woman, for example, a mother of four children that just took her own life from one of our northern communities, and, regrettably, her children were in care and the children had to be assembled in order for them to attend the funeral. And I was very saddened about that because that shouldn't be, and one has to think about the consequences that has on the family unit, as an example. But we remain firm and I know that nobody in government or any leader or anybody of that nature will ever dissolve this matter we're faced with, but I think that certainly every attempt and whatever way we can be helpful as government and people that speak in government can afford some change and we can forward some of our thoughts and some of our insight into some past experiences that we had.

I had the honour of sitting with some adoptees from the 1960s who are now middle-aged people, who were adopted out at a young age, and they talked about the unhealthiness of some of the communities. And these were people that were adopted out into foreign environments, never became knowledgeable about who they were as Ojibway, Cree, Dene, Dakota, Ojibway people or Inuit people for that matter. They were adopted into foreign environments.

One man that I met only spoke Ukrainian, was unaware of his Ojibway language. Another woman I met was adopted out to Holland in the Netherlands and, of course, she became pregnant at the age 11, at the age of 11 years old, at the hands of her adopted father and, of course, her body not being equipped to handle that pregnancy aborted, and she later had children when she was 12, 13 and 14 years of age. And I found that to be really sad because when she was finally brought home to meet her blood relatives here in Canada back in the early '80s, it became apparent that she didn't really fit in because she was not aware of her language and she contemplated suicide on a number of occasions.

That is only one story of many that exist out there among Aboriginal people, and some, of course,

come from a background of the residential school system, and these are, indeed, very, very sad stories and that hurt carries on into the current generation. But there is hope, I am told by spiritual leaders, by the traditional leaders of our communities, that we will overcome these challenges that we face, and certainly it's something that also leads into another issue and that's missing and murdered women across Canada.

* (15:10)

And that's another big issue that I know that I share, and share concern with the member from Riding Mountain with and—but I think I'm going on a little too long, Mr. Chair, but certainly these are some the symptoms of a broader—these are the broad symptoms of what we're dealing with here in the province of Manitoba in many of our isolated and remote communities. And we have to be honest, there are issues there are very, very difficult to deal with, including the issue of incest and these other things, and that's very challenging and I can't see anybody trying to address these issues head on.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the next question, for the committee's reference, each member when they are either asking a question or providing an answer has up to 10 minutes. So the minister made reference to, you thought you were going on for a while. That came in at less than eight, and, of course, the topics in Estimates may not sound exciting on the surface sometimes, but they can be very serious and important issues. So I want members to know that they have that latitude should they need it.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, absolutely, I had no issue with the amount of time that the minister put his statements forward and I appreciate his comments and his experience and his insight on these issues. So in no way were we concerned with the amount of time that was being shared. We appreciated his candidness and his information that we will take forward. Thank you.

Mr. Briese: I would like to thank the minister and thank his staff for the process we've been through here. I think I've been provided with quite a few of the—quite a few answers to the questions that I posed and, as always, there's a few more things that I probably would like to ask, but I think it's time we moved on in this Estimates process.

So I thank the minister and his staff and I'm prepared go line by line.

Mr. Chairperson: And, as Chair, let me just say thanks to everyone for a good discussion.

We will now move to consideration of the resolutions for this department.

Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,058,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$106,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 19.1(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 19.1.

So at this point, we thank the staff very much for their time with us here at the front table.

And the floor is now open for any questions, should there be any on this item, 19.1. Seeing none, is the committee ready for the resolution?

Resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,062,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes our consideration for the Estimates of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. Thank you very much for your time with us, Minister and Critic.

The next set of Estimates to be considered will be for the Department of Children and Youth Opportunities.

Shall we take a brief recess to allow the appropriate people to get here? *[Agreed]*

All right, wouldn't you know, we're in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:14 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:32 p.m.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the department for Children and Youth Opportunities.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Mr. Chief: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, first off, just wanted to apologize to the member for the delay. I am very happy to share some thoughts, and I do want to express my gratitude for her, of course, interest in the Department of Children and Youth Opportunities.

A big part of what we started to do right off the bat is that we know we had created some momentum with a number of years in investing in children and young people throughout the province of Manitoba. So we wanted to continue to do that, having a dedicated department that could put a lot of focus in the area, primarily in the area of prevention, but also to try to find a way that we were making sure that we were listening and taking into account what young people have to say, what parents have to say, what grandparents have to say, of course, what all of our stakeholders and health professionals and educators have to say.

One of the very first things that I had done was get to travel the province looking at how we build safer and healthier communities. So not only did it allow me to get a sense of the kinds of investments we're making throughout the province of Manitoba but, once again, got to hear first-hand the great thoughts and ideas, some of them being very innovative and creative, and some of those ideas were things that people who had worked in their neighbourhoods and their communities throughout the province for decades and were making a difference and had the opportunity to highlight that.

The crime prevention consultations took in over 29 sessions throughout the province of Manitoba. Thousands of people participated, and we heard, of course we heard about issues, but we heard a lot about the kinds of values in terms of what people see the importance it was for young people. You heard of things like how important a sense of

belonging was that, you know, many people said that if we don't continue to give young people something positive to belong to, they won't wait for us; someone will seek them out and get them involved in something negative.

And, Mr. Chair, we also heard a lot about the importance of co-ordinating services. Whether you were up north in northern Manitoba or you're in southern Manitoba or in any of our bigger cities, people talked about the importance of partnership and co-ordinating those services. Part of that was our launch of our After School Network. We also introduced a very innovative program called After School Leaders where we got to partner with organizations such as True North Sports & Entertainment, of course under the leadership of Mark Chipman. Also, we got to partner with some of our post-secondary institutions like Red River College. As we know, culinary arts is a big thing on TV nowadays and there's a lot of interest from young people, and they have a great culinary arts program at Red River.

The After School Leaders program puts a lot of emphasis in making sure that young people are exposed to jobs. Many young people, when you ask them, what do you want to do when you're done high school, are you going to post-secondary, a lot of them say they don't—they're not sure. And so, Mr. Chair, what we want to do is expose them to a lot of different kinds of jobs. I think one of the joys of one of the young people told me was what it was like to do live-by-live tweets of Winnipeg Jets hockey games and got to see all the different jobs that existed at True North.

And so, you know, these are the kinds of partnerships that we wanted to create. We're very proud to bring in Right to Play. Our very own Clara Hughes is one of the biggest ambassadors for the Right to Play program—once again, that's a partner with True North—and have Right to Play in some of our First Nation communities was a very innovative approach and got to bring Clara Hughes back into Manitoba to talk about how important sport, recreation, cultural activities are.

One of the things that I had heard so much in the crime prevention consultation is that if you want to maximize the potential of a young person, it even starts before they are born. It starts with prenatal investments. And so I was very proud to go from a consultation in building safer and healthier communities to going right in to listen to thoughts

and ideas on the importance, of course, of early childhood development.

We knew that a lot of the programs and initiatives that we were investing in were making a difference. But we also knew there was a lot of other people who were very interested in being part of the early childhood development movement, whether it was through early childhood educators or child care centres or things like the support for prenatal support.

And so I went out and travelled, once again, the province, but we launched this at the United Way, where we brought in a lot of different experts from the field, people who have dedicated their lives to early childhood development. I was very proud that, as part of that initial launch, that Dave Angus and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce joined us in that and continue to be a major partner in the things that we do there.

And so we got to hear first-hand, right from the start, about the programs that we deliver in partnership with the community and how we can improve them and how we can find ways to reach our most vulnerable families.

One of the biggest sessions we had was—I'd probably say—was in Point Douglas, the neighbourhood that I represent, at the Aboriginal Centre, where over 300 people showed up to listen to their thoughts and ideas. I'll never forget what one elder came to say. She was interviewed by the media. They asked her why she was there, and she said, you know, I struggled as a parent. I've got to say that I struggled with addictions. I don't think I was the best parent, but I think I'm a fantastic grandparent, and I've been given a second chance, and I'm here to simply tell the minister one thing: Whatever you do, don't forget about grandparents.

And we haven't. We recognize how important family is to the well-being, of course, of every child and how important it is to make sure that our services and resources include as many people that care for that child as possible.

We were able to do another one, as I said—the importance of prenatal care with PIIPC at Mount Carmel Clinic, the University of Manitoba Faculty of Nursing, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Health Sciences Women's Clinic. These are Healthy Baby sites, and they got to come and share the importance of prenatal care. And what was vital in that conversation was how do we make sure that

these services and resources are reaching the women who need them the most.

We put a lot of emphasis on making sure that we're investing in evaluation and data and research. We believe that the programs we deliver are some of the best programs in the country because they're based on evidence; they're based on good research, and we're very proud of the partnership that we have with the University of Manitoba, with the Health authorities, of course, with our own Healthy Child Manitoba office.

We are very excited as part of that to draw in the McConnell Foundation. I think—I believe it's the second biggest foundation in the nation. They said there was a golden moment in Manitoba to make investments. They came into the province of Manitoba with a significant investment—in fact, \$500,000 a year, I believe, for the next six years—to try to support our most vulnerable, to help create structures for more people to participate and help with the co-ordination of services.

So we're very proud that that consultation not only built on thoughts and ideas—and we continue to talk to, of course, our partners in the community—but it has already drawn in some incredible partners. We've said that the research, the data and the evaluation—what we're able to do is to tell people here's how the programs work, here's the successes we have, and be able to target where we know that we're struggling. When you have that world-class research, it brings in world-class partners: people like Gregg Hanson, that is now playing a major role in early childhood development in partnership with us, people like Art Mauro, who is known as the founder of the Manitoba Business Council.

* (15:40)

So we continue to bring in more and more partners. We're very proud of the partnership we have with United Way to make sure that we're giving young people the best start in life. We've said that the things that you learn before the age of five stay with us for the rest of our lives.

Once again, I haven't stopped, in terms of travelling the province, talking to people. Right now, we're currently in the middle of consulting on recreation; we're going to be updating our recreation policy. We know recreation not only touches young people, but it touches all people, all families. Whether you're eight years old or 88, recreation is a vital part of overall physical health, mental health. It

builds on the community's services and resources. Of course, it builds on economic—the economic development supports. And so we're continue to go out there and listen to how we can improve our delivery system for recreation, talk about the programs we currently have and are there things that we can do—and I think a best way to do that is by going out and, of course, talking to people.

We do put a lot of emphasis when working directly with children and families on three key areas. One is, of course, any program that we deliver, we want to make sure that we're building skills, that they're actually developing their skills and talents and that those skills and talents are going to lead to something that they can do in the future. We know that's a vital part of not only helping young people graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary, but also to be employable.

We also deeply believe in a good structure and this is why partnership becomes so important. And we believe, of course, in good supervision. We know that if you don't—if we don't—it's irresponsible of us to ask young people to overcome hardship and challenge unless we can show them others who've done it. And mentorship is well known and it's evidence based to be a great way in which to inspire young people and show them that they might have some struggles but they can overcome it.

I think a great example of that is our very popular—probably the most popular youth program in the nation with The Green Team program. I'm very proud to say that we're going to be expanding that. Of course, with our policy on increasing minimum wage, young people this summer will be making more money than they ever have before. More young people will be working. I know that many of our partners like the AMM and others have been very excited about our expansion of The Green Team program. We do know and I do want to recognize that it is because it is so popular, we still might not be able to meet the need for that one program, but we are going to continue to invest in young people.

I look forward to our Estimates conversation and, once again, I just want to apologize for the delay in getting started.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister for those opening remarks.

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I want to thank the minister for providing the background that he has, with regard to his role within the department of children and youth.

I'm going to leave my question—or my intro, or my opening statement as—put it to the side because I have a number of questions that I want to ask over this short period of time that I have, with regard to this department.

But I do want to thank the minister for responding to my earlier requests for information; it has helped me learn a little bit more about what the department is about and I look forward to the discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the official opposition critic for those opening thoughts.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we should now defer consideration of line item 20.1.(a) contained in resolution 20.1.

At this time we invite the minister's staff to join us at the front table and perhaps once they're settled the minister'd be kind enough to introduce them to the committee.

Mr. Chief: All right, with me here we have Jan Sanderson, the deputy minister for Children and Youth Opportunities. She's also the CEO—chief executive officer—of Healthy Child Manitoba and the secretary to the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. We have Dave Paton, the executive financial officer; Dr. Rob Santos, scientific director and associate secretary to the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet; and as well is Annette Willborn, executive director of Manitoba4Youth, recreation and regional services.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that, Minister.

Last item to go over in terms of housekeeping is how members of the committee want to do this. Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or to have a global discussion?

Mrs. Rowat: Global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Global has been suggested. Is that acceptable, honourable Minister?

Mr. Chief: Yes, for sure.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner and, wouldn't you know it, the floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: There are a number of areas that I would like to cover with the minister, but I'd like to start first with the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. There were a number of recommendations for community initiatives that were identified during the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. Three factors that were identified as—that put children most at risk for poor academic and social outcomes were teen mothers, families living on income assistance and contact with child welfare. So I'm going to go through a number of areas that were identified as concerning to the committee at Phoenix Sinclair and ask the minister if he would provide an update on what his department is doing to respond to those areas.

One of the issues that was raised was aged out of care, and that's—when I was the critic for Family Services that was something that came up quite regularly. Aged out of care is when children who have been involved with the CFS system are then, at 18 years of age, put out into the community and are pretty much told to fend for themselves. And that, without any types of skills or training leads to, you know, a number of challenges: homelessness, unemployment, early school dropout, depression, substance abuse and high risk of exploitation.

So I'm just wanting to know if the minister could provide for me—if he—his department does track children that have been aged out of the welfare system and if he can also provide me with any initiatives that his department has put forward to address this.

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for the question. I know that, of course, she has a lot of interest in the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and, of course, young people aging out of care. I would suggest to the member that the lead minister for that is the Minister for Family Services, and she would be the best minister to take those questions.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Rowat: These are community initiatives that have been put forward by the committee. These are issues that directly impact the role of the minister responsible for children and youth. I'm asking the minister if he would provide me with what his thoughts are with regard to aged out of care and what initiatives he has been discussing with the minister.

This is about children. This is about children who at the age of 18 are put out on their own. I have a 20 year old and an 18 year old, and there's not a chance that they would be able to cope without some type of mentoring or supports. So I'm asking the minister if he would, as a—as the minister responsible for children and youth, provide me with some insight into what his department is doing with regard to this very serious concern.

Mr. Chief: I know that the—I would just like to once again reiterate that things like—that policies like aging out are directly with the minister for Child and Family Services. She would get a much more direct answer in terms of the policies as it relates to Child and Family Services. If the member would like me to go over broadly and speak on how we support children and young people throughout the province of Manitoba through a variety of programs from early childhood development to crime prevention, if her questions are directly to young people that are in the child and family services system, it would be best for her to talk to the minister responsible, which, is of course, the minister for Child and Family Services.

Mrs. Rowat: Phoenix Sinclair's mother and father both aged out of the child-welfare system. They had a number of the issues that were identified as challenges or social outcomes that would affect their parenting ability. So one of them is an early school dropout, depression, substance abuse, high risk of exploitation 'expecially' in the sex trade, involvement in criminal activity, unemployment and homelessness.

All of these initiatives—all of these issues are initiatives that I—when I look through the Estimates book, are considered priorities of this minister. So what I'm asking for is some background into what his department is doing with regard to evidenced-based outcomes to address these. Like, I know these are very important issues. These are issues that are, you know, the issues that are at the base of challenges that young people face when they first are in—you know, brought into this world, and these issues have to be addressed either holistically or through government support.

And these were very serious issues raised by the judge at the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, and so I'm really wanting to know if the minister has been working on initiatives that would provide evidence-based outcomes that would address these.

Thank you.

Mr. Chief: Once again, I would just like to say to the member the details around Phoenix Sinclair or young people in care, the minister responsible for that, I'm sure, would be more than glad to get information on kids that are in care. If the member would like for me to spend time talking about evidence-based programs, programs like our prenatal benefit and the difference it's making to families all throughout the province, our Families First home visiting program—these are all evidence-based programs—parent-child coalitions and the difference that they're making in our communities, I would be glad to go through and talk about the programs that I'm responsible for under the Department of Children and Youth Opportunities.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister had indicated earlier that children under the age of five, you know, five and under, are considered to be of an age when learning is most important. What we heard from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry was that children under age of five are also the most vulnerable to effects of neglect and toxic stress.

So, when I'm asking the minister to respond to the issues that were raised at the Phoenix Sinclair hearings, what I'm asking him is to indicate to me how he is addressing the issues of young children dropping out of school, how is he addressing the neglect issues with regard to poverty, poor housing, parents' troubled histories.

We know that this department has a Healthy Child initiative. We see the number of departments in the organizational chart that are involved in discussions with the minister and we know that the minister would more than likely have some solid evidence to share with this committee on how his government is addressing these issues.

The Phoenix Sinclair inquiry cost a lot of money. The money that was put forward to do the inquiry was there so that we could learn how to better manage a welfare system that is the busiest in the country. There's over 10,000 children in care. So the recommendations, I believe, that were put forward were put forward with the intent that this government, as a team, would be able to address these issues.

So, again, I ask the minister if he would provide for me how his department is moving forward with regard to these types of areas.

Mr. Chief: I would like to start by, of course, sharing some information that the member had

asked. I did say, and I'm glad that the member attempted to quote me, that the things that we learn before the age of five stay with us for the rest of our lives. We do deeply believe that, and that's why we continue to invest in our prenatal benefit.

We do know that, and we've been told by many people, that if you want to maximize the potential of a child, starts before they're born, making sure that moms and future moms that are pregnant have the financial support they need to have good nutrition. We know that's making a difference. The babies that are born of parents that are part of the prenatal benefit, their babies are often born a healthy baby weight. They carry them full term. And so—and we know this because this is some of the data that we collect.

* (16:00)

But we don't just stop at supporting at the prenatal benefit. We also—that also comes with a community-based program called the Healthy Baby program. We want to make sure that as parents—as new parents are getting that support, that they understand the services and resources that are in their community. Once again, that's a program that we know is making a difference every day, that works in partnership with health professionals, with our educational partners, with our family, with our family resource centres.

We also know how important it was to reinstate the National Child Benefit and the big difference that that's making for families all throughout the province.

I got to tell you, when I had my—when I had one—my son, Hayden, my wife and I, of course, being brand new parents, we were—we, of course, didn't have a lot of confidence and, you know, although we have resources even as new parents, we were quite—you know, we were quite intimidated. And I got to tell you, I was very proud, and I, you know—I live in Winnipeg's North End and a nurse came to my house as part of our Families First home-visiting program and spent time answering our questions, provided us with information, gave us a list of programs and initiatives that were available to us as brand new parents.

I got to say, they asked my wife, particularly, some incredibly difficult questions that it was really important data and information to get from my wife on a whole number of fronts, including myself as a new father. We knew that those questions were

difficult for those nurses to ask but incredibly important. I do want to say, Mr. Chair, that the way in which those questions were asked and getting that information was done with complete professionalism, but we got to see—I got to see first-hand the work that's happening right on the front line so that we can get the information we need to be able to invest into the communities that need it the most.

Very proud of the investments—and I've got to sit with many members in the Legislature, including members opposite—and the investments we're making through parent-child coalitions, where we're bringing together health professionals, educators, where we're bringing together organizations, non-profit organizations, including the business community. I'm glad to sit with school trustees. I've even actually got to sit with my former critic from Lac du Bonnet at a parent-child coalition, and we got to hear first-hand up in his region of Manitoba how we can share and deliver services in a more effective way.

So investments into parent-child coalition—were the first jurisdiction in the nation to come out with the Abecedarian Approach that put a lot of emphasis on literacy, language and numeracy. We do recognize that young people that, before they enter school—how important it is for them to be able to count and know their colours. And we know that when they walk into school—and in my opening statement, I talked about the importance of belonging—and when a young person, on their first day of school, their literacy and numeracy and their language is at a high level, they're going to know they belong in school, and it's going to, of course, address and improve graduation rates.

Mr. Chair, we're very proud of the partnerships that we have with Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, the various Aboriginal organizations out throughout the province. Of course, we work a lot with First Nations leadership on the delivery of our programs—programs like our Roots of Empathy program where a baby, known as Manitoba's youngest teacher, goes into a classroom with a mom to teach things like empathy. We, of course, have family resource centres all throughout the province. Those, we know, are making a difference every day in not only children's lives but in parents' lives as well. Our family literacy programs make a huge difference in people's lives.

We, of course, do do a lot of granting. We support non-profit organizations like friendship

centres all throughout the province of Manitoba, organizations like Rossbrook House, Gilbert Park Going Places program. We know that when we make these kinds of investments, it is making a big difference.

And I do want to be able to let the member know that we also continue to invest in the Early Development Instrument, the EDI, that—where we can actually measure and get information to teachers and that can see where some of the academic challenges are for young people that are there. These are a lot of programs that we continue to invest in.

We continue to collect information. I do want to be able to say that we do pride ourselves on the work that we do on collecting research and data and then sharing that information with the community. I do want to recognize and say it for the record, we're very proud of the work that we do for Manitoba Centre for Health Policy at the University of Manitoba. That information is shared widely with a variety of community partners. You know, we know that the investments we're making are making a difference, but, of course, if we can improve on those investments, that's what we want to do. And that's why we continue to invest in research and evaluation and just as importantly make sure that we share that information with the community and, of course, members of the Legislature.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you for the information that I received from the minister. I know that at the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry there was discussion about the need to emphasize early learning and early child development, and that would look at giving every child the opportunity for brain development that helps them succeed later in life. So, when the minister was talking about these initiatives, I support them. I believe in them. But what we also heard in contradiction to what the minister was just saying is that there needs to be a need for holistic supports. There's a wide range of services, but families are often not being able to access these services. They have to travel to different service centres to receive multiple services at multiple locations, and we see that that seems to be a trend with this government. They seem to be—instead of pulling resources together they are now separating different types of supports under different departments. We're seeing EIA under Jobs and Economy. We're seeing Child and Family Services supports for social work under their department. We see Manitoba Housing, public housing having to go to, you know, a different department for those types of services.

So I'm just wanting to ask the minister if they have looked at ways that they're going to be addressing the needs of—needs for individuals who are requiring these supports and how they plan to provide them in a more meaningful way that would take stress away from having to travel to various locations for supports.

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member, once again, for the question. I do want to provide some additional information on some of the programs that I did just initially highlight, because the delivery of those programs, they're never done alone.

The Healthy Baby community support program reaches over 3,500 women in the province, and since 2004 there's been over 25,000 women touched by the Healthy Baby program. I do want to say that, as part of that program, that brings in Health officials to work in that program. As I said, it starts right at the prenatal stage with nurses, but also takes into account our family resource centres, and a lot of this information is passed back and forth in terms of how we can support families. Our educational partners are there.

*(16:10)

I was able to talk about our prenatal care and how important that is where we actually bring in the, like, the University of Manitoba, the Health authorities, our Healthy Child Manitoba office to look at different ways in which we can reach some of our most vulnerable families. These are ways in which we're coordinating some of those services. Every investment we make has multiple partners.

We also know that, as part of the prenatal benefit, reaches over 3,500 women. Once again, that comes into a lot of partnership with our First Nation leaders, of course our health authorities. All of these programs that we deliver are working in partnership with one another, often bringing regions together, that's why we continue to bring in and invest in 26 parent-child coalitions all throughout the province of Manitoba. We know that in different regions, some of the needs are different, and what one program may work in one region may not work in another. So we make sure to bring together the experts, the people with the most experience in the regions by investing in our parent-child coalitions. We deeply believe in that.

Mr. Chair, we invest in making sure that we're providing parenting programs. In fact, there's over 200 communities touched by some of the parenting

programs that we're working with. We make sure that we continue to invest, not just on the research side of the work that we're doing, but making sure that there's ways in which we can organize ourselves to come together through conferences, through events so that people who have information, you know, it may be a project on prenatal care, but we want to have education partners there because we know that that kind of investment is going to make a big difference when those children enter school.

So we continue to find ways to find partnerships, to bring unlikely partners in. You know, this approach, because it's evidence-based, has been able to bring in people with a unique experience, and that experience could be around business, people like Gregg Hanson, people like the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. I'm very proud that the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce has put a lot of priority, that represents thousands of businesses, to support some of our most vulnerable families.

As I stated before, one of the biggest foundations in the nation is now making investments here in Manitoba. So they're willing to do these things because they know that we have to find ways to bring many people in, to partner in effective ways. And so when we deal—in any of our programs, one of the things that we try to do by region, by neighbourhood, by community is to co-ordinate our services, co-ordinate the resources to support individual families in neighbourhoods. This is something that is always going to be a work in progress. You're always going to have to continue to find ways to do this. You're always going to have to find ways in which to engage family by family, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, community by community. What I'm saying is that those investments are there to continue to try to do that.

Mrs. Rowat: I found the comments from the minister encouraging, but I'd also like to ask him what his thoughts are with regard to the Child and Family Services Information System. That's a data management system that supports case tracking and reporting of services that are provided to children and families as they pass through the child and family services system.

The minister talked about partnerships and how partnerships need to be created and grow into effective services or supports and these have to be co-ordinated. I would like to ask the minister, this information management system has been on the radar of the Auditor General's prior to 2006. She

introduced the report in 2006, and at that time she recommended this as something that is required to ensure that children could be—and the services they're receiving, both the children and the families, that they are receiving adequate services, that they're not falling through the cracks, and just, you know, something that is really required to pull it altogether with regard to partnerships and to ensuring that their services are co-ordinated. And I think that Carol Bellringer summed it up perfectly when she said, if this system, you know, even though it is expensive and has been at one point denied funding by Cabinet or Treasury Board, that should be very shocking to Manitobans because if Manitoba Lotteries can track every dime, why can't Child and Family Services track every child?

So I'm wanting to ask the minister what his thoughts are with regard to this very important database system that is critical in the tracking and reporting of services provided to children and families and what his role is with regard to child and youth, and ask if he is pushing for funding for this type of initiative.

Mr. Chief: Once again, the question that the member has, that would be a question directed to the minister of Child and Family Services. Her and her officials could provide the information that she is asking me. I believe that the minister now is actually in Estimates as well, so. But, even if she wasn't in Estimates, I'm sure the minister would be more than willing to provide the member with the information she's requesting.

Mrs. Rowat: I thank the minister for his comments.

I think what I'm asking is for the minister to confirm that this system, this information tracking system, is critical for the initiatives that he's just spoken of with regard services being provided to children and families. If you don't have a database that is there to support the information that is being shared by the different bodies that are providing supports for families, I think that is a huge gap in the government's ability to track and to ensure that families and children at risk are receiving the supports they need, so it is unfortunate.

I'd ask the minister, then, if another recommendation that was put forward was the push for funding for transition programs for Aboriginal people leaving First Nation communities—they recognized and identified a recommendation that there needs to be supports for families transitioning out of First Nation communities to urban centres.

And I know that, when I've met with various First Nation and Aboriginal women's organizations, they have indicated that when women either stand up to or—their spouses and are expelled from the home and from the community, often they—all they have is the vehicle they're travelling in, if they're lucky enough to have one, or are travelling by means of bus or other means with two children or three children in tow, and there doesn't seem to be any help in supporting those women to get back on their feet.

So I'm wanting to know if the minister has any comment or opinion with regard to the resources to assist these young children and these—often these mothers are not 18; they're younger than that. Just wanting to know what he would recommend with regard to that initiative that was put forward by the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. It is a community-led initiative, and child and family—or children and youth is a community-focused department.

* (16:20)

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for the question. It's a very good question. I do want to let the member know that our department—and, you know, we do put a lot of emphasis on that transition from our First Nation, from our Metis communities. We do know that transition can be quite difficult, and not only can it be difficult, but once and often what could happen is once they're transitioned into an urban area there could be something that happened back in one of their home communities or they could be having an issue with something going on back home and many of their, you know, they're thinking of their loved ones back in their community. And sometimes there is transition back and forth. I would like to let the member know that we—I see this is as a—as the MLA for Point Douglas, I have a high rate of families that move into Point Douglas, stay a number of months, sometimes a year, sometimes two years and then they move back home, back to northern Manitoba, Norway House.

And so what we have seen, though, is how important organizations like Friendship Centres throughout the province play in the lives of adults, grandparents, of children. Having those consistent programs, we do know some of those places where people go to look for their service, you know, your confidence can be down, you know, you're asking for help. I can let the member know that's an incredibly difficult thing to do when you don't have a lot of resources and you want to go somewhere where you know people can appreciate and can understand that.

We, of course, support Friendship Centres and we support the programs they provide. We do have support. We pride ourselves in the partnership with organizations like the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development that put a lot of emphases on education, employment and training for families and also do recognize that there's a willingness to work from an urban area directly with a First Nations community. So what can happen is that urban Aboriginal organizations, which you're seeing more and more and more happen now, is those organizations, even though they're based in Winnipeg will be in constant communication with First Nation and Metis communities all throughout the province to make sure that those services and resources and that transition is happening as smoothly as possible.

We're seeing that not just in education, employment, training; we're seeing organizations like the Aboriginal health and wellness that plays not only a role in physical health—of course, a mom with—a single mom with children and she wants to be able to go to doctor or go somewhere where she feels comfortable—but they also play a major role in spiritual health and how important culture is to families whether they're in their home communities or whether they're in an urban area. I was very proud of the work that I get to see every day with organizations that deliver support for young people, Aboriginal non-profit organizations like the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre. I know the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) took the time to come for a tour and to see it first-hand: young people, unemployable young people that are Aboriginal that are being hired. They're being trained. Because of that happening, often those can ripple and support families. Some of these young people are—that are hired, they're teenagers and they have children. And so organizations like the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre play a role in that.

We, of course, believe that for families in an urban area—many families even though they're Aboriginal doesn't mean that they necessarily want to go to an Aboriginal organization. So we want to provide supports to organizations, family resource programs all throughout the province, that if they are going to an organization that isn't Aboriginal-based we still want them to know that that's where they belong, that they can get the services and resources.

What these organizations do and why it's important we continue to fund them is because they

consistently try to remove barriers that hinder participation. That could be anything from struggling to get transportation, that could be child care, that could be simply the idea of going to ask someone for help when you know that you really need that help, and that's a difficult thing to do. So we want to support Aboriginal non-profit organizations like our Friendship Centres, but we also want to make sure that we're seeing mainstream organizations provide the service in a way that's going to continue to remove barriers to help with that transition as much as possible. We think it's important to continue to bring people together as much as important it is to get information to them, to talk to them. It's also important that we bring them together. That's why we consistently have an After School Network where people come together; that's why we often will participate. I personally participate when friendship centres come together; I make sure that we take the time to visit. And a big part of this was the consultation processes that I spent a lot of time doing. Getting out and talking to people when they're under one roof makes a huge difference.

And so the co-ordination of these services, I think a great example of that is when you see an urban Aboriginal organization or a mainstream organization, a family resource centre, spending time with people's home communities to find ways in which they can support that child, support that family, support parents, support grandparents—anyone who's going to provide that circle of care for that child. We don't—we not only do we encourage that, but we invest in that.

Mrs. Rowat: I appreciate the comments from the minister, but I don't believe it's working as well as he's leading us to believe. And I believe that the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry did address that, that there were recommendations, strong recommendations, for community supports. There has to be a better need—or better—a better overall need for government funding in order to run those programs. There needs to be an emphasis on early learning and children—early childhood education. There needs to be a better way of providing programs that are holistic so that families don't have to travel all over to access different services in multiple locations. These are not my words; these are the words of the recommendations being shared by the judge at the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. So we know that, you know, there are things being done, but there needs to be a better way of co-ordinating these services and supports.

What we're hearing is that there has to be some strong leadership, that there doesn't—that there appears to be, and it shouldn't be, is that everybody's involved but nobody in charge. There has to be, I believe, a stronger emphasis on ensuring that no child is turned away from supports that are available and should be available to an individual who's at risk. So I appreciate the minister's comments, but I do believe that there's a significant number of challenges that have not been addressed and will be needing to be addressed to ensure that the 10,000 children-plus in care and other children at risk throughout Manitoba are being taken care of.

I want to get into another area with the minister: childhood obesity and the challenges that Manitoba is facing with regard to an increasing number of children and youth who are labelled as obese. In Manitoba, one third of all children are considered overweight or obese compared to 26 per cent nationally. So we have a lot of work to do in this area, and how this hits Manitobans in their—in a financial way is obesity costs our provincial health-care system more than \$762 million a year. So we need to be identifying a reduction strategy—obesity reduction strategy. We need to ensure that there are outcomes that are successful because we know that child obesity in Manitoba may cause this generation of children to be the first to have a shorter lifespan than their parents. And that statistic and that statement is very, very concerning.

So I'd like to ask the minister what prevention efforts would he share with us that he knows are working presently with his government and with Manitobans receiving those supports, and how he is actually tracking that success. I know that the former minister indicated that we are looking at healthy eating and weights, and it's unbelievable the results for such a little cost. So I'd like to know—it was the former minister indicating that, obviously, they're being tracked, the results are being prepared and have been presented to him. I'd like to know if the minister could provide to me the results that would indicate that child obesity is actually being addressed and that we're moving in the right direction instead of the direction of a third of all children being considered overweight.

* (16:30)

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for the question; once again, very good question.

I do want to say, on the prevention front, many of the programs that particularly—that I highlighted

through early childhood development clearly is prevention for childhood obesity. The prenatal benefit is one example. The results we see from the prenatal benefit is that moms carry their babies to full term, it does increase that. Their child is born at a much healthy baby weight. I also did—mentioned—that, of course, leads to programs like our Healthy Baby programs. I think when we take the time to bring people together, like through parent-child coalitions, often what you would see is nutrition in different parts of our province is often talked about.

We have a program called—that's being delivered throughout the province—called Wiggle, Giggle and Munch. Wiggle is getting the body moving, giggle is to make it fun—we have to recognize how important play is for young people in getting them healthy and active—and the munch is the idea of nutrition. These are the kinds of programs that we deliver, of course, in partnership with community; they're often referenced through the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy.

Mr. Chair, we are working with the Manitoba institute for child health under the leadership of Dr. Jon McGavock, a program called Healthy Buddies program. Results are from that are in the journal of American Medical Association, pediatrics. So we're—what we're recognizing is investing in early childhood development is the most effective way to deal with childhood obesity—making sure we're doing that in partnership with organizations throughout.

I do want to let the member know—particularly not just in areas that I represent but particularly in areas that she represents as well in the Legislature—if she goes and looks at the programs that we deliver throughout the province of Manitoba, what you will find is they often put a lot of emphasis on getting young people active and busy but just as importantly, when we talked about the importance of the health and wellness of young people, that will always include a nutrition component. Organizations not only provide opportunities for young people to build their skills and give them good supervision and give them structure, but what they'll often do is provide a nutrition component because they know and realize how valuable that is.

One of the things that I heard as I travelled the province on early childhood development is how do we get back to the basic idea of play? How do we make sure that young people are out there simply playing and enjoying themselves? And we're seeing—these are the kinds of initiatives that we're doing all

throughout the province. We, of course, work with the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, the Manitoba Institute of Child Health, and believe that with investment in early childhood development, it does make a difference. It is the best way to prevent childhood obesity.

We also know that the program that I was highlighting earlier, the first of its kind in the country, the Abecedarian Approach—although it puts emphasis on literacy, language and numeracy skills for children before they enter school, we also know there's a nutrition component and that also decreases obesity as well.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): A year ago, it became very clear that the Healthy Baby program was only being taken up by less than a quarter of the children who actually need it. Wonder if the minister has an update in terms of whether the effort around the province has had an impact and whether the numbers are now higher.

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for River Heights for the question.

I was able to highlight a few programs, and one of the programs I did highlight, of course, was the Healthy Baby program. I do want to let the member know I got to travel the province and talk to people about the importance of early childhood development, and one of our partners is the partners in inner-city prenatal care, also known—the acronym is PIIPC. We're currently doing a three-year research partnership with the University of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the Healthy Child Manitoba office.

* (16:40)

We're implementing a range of incentives and approaches to connect with our most vulnerable women, in particular, to reduce high rates of inadequate prenatal care, including introducing them to midwives through six Healthy Baby sites. And there's also, of course, different ways in which we're doing outreach to support these women and to engage them. We said that we do recognize that the programs that we have do make a difference, but there's always going to be need for engaging our most vulnerable families. Some of the work that has been done. We know that the opportunity to apply and get support to the Prenatal Benefit actually does lead to a lot of these women getting the medical care

that they need. I also do want to be able to say that the program, we're noticing, is culturally sensitive and culturally relevant to many of the moms as we do that. We have a StreetReach van that we're doing in partnership, of course, with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. There are different incentives for these women in terms of engaging them, getting the care that they need, and it's important to recognize that we are collecting information and data so that we can improve how the—how we're delivering the program and that if there are gaps, that we're investing in a way to close those gaps.

I did spend a lot of time with many women who do struggle to get prenatal care, and, you know, we're seeing that things like the Prenatal Benefit do play a role in helping us engage vulnerable women and people who need it the most.

Mrs. Rowat: Back to the indicators with regard to child obesity. Can the minister indicate to me what—whether his government supports a sodium reduction strategy in Manitoba?

Mr. Chief: That question would be—the—would be—should be directed to the minister of Health and Healthy Living.

Mrs. Rowat: I don't agree. A sodium reduction strategy would be one of the components necessary in a childhood obesity reduction strategy, so the minister's responsible for children and youth, I'm asking him if he would support a sodium reduction strategy in Manitoba.

Mr. Chief: I, of course, want to give the member the best information that I could provide based on the Estimates of Children and Youth Opportunities. If I had that information I'd provide it. But if I know other departments and other ministers have that information and she can get a much more detailed answer, that's where I think that question should be directed.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister's department is responsible for Healthy Child Manitoba, and I'm wanting to know if Healthy Child Manitoba have discussed a sodium reduction strategy for Manitoba.

Mr. Chief: Once again, I'd just like to let the member know I want to provide as much information as I can for her. The best place to direct that question would be to the minister of Health and Healthy Living.

Mrs. Rowat: So I'm—from the answer that I'm getting from the minister is that that's not something his department is looking at?

Mr. Chief: I'll just reiterate again. The—when it comes to sodium reduction, and the lead department and lead minister where the member could get the best information and get a clear, concise update on facts, on partnerships, including the relationship and what's happening at the federal level, which I think is incredibly important, the best person to talk to would be the minister for Health and Healthy Living.

Mrs. Rowat: So what I'm getting is very little assurance that prevention efforts are being made by this government or—and this minister is failing to address that issue. Child obesity strategies by this government have not been successful, especially since one third of all children are considered overweight or obese. Self-reporting, we're seeing an increase of almost 1,000 children from 2009-2012 self-identifying as overweight. This would be something, I believe, that the minister responsible for children and youth would be taking a lead on. Fifty-five per cent of Manitobans are overweight, 400 per cent chronic illnesses among children. There's a 400 per cent increase in chronic illness among children compared to a generation ago. So these are alarming statistics and they are well-founded.

So I'm very curious to know why the minister is refusing to respond to the question with regard to a sodium reduction strategy in Manitoba and if he is supportive of it—and just responding to it and indicating that there is some interest in this area.

Mr. Chief: Well, you know, I'll gladly talk, and I have been providing as much information as I can, of course, on prevention, including when it comes to child obesity. If the member's asking specifically about sodium reduction, I've said over and over again the best person to get that information from is Health and Healthy Living. It would only make the most sense for—if she wants to talk about sodium reduction to go to the minister of Health and Healthy Living, ask that question. She'd get—she'd be able to get the answer. You want to talk about child obesity and prevention, I'll gladly talk about the difference that's happening and the support that's being provided of prenatal benefits. I've highlighted that. You know, of course, of—when you provide the National Child Benefit and—that was reinstated. That's making a difference. When you co-ordinate services and you

bring people together through parent-child coalitions, we know that these make a difference. We know that Families First home visiting program—certainly, the nurse who visited me and my wife provided a lot of great information for the overall physical well-being of my newly born child. We know that the Abecedarian Approach in places like Lord Selkirk Park make a difference when it comes to child obesity. We know that's a lot of Aboriginal leadership in the province of Manitoba that's spending a lot of time dealing with obesity, and when you're spending time to remove barriers for young people to fully participate, often through organizations, through our schools, through many of the investments we make, all of them include a nutrition component. And so we not only support that, but we invest in that.

Mrs. Rowat: But facts speak for themselves. Child obesity in Manitoba is outpacing the national average. Evaluation of Manitoba's children and youth indicates that childhood obesity is a growing concern in Manitoba with—and the stats of one third of all children are considered overweight or obese, compared to 26 per cent nationally, are not figures that would be supporting successful outcomes in this province. So I'm disappointed, but I'll carry on to another ask.

Will the minister indicate to me whether he supports initiatives to reduce consumption of sugary drinks such as, you know, sweetened beverages. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recommends sugar-sweetened beverages taxation and portion control regulations. I just want to know if the minister would provide me with his thoughts on that, Heart and Stroke's recommendations and what his thoughts are going forward with his government.

Mr. Chief: Once again, Mr. Chair, the question the member is asking, of course, I want her to get the best information and as much information as she can on what our government's doing. That question should be directed to the minister for Health and Healthy Living.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Rowat: I'd like to ask the minister what his position is with regard to funding healthy eating education programs in Manitoba schools. I know that, you know, that was something that was looked at. There's, you know, school-based gardens, et cetera, but there seems to be a disconnect with that initiative and I'm just wanting to know what the

status is of that type of initiative and if he's taking the leadership role in that?

Mr. Chief: I thank the member for the question. The school nutrition programs and guidelines is with the minister for Health and Healthy Living.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm going to go into another area. The strategy would be child and youth suicide reduction. And I'm wanting to get the minister's input and comments with regard to the increase in number of children, youth, who have committed suicide in the last year—2012-2013 there was 17, and that's up from 13 the year before.

The Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and I have had a back and forth on this issue. We both agree, and I know that this minister would wholeheartedly agree, that this is not something that we can ignore. Children and youth suicides is becoming more and more of a concern in Manitoba. Younger and younger children are taking their own lives. I believe four children were under the age of 12, and we've—that's the youngest ages we've seen in our province, so we need to be addressing this issue.

I know that whatever's been decided by this government, since 2008, with regard to a strategy, has not been working; the numbers speak for themselves. So I'd like to ask the minister if he would comment on that and also comment on the ASIST program that was being delivered by the Province and the university, and the outcomes with regard to that program.

Mr. Chief: I want to thank the member for the question. It's a very important question and I do thank her for acknowledging and saying for the record the commitment that not only she has, but, of course, the Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

You know that when one young person needs—feels that this is a—the solution, that's one young person too many.

I do want to say, for the record, that I spent much of my time as part of my career travelling to different parts of Manitoba doing, in essence, suicide prevention work. It was a lot of emphasis on the important of providing recreation opportunities, leadership development for young people, removing those barriers that exist for young people. And if you talk to young people with those—with—what they'll

tell you is some of those values that I talked about before, and all young people need something positive to belong to. Sometimes that is culturally relevant. Sometimes that means some place, a physical place to go and be and do some positive things.

We also know that when we invest in programs—and I want to say, for the record, that the programs that I was able to highlight earlier around early childhood development, we know that those programs do make a difference. We also know that it's important that young people's skills and talents are actually being developed and maximized and utilized. And so we know how important it is and to provide the kinds of programs and initiatives that are going to be able to do that.

I also want to be able to say that many of the programs that we offer through Children and Youth Opportunities and the organizations we work with, I do want to acknowledge the work of our First Nations leadership, our Metis communities, that we do recognize that we have to work together to invest and do what we can to make sure that young people have positive things and that we have the opportunity to collectively work together to come up with mental illness prevention and mental health promotion.

With that said, though, I do—I would just like to say, for the record, for the member, the suicide prevention strategy is under the minister for Health and Healthy Living and so is the ASIST program.

Mrs. Rowat: I just want to put on the record the office of the Children's Advocate had chosen youth suicide of—as one of the four key themes in their 2012-2013 annual report. And the report said the changing pattern of suicide that now includes a greater proportion of girls, an increasing trend of strangulation and a—and possibly a younger demographic all speak to the need to re-evaluate our approach to youth suicide.

I think that what the Children's Advocate's office has put on the record is important, and I think that the government has to be aware that what has been implemented in the past is not working and that we need to see a better system in place of evaluating youth suicide.

We know that there's, you know, a wealth of experience, knowledge and expertise out there to approach suicide as a public health issue, and including child and youth department. And there are preventable ways of dealing with this. But there

doesn't appear to be a very strong strategy in place, and what we're seeing are more children taking their lives as a result of pain, hopelessness and despair.

So I want some assurance from this minister that this is something that is being discussed through Healthy Child and that there is work being done to re-evaluate the approach that has been taken in the past because I believe the statistics that are being presented in Manitoba are very concerning. When we are seeing trends that are opposite of what is 'happelling' nationally, we need to be cognizant of the fact that something isn't working, whatever's been implemented isn't working, and that we need to have a very, very clear strategy—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

FAMILY SERVICES

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Order, please. When we last sat, the minister had been giving her opening statement when she was interrupted by the 5 p.m. adjournment. She technically has—let me begin again.

Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be resuming consideration of the Estimates for Family Services. As I said, the minister was speaking. She has three and a half minutes left.

Did the minister want to continue for her remaining time, or has she completed her introductory remarks?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I have completed my remarks.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, have any opening comments?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'd like to thank the minister for her opening remarks. She definitely referenced a number of areas that we have expressed quite a bit of interest in, including the autism area and then further dollars for autism care. It's to reduce the waiting list.

We also have quite a lot of interest in what's going on in the community living area in particular these days because there's been a number of

agencies, and we'll get into this in question, but a number of agencies that have been expressing some concern about their ability to sustain themselves in the future, so we'll certainly be wanting to look at that.

But probably her most interesting remark, and I'm not sure whether it was actually in her opening remarks or a comment she made the other day in the House about the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry being transformative in the child and family services and child-welfare systems, and in that area we certainly agree. There's certainly a lot of work that is done, and the—Justice Hughes certainly pointed out a lot of areas where considerable work remains to be done. I know that some have been started and perhaps even a few have been completed, but there's still more than half of the report that needs to be implemented in some way, and some of those are fairly major in regards to what impact they will have on the child-welfare system.

So we're certainly interested in talking and asking a few questions about that, along with child care and a number of other specific areas, including some of the linkages that should now be in place. I had a chance to ask a few questions of the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald) and to explore further how the linkages between those that are receiving income assistance and Jobs and the Economy might actually be changed because of the structure of the department.

So, certainly, with those few comments, I would look forward to asking some questions of the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank the member for Portage la Prairie.

Under Manitoba Practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and staff from the official opposition to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated, we'll ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance and the critic to also introduce staff in attendance.

Honourable Minister of Family Services to introduce her staff.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am very pleased and honoured to be joined by the Deputy Minister, Joy Cramer; the assistant deputy minister for child and family division, Ben Van Haute; Charlene Paquin, the assistant deputy minister for community service; and Aurel Tess, the assistant deputy minister for Administration and Finance.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank the minister. Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Wishart: We would like to have a global discussion if that's agreeable.

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: It is agreed. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wishart: I guess I'd like to start by asking a few questions about the linkages that I referred to. And as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I have had a chance to ask a few questions in Jobs and the Economy and to try and establish some linkages.

And certainly it's—well, the implication was that there would be some form of linkage between those that were receiving EI and possibly could move into the labour market, and Jobs and the Economy, and that there would be some process to move these people through this—through some process so that they might be—find some advantage in marketplace. And I wondered if the minister could expand on what she has in mind in this area.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we have the pleasure of working very closely with Jobs and the Economy. The policy branch of employment and income assistance was transferred there approximately two years ago, and we continue at Family Services to work with the direct-service-delivery arm across the province. So we have regional officers in the rural, in the North and in Winnipeg, where direct services have been provided to individuals.

I really see that the new partnership with Jobs and the Economy is going to open up a number of doors and avenues for the individuals, the clients that we represent. Specifically right now the target group that we have chosen to work with are single parents. We work extremely closely with a array of community stakeholders, Urban Circle, Ka Ni Kani Chihk, as well as representatives from the North at Opaskwayak Cree Nation; that's just an example of

some of the community members that sit around the table.

And in collaboration with them we've been able to identify a really important strategy and root for individuals from EIA to work, and it is a process which provides self-evaluation but also support for individuals throughout the entire process.

So we have done information sessions; they are voluntary for individuals for participate. We have noted out of the hundreds of people that have attended these information sessions that a number of them have expressed an interest about the opportunity of employment. We have started to do further work with them, further assessments and career tracking with them and are now working on what are some employment opportunities for them or educational opportunities, looking at apprenticeship programs.

So I'm extremely excited that this pathway has been developed in partnership with Jobs and the Economy and Family Services, and I have a lot of belief that it's—we are going to see success.

I know that as we continue to work with this single-parent population we are also going to be working with people with disability, and that, too, will provide opportunities.

In this budget you will have seen that there was a commitment made to Red River College for Transforming Futures which will be a brand new innovative project in partnership with small business, as well as a post-secondary education for people with intellectual disabilities to identify a career path for them, provide them with life-skill training if that's needed, and then provide them with the necessary support to see them achieve their goal.

* (15:00)

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that response. In terms of the single parent in particular, the minister made reference to the supports that they might need, which would be, I would assume, often child care, things like transportation is often an issue. We—drawing this experience from individual cases and then access to the right type of training.

What additional supports would they be receiving while they were working their way through that process because it is certainly a multi-year, probably, multi-year process that they would likely be entering into?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are a variety of programs that the participants can register in but some of the benefits, as you've stated, are transportation, there's a clothing allowance, there are school supplies, of course, our robust child-care strategy, there's also tuition and training supports that are being provided to the individuals. There are programs, and I know that the member is familiar—Rewarding Work is one of our signature pieces, and what we're doing is we're bringing all of these programs together and providing a one-stop shop for the individuals. And we believe that with the support and the acknowledgement of some of the barriers that the individuals face, that we will be able to successfully support them transition to work, if that's what they choose to do.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that response, and I know that a number of these programs have been in place, but I repeatedly run into people that are finding trouble—or having trouble navigating the system to make it work for them. So I'm wondering if anything special has been done here to make this more user-friendly and more easily negotiated on the part of. The minister specifically mentioned single parents but there is also those with learning disabilities and physical disabilities. Anything specific for these three different groups?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we—over the last few years, EIA has consciously made a decision to make sure that they are providing a better quality customer service. I'm not saying that we have it 100 per cent right today; we have a lot more work to do, but we really have taken some of the 'brureaucracy' out—'brureaucracy'—bureaucratic language out of our information that we're providing, that we are making sure that it is user-friendly, that they know what their rights are, they know what their responsibilities are.

And, yes, right now, as I have stated, that our focus is on single parents and yes, I agree that there is a lot more work that needs to be done with other groups, but we have been providing supportive employment programs through a number of community agencies. The one that comes to mind right now is SSCOPE, and I know in your own area of Portage la Prairie that there are many strong programs that are providing services with—for individuals with intellectual disabilities, and we appreciate the quality of life that that provides for them as far as employment and the value of earning money. I've heard from a number of our clients that I've spoken with, and Donovan comes to mind right away—when he was able to find employment and no

longer be on Employment and Income Assistance and what that meant for him to feel independent.

And so we continue to work with individuals as we go forward. In our—in the department we also have specific strategies and assessment tools that I've mentioned before. One of the pieces that we're doing with the department staff is doing a training module called motivational interviewing, and we're merely providing staff with the tools to ask the right questions and to do it in a non-threatening way. That's really important that we are working in partnership with all of our clients.

And also within the system we have what we call is job connection staff. And those, too, are helping to find out if there is a specific skill that's needed within our economy. Let's find the individuals to do that. And what kind of supports do we have to put in place, whether it's life-skills supports, education, apprenticeship, to help train people up to those positions, but also making sure that after that employment has been found, providing ongoing supports to them, and if they're—do run into issues or conflict, doing problem solving so that they can be very successful.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for the answers there. I'd like to move on a little bit, I guess, sort of in a different area and talk about the service providers, community-living service providers. And I know there are literally more than 100 agencies, I think, that the department contracts with. And I don't need that right today, but I would certainly appreciate a list of all of the contract agencies that currently the ministry does work with.

But I had some specific questions that we've been hearing from a number of the service providers for those with learning disabilities, particularly in rural areas. And, Mr. Chair, their concern is the sustainability of the program that they're in. One, Westman-Parkland, actually went so far as to say they would be discontinuing services, and I know that an arrangement has been hammered out to—for them to continue services.

But I guess I'd like to know where we're headed here. We have heard from a number of others, and I'm sure the minister has, too, about their concerns about being sustainable in the long run. And if there's a specific model that has been worked out for Westman-Parkland, would the minister be so kind as to expand upon that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not sure if this will give the member comfort or me fear, that we are—I'm thinking exactly along the same lines about how do we make the community living division for adults sustainable, because that's one of our challenges right now. And I have gone just not very far in the province, but I have attended to community agencies within Winnipeg and outside of Winnipeg, and I've had that conversation with front-line staff, with not-for-profit service providers and families themselves. And we've had a conversation about how do we make the program more sustainable. And we all accept that in its current form, it isn't sustainable.

I am sure the member has heard me talk about how we have increased funding by 400 per cent to support people with intellectual disabilities and we have made a number of program enhancements. And we've—also have worked with agencies around staffing stabilization and we'll continue to work very closely with our partners.

You made reference to a funding formula, and I'm proud to say that we are working with all of our partners now and we are reviewing what would a funding formula look like. The first step is doing assessments, and they are the SIS assessments, which stand for—somebody—[*interjection*]-the Supports Intensity Scale assessment which will give us sort of our baseline.

* (15:10)

As we move forward what we have found out is that there is an equity and a fairness issue that we need to address, and we believe that the funding formula will not only provide us with a—sort of a template about what funding will look like, but also will give agencies some predictability.

We are very fortunate that we work with 102 agencies across this province who provide quality service to the most vulnerable people of the province of Manitoba, and we will continue to work alongside of them as we come up with a strategy. I had the privilege of meeting with Abilities Manitoba last week where we have made a commitment that we will work together with open communication and that our ultimate goal is about sustainability, as well as providing support to the staff that work in the system but at the centre of all of that, and the priority is the quality of service for the clients that we serve.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for her answers in that regard.

Supports Intensity Scale—and I know that the scale of remuneration that the contracted agencies and the not-for-profits had been receiving for the last 10 years or so was a draft scale that everybody had been working with for approximately 10 years. So is this in place now or—and, if it's not in place now, what is the consultation process regarding this? Is it formal?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I would just like to put on the record so people that choose to listen to this and that choose to read Hansard will understand what, when we talk about the Supports Intensity Scale, what we really mean. And the SIS is a valid and reliable assessment tool that's designed to measure the type, frequency and intensity of support an individual needs to participate in community living.

We piloted this tool in the Westman area and we found it very successful, as we—before we piloted it and while we piloted it, we had a number of conversations with community organizations, as well as family members, and explained what we—what the goal was, and we are now in the process of applying it across the province. And, as we move forward with this plan, we will have a community engagement strategy, which we have endorsed, and we have made it—community agencies are very familiar with this community engagement plan and encourage us to follow it. It's one of collaboration, sharing of information and working for the same goal.

So I am confident in the very capable staff in the Community Living division that they will be able to successfully work with all community agencies and families and apply this assessment tool and provide us with the data we need to ensure that we are having a sustainable system that will provide good quality service. I should tell the member that all new intakes that come into the system, as of this fiscal year, the SIS tool will be applied to them. So it's a—it will again make sure that we have some continuity of funding.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister, and I'm sure I do listen to her responses.

But the reason I asked for clarification there is I'd recently had a conversation with the outgoing CEO from Westman-Parkland, and he was very clear in his information that he was still working under the old funding formula and had seen no change. So I guess I'm having a fair bit of difficulty aligning that statement with what the minister had to say.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Please allow me to clarify.

The SIS is an assessment tool. It is not of the funding formula. This assessment tool will help us develop the funding formula, which has not been defined yet. This will happen as we proceed with all of our partners and develop our baseline information and work with—we are also working across jurisdictions. The funding formulas have been applied in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and we are learning from all of their lessons. This will be a lengthy process. This is an essential process around sustainability, and this is a process that will happen with partners from the not-for-profit organization, as well as our own staff will be working very closely with them and using their expertise, as well as families. There will be a community engagement strategy that will be applied as we proceed.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister. So both statements are correct in that regard then. The CEO's statement is still working under the old funding formula. The minister has corrected that the assessment of all new placements is being done with the SIS system, and I assume at some point there'll be an alignment between the funding formula and the SIS system. Is that correct? And when might that be?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: He's somewhat correct. The SIS will provide us with the baseline information about how we proceed with the funding formula. It is an essential part of the development of the funding formula. They can't be done independently of each other. It's going to give us the data that we need to evaluate the clients that we have within our system and the agencies in which they're being served by.

Mr. Wishart: Could the minister share what timeline she believes that might be accomplished on?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is a number of processes and, as I said, the community engagement strategy is essential to the success of this initiative, so I am reluctant to say a specific timeline. I'm confident to say that we'll be continuing—we'll be working on it during this fiscal year.

Will full implementation happen this fiscal year? Very unlikely. We suspect within the next two years that we will have it fully implemented there, as we've outlined that there's the assessment that needs to be applied, but also the important work about communication with service providers and families.

We do not want to create any fear within the system. We want to ensure that Manitobans know that the service that their loved ones are receiving today are the same services that they will receive

once this funding formula has been applied and that it really is a long-term, go-forward strategy about creating a sustainable system for community living.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I understand that there is a consultation process that needs to be done, but I think the minister's already a little late when it comes to concern about fear that's already in the system, because we're hearing from a number of service providers that are quite concerned about sustainability in the short term and wondering if they can maintain the fiscal year, let alone think about the next one.

So, certainly, it's very obvious that the system has issues—we agree on that—and I think we need to maybe move a little more quickly in terms of at least consulting with these other service agencies so that they know that something's in the offing, because they're uncertain and uncertainty generates a lot of questions, and we've been certainly hearing a lot of questions and, yes, even some fears. So we're certainly not encouraging that because these people that are often using these services are a very vulnerable portion of the population and we don't want to do anything that might give them concern. So I would encourage the minister to move as rapidly as possible to engage the service providers. I mentioned one, Westman-Parkland, and they're certainly—even though they have an arrangement for this year—are uncertain where that leaves them in the future. We've heard from Grandview Gateways, Gateway Resources. Some of the agencies in my own constituency are—also expressed concerns as to what's going on and when it's happening. So moving more quickly might be important in this area, especially when it leaves seeds of uncertainty.

They also are really quick to bring forward questions about the 4 per cent cut that came late in the season—retroactive cut. Can the minister, you know, basically give us any information as to whether this 4 per cent cut was effective in reducing costs and where the money that might have been saved has been used?

* (15:20)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The member's getting two different branches confused, so I'm going to address the issue first of community living and we addressed some of the uncertainty and fear when we introduced the budget of 2014-2015. Community Living division received an 8.2 per cent increase, \$25 million—over \$25 million, actually. So, when I go out and meet with the service providers, they thank us for our

commitment, and our commitment to this fiscal year, but moving forward. And I was the first one to put fear on the record that I acknowledge that there is a sense of fear about what is going to happen. There is a lot of opportunities that are presenting themselves with our partners as we work together in a collaborative way. And I'm very confident that we will do that.

You mentioned two specific groups. The Westman-Parkland group; we are in constant conversation with them. You mentioned Grandview Gateways; we are in constant conversation with them. As soon as issues are identified to us, we have extremely skilled staff that are working within that region, and they will be also provided with support from the main office if necessary, about problem solving, about how do they address the issues. We want to make sure that these agencies are able to provide the quality day service that they have. And in some of—in some communities, they are providing a really important community service, as well, and we talk about the Grandview bakery as being one of those.

At the latter part of your question, you asked about the 4 per cent—*[interjection]* You want me just to hold that answer? *[interjection]* Okay. To be continued.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister, and certainly, we're hearing concern. You're hearing concern. And I know that the number of clientele continue to rise, as well, certainly leaving some agencies stretched in terms of their resources. I recognize that there's been an increase in funding, though if the funding formula is unchanged, that actually hasn't flowed particularly well, I suspect. And we'll also be looking at the total numbers in the system, which I think will explain to a significant way why that amount of funding is necessary. It's been certainly used in terms of the large numbers.

But I'm going to move on here a little bit, but I would encourage the minister to make sure that the consultation process is very obvious and very forthright with the service providers, because, frankly, most of them are feeling that they aren't being consulted. And certainly, the boards, and we hear a lot from the people on the boards, they're feeling like they're not part of the process. So I would encourage the minister to move forward with a consultation process as quickly as possible that is—that reaches out to those that are actually providing the service in the community.

So, that said, my colleague here has a quick question.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just want to assure the member that there has been, and will continue to be, a robust community engagement strategy, that we have been working with agencies across this province, and we are very confident that if they have an issue, that they know that we have an extremely open door. When I met with Abilities Manitoba last week, it was one, a conversation, one of honesty and respect and trust that we were going to move forward and build a stronger system to provide good quality service for our clients, but also work in a respectful environment together.

The community engagement strategy that I continue to make reference to, I direct the member to our web page. He will find that there. He will see what the goals of that community engagement strategy is. We have been approached by specifically by Abilities Manitoba and Westman-Parkland about making sure that we follow that engagement strategy as we proceed. And we are extremely committed to that. We know that we will only have success if all partners are walking this journey together.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): The question to the minister has to do with a local constituency issue that I recently received, and I decided to bring this issue here in hopes that she could provide some direction and perhaps a commitment to help with this issue. Recently, an individual came and contacted our office who had recently moved into the Morden-Winkler area and drew to my attention some concerns that he had that had to do with his transition out of Winnipeg and into this area and seeking services for his son who is 13, living with him, who has cerebral palsy and suffers seizures and is confined to a wheelchair. He asked me certain questions that had to do with policy and with the practice of the department that I wasn't in a position to answer. And I thought that I would either, you know, write a letter, but this opportunity came up so I thought I'd bring the issues here.

To make a longer story short, what I will indicate is that this family applied for and received certain changes, those renovations that are, of course, necessary to accommodate someone who is—has accessibility and special needs in a home. And they were able to do that successfully in Winnipeg and they had a home where they had—they felt they had successfully changed the home in order to meet the needs of his son, this individual living with cerebral

palsy. In moving to the Morden-Winkler area and dealing with a new agency and having a new client services manager assigned to them, what this individual found is that they once again had to go back and start over with the advocacy. And now that they are quite far into the process, what they have found is that the accommodations they were able to successfully get when they were living in Winnipeg, they have not been able to get in this case.

My first question for the minister would be, would there not be consistent and unified—I don't know if the word is regulations—but guidelines that would govern what kinds of changes, what kind of renovations, what kind of accommodations would be made for an individual living with cerebral palsy that would not be affected by which agency happens to be—which office happens to be receiving the application?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I have mentioned before in the House, and I'll mention again, that I can't discuss specific cases. So I welcome the member to bring me the name, if the family have agreed to that, and look into the case for you.

We do—it would be the Children's disABILITY Services in which this young child is served. And there are guidelines and there are standards that are—that have been developed across the province.

So once I get some more information and understand the full picture, I can certainly provide more information to the family.

Mr. Friesen: And, of course, the minister recognizes that I'm not attaching any information that would disclose the identity of the—either the caregiver or of the child in this case.

But, from a policy perspective, so if I just give one example and indicate that when they lived in Winnipeg—and I believe that this family lived in the west part of Winnipeg—one of the accommodations they were able to successful get into the home was simply an accessibility sink and vanity. Of course, you know, the minister will understand how it's common practice to lower wall outlets and bathroom doors and other doors are widened to permit the wheelchair access. But in this case, when the application went in with this agency in the south, in my constituency, the application for an accessible sink and vanity was declined. So this child continues to be in a home where there is no access to an accessibility sink and vanity. In my thinking, that would be one of those items that would be

commonly referred to and it would be an item that there should be some framework around, some guidelines about when and when not to have one.

I guess my question to the minister would be why would one agency—or, I should say, why would one office approve that expense and a next one decline it? On what basis would that kind of decision be made?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I stated earlier, until I have all of the information, I'm not able to respond. I do not want to put incorrect information on the record. I need to understand all sides of the story. I used to work with the deputy ministers that said there's six sides to every story, and I need the other five before I can give you an answer that will meet what this family is wanting to know.

* (15:30)

I can tell you that there are guidelines across CDS that apply across the province to make sure that there is equitable service. We are prepared to look into see what happened and why this was denied.

I just want to say that I did have the opportunity of visiting your fine constituency in Morden about a month ago on a snowy day. I hauled—I went out and had—

An Honourable Member: They were all snowy days.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was a very bad winter. And there are some extremely capable and confident and phenomenal workers in that division, and I trust that if they are able to make—to advocate for their clients, they will continue to, so once I get the information, I'll certainly be in contact with the family.

Mr. Friesen: I apologize to the minister for the snow, but I assure her we've had a lot of that in our area of the province, too, as recently as just last week, and—but I would say, as well, I know many of those workers who work out of that local office, and I know, you know, from my experience working with individuals in the community, that we have a lot of very capable people.

I also acknowledge her caution that there are many sides to a story, and it's something you learn very early on as an MLA, that when people walk across your threshold, they bring issues, and often it's very important for us initially to capture as much information as possible. I appreciate the minister's caution about that. I will endeavour to get her this information in just a very short while.

If I could just withdraw from the specifics of that case and then ask one final question, it would be, probably, not with specifics to this case, but it would be on a more policy-driven level. What I would want to draw her attention to and invite a comment back on would be this: It would be the idea that when a caregiver has applied for accommodations to accommodate a child, someone living in their home that would have a clear disability, and they had been able to win agreement from any office to provide those accommodations, would the minister think it would be a good idea, then, if a family moved to a new jurisdiction, that there would be policy that would indicate that whatever they had in place already would remain in place wherever they would go? Would that be a good policy point of view, without being specific to this case?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I would suggest that this is exactly the same scenario and the same question that I received. My father would be very proud of you. He would say you should be a horse dealer, that you have a way with language, that you try and make things look different. It's the same question. I will make a commitment that I will—I will make a commitment that I will look into it. You were making it case specific. You've provided information that there was an agreement that was made. You know, we have made a commitment to Community Living by providing, you know, a record amount of funding and continue to provide funding again this year at 8.2 per cent. I believe that we are out there every day providing good quality services with individuals.

As I said earlier, I did talk about there needs to be equity within our system. I will look into this case, and we will find the right answer for the parent and we will proceed.

Mr. Wishart: I'm sure my colleague thanks the minister for the answer, and I'm sure he'll provide the information that is necessary for you to follow up with him.

I did want to explore a little bit some of the special services area, in particular, Macdonald Youth Services. I understand a bit about how they operate, but I wonder how their funding formula works because their—the clientele that they deal with is very transitional and so their funding formula, obviously, will be quite different than some of the other agencies. Can you add a little detail to how it is they are provided with support?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, thank you very much. Macdonald Youth Services provides quality program to at-risk youth across this province—or, well, they do; they work in Winnipeg and they also have resources in Thompson that they provide in the North. I think that they're celebrating their 95th year this year, and I had the privilege of attending a grand opening of their eight-bed facility—shelter bed—and we are very excited to be supporting them as they move forward.

We provide \$4 million a year for funding. We provide funding through the brief treatment, the MY TEAM, the resource centre, youth emergency services and the youth shelter. And I believe that under the youth emergency services that includes that they provide services to some of our most complicated children—the children that have been traumatized and the young adults—and work very hard to ensure that as we move forward, that when they are in Macdonald Youth Services that they are being provided with their basic needs but also strive to provide them with treatment as well as life-skill development. And I, too, toured the Macdonald Youth Services prior to the grand opening of the emergency shelter and learned a lot about the good programming that they do and that there are many lessons that we can learn from this agency as we go forward.

We are exceptionally excited about their relationship with us and the MY TEAM and the ability to help support children as they age out of the Family Services into independent living and providing them with some of the life skills that they need.

Mr. Wishart: Thank the minister. And it's in regards to that last statement that twiggged my interest, because a number of service providers have expressed concern about aging out of this—the child and family services system, and also a number of not-for-profits in the community have made a comment on the fact that they frequently run into young people that have aged out of the CFS system and are struggling in—to function in that community. And it was in that reference that Macdonald Youth Services was mentioned, having provided a very important service. So I certainly agree with the minister in that they do provide a very valuable service.

Is this a direction that the minister thinks that might work for those that age out of the child and family services system, those that can't function on

their own and need further support beyond the—their 18th birthday?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: In our legislation we have the ability to apply an extension of care for 18 year olds. So there are a group—and I'm afraid—I think they're—last time I looked, I think there was approximately 400 young adults—and we'll get the correct number in a few seconds—that have aged out and now are still receiving service for us.

I have a personal commitment about when we have children that are in our care and our responsibility, that when they age out of care that we're able to provide them with—throughout their stay with us and the people that are tasked with caring for them, that they are—that we are providing them with life-skill opportunities, that we are ensuring that we're supporting their education as well as employment and post-secondary education.

There is a number of partnerships that we have recently developed. So MY TEAM is one of those options that we have in the south and in the North, but we also have—there are options at Knowles Centre and at Marymount, who provide different services. Villa Rosa is another example of an agency that provides supports to young women with children. *[interjection]* Oh, not bad, hey?

* (15:40)

So there's a whole—there are lots of opportunities that need to happen. One of the most exciting pieces that have happened in the last two years is the commitment from the University of Winnipeg, and, I think, also the University of Manitoba and now Red River College, to provide grants and bursaries to children that have been in care so they can attend post-secondary education.

So, you know, it's unfortunate circumstances with—that bring children into care. I think we have a responsibility of providing them with skills and structure so that they continue to grow and develop and that we're there to provide them with the important pieces to transition.

What I find—found to be an eye-opener for me was when I assumed this responsibility of the portfolio and I had a foster parent say to me, so how old are your kids? And I proudly said, 19 and 21. Are they still living at home? I said, they sure are. When are they leaving? Not soon enough.

They have no plan to leave. I have no plan for them to leave and so is it reasonable that when a

child turns 18 we open the door and say, off you go? So foster parents challenge us, the agencies that represent them challenge us. There are some kids that when they turn 18 they want to be independent, and they can be independent, and we need to make sure that we support them as they move forward. But in the cases where they're not—and I want to tell you as I wasn't too far off, it's 435 young adults where an extension of care at the end of the fiscal year '12-13.

So we have a plan. We have a lot more work to do to make sure that we're providing services.

When you meet with Macdonald Youth Services, they will be very clear, and I'm sure you've heard it yourself, that many of the children that they serve are children that are currently in care, or children that have aged-out in care, and I think you hear it the same from RaY and that's important that we work with them and make sure that the young adults know where they can go to get the supports they need, but they also have the skills that they can move forward.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that response. Child Abuse Registry area, and that is something you're responsible for. I occasionally hear complaints that the wait times get a little high and as many of the people that use that service are volunteers in community events, I just wanted to check and see that the numbers were actually current, and that we're moving people through that process in a timely manner so as not to impede the not-for-profits, in most cases, that use these volunteers.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the member was asking about what's the turn-around time and I can tell him that we run anywhere between two and three weeks for a turn-around that is for individual. There are groups of people that apply for the Child Abuse Registry that do not have to pay for that. It is volunteers—sorry, Hansard—volunteers, students and foster parents that don't have to pay. We do have for CFS agencies and residential care facilities, we prioritize those to make sure that they get the necessary information and that takes two to three days. We have maintained an average of one to two weeks processing time and it's actually—the days is 6.8 working days, so we know that there—when people come to apply for it, that they are interested in having it come—be passed as soon as possible. We have also ensured that we have an e-form project, so we're using technology to help us process it even quicker. It's being developed this year. This fiscal year it will be implemented. Thank you.

Mr. Wishart: And will that mean, Madam Minister, that they'll be able to do this online then? Is that what that will lead to?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, during this fiscal year, we will be working on the technology and they will have access online and they will be able to apply online.

Mr. Wishart: That's actually good news because, you know, I mean, I suspect it's a local issue and that you get volunteers, an uneven flow, and when you need them you need them and so certainly the quicker the turnaround, the better.

I wanted to move on from there to ask a few questions about Osborne House, and it was much in the media a while back and I know it's under different management and I think, if I remember correctly, a different board. I just wondered if the minister would care to update us on how that's working, and is it continuing to function well?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As of October 2013, an administrator was placed at Osborne House, so she is—acts as the board of directors. The board of directors that were in existence in Osborne House are—there's—they're not operating the agency, the facility, but they are still together, I guess. I haven't had any contact with the board of directors. We are still providing, and I want to make sure that Manitobans know that Osborne House's door is open and we're providing good quality service.

When the administrator was placed on October 4th, there were two reports that had recommendations specific to health and safety of the Osborne House, and I can say that the first little while, the administrator's—provincial administrator's responsibility was to implement those recommendations, and I understand that all recommendations have been implemented. We continue to work to stabilize the workforce and, as I said, from day one, our goal is to ensure that we are providing supports to women and children from across the province that access Osborne House to ensure that they get the quality of service. So we've been able to evaluate standards of practice and make sure that they are being applied on a daily basis, to provide the adequate support needed.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister. So current status is you have an administrator in place that you put in place, but that person does not answer to the board in any way. The board may or may not exist. I may have misunderstood the minister but—

Ms. Irvin-Ross: He is correct. The administrator does not report to the board. The administrator reports to government, and we need to stabilize the agency and make sure that the health and safety issues have been addressed. And then we need to move forward with a plan to return it back to the community.

Mr. Wishart: Well, then, as the minister has mentioned here, the administrator has addressed the health and safety issues, so I would assume then you're now moving towards a transitional plan to re-engage with the board?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As we have been operating Osborne House, there has been other issues that have been identified, and so we are having to do some more due diligence around some specific concerns. And when that work is completed, then we will continue to look at a transition plan.

Transition plan is something that we've talked about since day one. We know that Osborne House has played an important role in Manitoba, and there are a number of founders of Osborne House and past board members that are extremely proud of the work that they've done, the work that they've been able to do with—they can accommodate up to 45 women or children and they're a valued part of our Family Violence Prevention Program.

* (15:50)

As—you'll hear this theme from me as we go through this exercise of Estimates, that the face of family violence has changed in the province over the last two-plus decades, that the services that were once needed within shelters have changed a bit, and we are finding that out as we have Marlene in—the administrator in the facility. She's having a hands-on experience again and doing comparisons about what it was like 30 years ago when she was in a shelter, and we have a commitment and an interest to work with all of our partners and with Justice as well and identify how can we strengthen the system, how can we move forward, what kinds of services are women and children wanting now, who's coming for service. We know that there are differences that are happening. We—a newcomer population is coming for services. There are men that are seeking services, as well, for family violence.

So we have some very strong partners, and we will continue to work with them as we continue to resolve the issue of Osborne House.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

Moving on from that then, I would like to ask a few questions about child and family service agencies themselves and will start with some global numbers.

I know the book provides the number of children in care. I just wondered if that was a current number. But I'm also very interested in—actually, if you could give us a number around the number of families that are supported in the process, which may not be the same as the number of children in care.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The total number which I have of family cases—and so these are families that are being supported by our very many agencies across the province—is 10,425. Out of these 10,425 families that are being supported, it could be anywhere from a family support worker, from the family enhancement program, some of these children could be in care temporarily at different periods but with always the goal of family reunification. That's our priority with all of—whenever possible. It's about returning kids back to their families, back to their communities.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that, and she's absolutely right; it should always be about the reunification of the family wherever possible.

Now, earlier, the minister mentioned in one of her other answers that once kids age out of the service, out of Child and Family Services—rather, they get past 18—that there is extension of care, and she mentioned the number 435, and that's good. I'm just a little unclear though as to what are the triggers that cause the extension of care or trigger the extension of care. And is it more up to the individual to ask for this or is it generated by someone's measure of their need?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's often a case-by-case decision. I think sometimes it can happen as we—it could be some of our youth were transitioning into community living and so that would be an extension of care. They may still be within our public education system and finishing up, and then we're looking at doing that piece. I think that it is—it always applies to permanent wards that can have extension of care. It is voluntary. It could be—the youth could ask, themselves, for an extension of care. The agency could ask for an extension of care, and based on their belief and their experience with the youth that they need to have additional services.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that—for clarifying how that was done. And I suspect that it was a case-by-case situation, but it's good to hear

some of the—that it is voluntary in nature and that they do have some choice in the situation.

I want to explore a little further the terminology of places of safety that are used, which are short-term in the foster-care situation, and the criteria that are involved in developing those and setting up those foster families and how long children are—can stay there and, in fact, on the average—if there ever is such a thing—how many children are in places of safety at any given time.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the place of safety is an important tool that the agencies are using on the front line, and we have to thank the many Manitobans that open their doors and their hearts to our children and provide them with a place of safety, and what's the important part about that is an immediate placement. It can be a family member or a community member that is identified, and there is a screening process that happens. There is a criminal record check that happens as well as a Child Abuse Registry check that happens. The place of safety is in effect for six months and, in the six months, they have to start working—like, during the six months, they have to start working towards an application for a foster home, so that has to be submitted. But that is the place of safety.

Mr. Wishart: The minister have any idea as to numbers at any given time? Is that something that's tracked?

*(16:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have—we do not differentiate in our statistics from places of safety to foster homes at all, but what I can tell you is that we have—we refer to them as bed space—for almost 12,000 bed spaces we have; that includes homes and foster parents. I wanted to just put on the record that the place of safety is always a place where the child already has an existing relationship. So that's why it can happen immediately and that we're comfortable in that happening, but, as I said, that there are some very specific checks that happen.

Mr. Wishart: Thank the minister for that. In regards to foster families themselves, while we're on the issue, it is an agency responsibility to recruit foster families. Is there a standard process that the different agencies use to apply to foster families?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the agencies themselves are responsible for recruitment of foster parents, and they take that very seriously. And they also have the authority to license the foster parents. It's based on

what they see their need being. It has been brought to our attention that it is getting increasingly more difficult to find foster parents, and part of that is families have changed. And so, because of that, we are working very, very closely with the authorities to identify a provincial-wide recruitment strategy so we can start working together and finding some resources to ensure that we are able to attract foster parents.

I think one of the biggest pieces that we've done as far as retention is the funding of foster parents and making sure that they are included in training opportunities as well. So we've been successful in increasing their funding, and, because of that, we have some long-time foster parents with us that support children. And I think that it's really important that we acknowledge the foster parents around the province and the thousands of children that over the years that they have served to—and provide them with love and nurturing homes.

I often have the opportunity to meet with foster parents and hear them talk about the pride of their child. They really become part of their family and provide incredible opportunities. We have some—lots of stories about young men and women, because of the stable environment that they've been provided, that they have been able to have dreams come true. Some of—we have one young fellow who is going to New York this summer to dance, and that's an accomplishment. And we're going to celebrate with him.

We have MFFN, which is the Manitoba Foster Family Network, who we fund annually, and they are a board-driven agency that provides training and opportunity and advocacy. And then, also, Voices, which is in—they're housed with Boys and Girls, and they are able to provide some support to children that are in care. So they see their membership as every child that is in care, so they are often organizing a multitude of events from recreation to social to educational, and then also providing valued emotional support and sharing the stories. For the most part, the staff that are employed at Voices are—have been children that have experienced being a part of the child-welfare system.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before I recognize the member for Portage la Prairie, just a caution to all members in the House. The minister and the critic are having a very serious conversation here, and conversations are popping up all around us. I see both of them are looking back behind them at times,

so I'm asking all members to please respect the decorum. Try and keep their conversations quiet or adjourn to our loges and have them there so that we can continue to have a fruitful debate here.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the comments. I know people want to have their discussions, but sometimes the acoustics in here make it a challenge, at the best of times, to hear what's going on.

Just—and the minister made a comment on the province-wide program. And I understand, you know, why it would be difficult. Frankly, being parents to your own kids is tough enough. Anyone who's brave enough to be parents to another child certainly deserves our respect, and they do a wonderful job. And I know that, for many of them, they become lifelong linkages and they hear back from them—some of them, many years into the future, about the impact that they had on that child's life and how, in so many cases, they set them on a different path than they might have gone with otherwise.

But I know, for many of the agencies, it's very important to try and find culturally appropriate foster families. Is that actually something that they track, or is just their best effort?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It is a priority for the First Nation and Metis organizations to make sure that they're able to find culturally appropriate placements for the children that are in their care. However, that's not always feasible, and they have to open the membership a bit broader. And I have full confidence in all agencies and staff that, when they do that, that they are ensuring that they are providing culturally appropriate training to the foster parents as well as providing opportunities for the children themselves to participate in cultural events.

So, as we—we have in the—every authority has the staff that are in charge of doing the recruitment strategy for foster parents, and I am very confident that they are always focusing on culturally appropriate placements, but sometimes, just because of location, geography, that they are not able to fulfill that, then their priority is, as our legislation states, that child safety is the highest priority, the highest priority when a child is at home with their family; it's the highest priority when a child is in care with us. And I have a lot of confidence in the front-line staff that they are ensuring that, when they are recruiting foster parents, that they're finding foster parents that have a desire and an interest to

provide a stable, nurturing environment for the children in their care.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Madam Minister. I want to touch very briefly on the Phoenix Sinclair recommendations and Judge Hughes's many recommendations. And it is, as the minister has said, a very significant document. It may make significant changes in the future to Child and Family Services agencies, and, in fact, some of the recommendations spill into a number of other areas as well.

*(16:10)

I know that a consultant–consulting firm has been hired to help with the implementation of the—correct me if I'm wrong—but I believe it's 31 recommendations that are still outstanding, some of which are monumental in nature in terms of changes in the system.

And I hope that this is a wide-ranging consultation, but I wondered if the minister could give us some idea of the timeline that the consultants were giving to bring back recommendations to the department.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The murder of Phoenix Sinclair was a tragedy that touched all Manitobans, and it actually—it went nationally.

On January 31st, when we sat in front of Manitobans and apologized to her family, the people that loved her, we made a commitment that we were going to work with all partners and enhance and continue to work on the system.

Mr. Chairman, in 2006, we were faced with 295 recommendations. The majority of those recommendations have been implemented. Commissioner Hughes states that we are in—going on the right path, but identifies that there are significant—stated significant recommendations that need to be addressed around the social work professional act, around making sure that we are working together with all of our partners, that our roles are extremely clear, that we're looking at prevention initiatives. And he actually—in his recommendations, we can say that we have addressed 31 of them, or they're in progress, or they've been implemented, and also we are successfully working on the other 31.

We have an expectation that the implementation planning team will present with us at the end of September, a work plan, a draft work plan, about how we will proceed. And they are working

extremely hard with all of our stakeholders and meeting with them, finding out what their experience is within the child-welfare system, finding out what the recommendations of the Hughes inquiry, how they interpret it, and how they see us moving forward on the development of it.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister, and I think, Chairman, I'll turn the floor over to my colleague from River East for a little while.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Just a few questions.

I know that the chief executive officer of the Southern First Nations Network of Care was hired. I think an announcement was made just recently. And I'd like to ask the minister what the process was for the hiring of the CEO.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There was a national search that was put into place. There was a committee that was identified, and they made a short list. And they—and in the short list, there was conversations amongst chiefs and the administrative of southern authority about how to proceed.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Who, then, made the decision to hire the CEO? How was that job offered to that person?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That it was the administrator, in collaboration with the deputy minister, that had a conversation, and a decision was made.

Throughout that process, there was conflict that happened, and we have been approached by board members that have congratulated the southern authority on making a very good choice: a person who has decades of experience in the field of child welfare. And they have full confidence in her ability to continue to provide supports to the authority.

One of the important pieces that needs to happen with the southern authority is that we are transitioning it back to the board of directors; we do not want it to be under administration. The sooner we can get it back to a healthy board and to the staff, that's our priority.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate who did the nationwide search?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: To ensure that I put the right information on the record, I'll have to get back to the member and take that under advisement.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. But I think I have information that says

Higgins International was the company that did do that search, so I'm wondering if the minister could confirm that.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's correct.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Could the minister indicate to me what the cost of that search was?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That process would have happened through the southern authority, and we'll have to get that information for you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Was the short list that was developed by that—of that search—the short list that was contemplated and was that person—the person that was hired from that short list that was developed by the—by Higgins International?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This—I wasn't involved in this process, so I don't have all the direct information that you are asking for. So I can take it under advisement and I can provide it for you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the minister is obviously—by the quick response in her answers—is aware of the circumstances in the situation, because I know there has been some controversy around the hiring. And it is my understanding, and maybe the minister could confirm through her staff, through her deputy here today, that the person was actually offered the job was not shortlisted by the search company that did the search. Am I correct, and I wonder if the minister could confirm that through her deputy.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am told that she was on the short list and that she was interviewed by the interviewing—by the hiring committee.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It's my understanding that there were three people that were screened into the final process, that went through a pretty rigorous interview process with reference checks and that the person that was hired was not part of that rigorous process. Could the minister confirm that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not comfortable answering the questions that the member's putting forward. This is a human resource issue and there has to be some confidentiality around this issue. So, if there is a specific issue, complaint that you have, I welcome you to bring that to me, and I'll certainly address it with you personally.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member, the minister should address her comments through the Chair.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess—I would venture to guess that the minister must know about this, because the minister did receive a complaint and an appeal to the final decision that was made. And I understand that that appeal letter was sent to the minister's attention at the end of March. March 21st, there was an appeal that was sent to the minister, to the deputy and to the administrator of the network. And so I question why, a month after the minister received that letter, why she wouldn't be aware and why I would have to bring that to her attention.

Can she try to enlighten me on what took place, because I know that she did receive the appeal, and I—it's been a month since then and I'm just wondering what has transpired in the last month and what has the minister done to assure herself that this was a fair process.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I've stated earlier, Mr. Chair, that this is a human resource issue, that it was a—it—there was a process that was put in place. It was a collaborative approach that was applied. The letter that she refers to—yes, it was received by the office, and it was—a response—it was sent directly to the administrator requesting that a response be made directly to the complainant.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And is the administrator an employee of the Department of Family Services, and what would his position be?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: He is the former ADM of the Community Service Delivery, and, yes, he is an employee of the Department of Family Services.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Then was he appointed the administrator by the minister?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, the minister at the time appointed him as the administrator.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I want to thank the minister for that clarification.

I guess I just want to ask the minister whether—I mean, obviously, given that she did receive the appeal letter, that the administrator was given the authority to get back to the person that put the appeal forward—is the minister satisfied with the process that was followed through the hiring process?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am confident that the offer was made to an individual that will provide good quality leadership for the southern authority, will provide good quality leadership for the agencies that report to the southern authority, and is well respected in the community.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But that wasn't the question that I asked. The question that I asked the minister directly was, is she satisfied that the proper process was followed in the hiring of the new CEO?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm confident that the right person, Mr. Chair, was provided with the offer and will provide good quality leadership for the southern authority, provide leadership and experience to the agencies to ensure that the children and families served by the southern authority will receive the best quality service available.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just like to ask the minister whether she was involved in any discussions with the department prior to the offer being made to the individual that was hired. Did she have discussion with the administrator or the deputy around the hiring and the recommendation of who should be given the offer?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No, there were no direct conversations.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And then I guess my question would be: Who offered the position to the individual that ultimately received the offer? Who made the direct offer?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The administrator made the formal offer of employment.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I guess I'd just like to ask the minister whether it was the—ultimately, the administrator's recommendation, or was there a recommendation from anywhere else that would have precipitated the offer being given?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not sure I can answer that question. That's another—it's the human resource process. I wasn't involved in the process. There was a national search that was set up. There was interviews that were set up with the southern authority, as well, with the administrator. There was a—I can't remember the working group that was established to do the hiring process that received the applications and created the short list.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I guess, then, I would ask, and maybe the minister doesn't have the answer today, but if she could check and indicate to us whether it was a recommendation of the search company, Higgins International, that this individual be provided with an offer to hire?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I could certainly seek if that information is available, and if I can provide it, I will.

Mr. Wishart: I would like to go back to a little bit on the organizational chart. And, you know, I know that there's been a significant amount of change in the department with some movement of some of the responsibilities and the structure over to Jobs and the Economy, but there are many of the staff in the senior positions that are there in an acting position, and I'm wondering, is this a temporary thing or is this a sign of the changes? Perhaps the minister could provide some explanation.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We know the value of having strong leadership in the department, and we have been working diligently on getting the acting positions filled. There is a posting that has just been released—today, I think, it's online. The Disability Programs and Early Learning and Child Care assistant deputy minister has just been posted. So there is movement to make sure that we get a workforce, a permanent workforce, that can help. As we've spoken about before, Mr. Chair, we've talked a lot about our vision and our commitment to improving services in the Child and Family Services branch but also across the whole department, whether it's Community Living, as well as Early Learning and Child Care.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. I assume that this process will continue until the positions are—the acting is removed from many positions. And, yes, the point is strong leadership in a department that does a lot of things and has impact on a lot of people is a very valuable process.

* (16:30)

Just a couple of other things from the Estimates book, too, that I would like to ask a question about: On page 15, there's reference to the 20.5 full-time equivalents that are seconded to Child and Family Services General Authority. Now the accounting's certainly here. What is their role with the general authority? Why are they secondments from the department rather than the general 'authoy' employees themselves?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, the 20.5 staff that the member references, these are staff that, in the development of the general authority, were 'serconded'—seconded over to provide a variety of services, and I can just let you know a bit of services that they were doing. They were doing administration work. They were doing policy work. They were doing finance work. They were providing supports for training and education. Those are some of the examples of what they were doing. There's a process right now in place

to transfer their positions permanently to the general authority, and then that will allow us an opportunity to fill the positions back in the department, if that's what we choose to do.

Mr. Wishart: How long have they been in the secondment position, then? Just in the last two years—is that how long ago back it goes?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: They've been in the—'serconded' since 2005. It was during the inception of the authorities that all authorities had an opportunity to 'sercond' staff to them to provide them with, if they wanted, with policy and service direction. Not all authorities chose to, and some chose to have that support for a certain period of time and then the positions came back to the department. So it was a transition plan. It was part of our transition plan to make sure that there was still good, quality service being provided and that families knew that there was a transition in place.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

That pretty much explains why I couldn't find a start date. The Estimates books available to me only went back four years, so, obviously, it predated that.

So, by what time—what year does the minister anticipate having this transfer first done so that they are answering to the general authority rather than through the department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We're hoping that this process will be completed this fiscal year.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

Certainly, if it's been ongoing since 2005, it's probably time it was done.

I wanted to ask a few questions about the whole process of All Nations Coordinated Response and the administration and the leadership thereof. My understanding is that there is a special committee that is responsible for the actions in that area, the co-ordination of that setting—policy would be the best way to put it I guess. Can the minister explain how that is structured and how that seems to be working?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: May I ask for clarification, please? I'm curious about is there a name for this committee? We are a department of many committees that are working on a number of initiatives. I just want to make sure that I'm giving an accurate response.

Mr. Wishart: Well, my understanding is that this committee that oversees this whole process contains representatives from the Metis, and the First Nations,

your department as well. And I'm not sure that I have all the membership, but I suspect that the minister should be able to narrow this down as to which committee we're asking about.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: He's correct. The answer has just come in. It is called the joint management group, and it consists of the four CEOs and ANCR also has an independent board as well. So there is a number of groups that are interested, and right now ANCR is directly linked with the southern authority, is my understanding, and we need to thank the front-line staff that work at ANCR; whether they're working the intake or the abuse cases or the after-hours service, they are providing quality programming to families. They are providing a lot of support to agencies, whether it's schools, health-care agencies in making sure that we are—if an issue is raised and a child is alleged to be abused, this is the first point of contact, and they're the ones that begin the process of working with the families in identifying what is the best plan of action.

Mr. Wishart: The joint management committee just consists of the four CEOs, or have we excluded some here? My understanding is that it's much broader than that.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I welcome if the member has more specific information that he shares it with me. The information that I've been given is that it is the four CEOs that the CEO of ANCR may as—may well sit on this committee. I'm not—we're not certain. We will get the information as soon as we can about who comprises of the joint management, but if has some insight that he'd like to share, I'd welcome that.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister, though, usually, the questions go the other way. But I did meet with some representatives of the Metis community, not too long ago, and they expressed concern that they didn't seem to be meeting as part of the joint management committee and felt that they were not being consulted as part of the process here so that—hence my questions. Certainly, I've reached out to the agencies as well, but I have not received answers. It's—are we miscommunicating or are their two committees here or committee not functioning?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The joint management committee is led by the four CEOs. They could call the meeting if they chose to, that there is work that's happening at ANCR every day, that there is a board of directors that also provides them with information. There is a direct link today, and it has been for the last few years with the southern authority, that provides

supervision and direction to ANCR. We are very fortunate that we have a number of skilled staff that are doing the intake for us. They are doing the hard and heavy lifting of meeting with families and agencies when a family or a child is in need of protection and probably at the most vulnerable time within crises, and working with and identifying solutions of how we move forward and how do they support the family and protect the child.

*(16:40)

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank the minister for those answers, but I'm not sure it cleared up the issue here. Clearly, there's a miscommunication between some groups involved in Child and Family Services and the minister on the issue of management here. But we'll leave that as it may be at this point [*inaudible*]-I'm doing it here again-papers.

I wanted to touch briefly-I had mentioned earlier the 4 per cent cut that had come just before Christmas to agencies through Child and Family Services, and why that was done so late in the day and whether or not that actually has achieved any savings and where those savings have been used.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The 4 per cent vacancy management was put in place as a-many organizations are using vacancy management as a way to operate their budget. We made it very clear when we spoke with the agencies and authorities that there were to be no layoffs, that they needed to continue to provide the quality of service that they were. There was communication on three occasions, and there probably were other private conversations, but I'm aware of conversations that happened within July and September about-that this 4 per cent vacancy was an expectation for the authorities, and that you're correct that a letter did go out in December that reinforced that yes, there is an expectation of the 4 per cent vacancy.

We felt confident when we put that measure in, knowing about the turnover that happens on a regular basis within agencies, that this would not create any hardship, and we made it very clear to the agencies and the authorities that front-line services should not be impacted, and we encouraged them to contact us if this was going to put any hardship on them.

I can tell the member, Mr. Chair, that the 4 per cent vacancy management resulted in-I should back up just a bit though-that there are some agencies within our system that have surpluses right now and part of that is because of the vacancy

management that's been happening throughout the years. We can report to you today that \$4.1 million was the result of the exercise of the 4 per cent vacancy.

Mr. Wishart: I would concede the floor to the honourable member for River Heights for a little bit here.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to talk to the minister about the fact that we've got approximately 10,000 children in care. It seems to me this is way too high. I just wonder if the minister would agree that this is far too large a number of children in care.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That I think every Manitoban is concerned about the number of children that are in care and-but also accept that under The Child and Family Services Act that safety is our No. 1 priority, and so we are constantly working with agencies and authorities introducing new training modules, looking at assessment tools, and as the member will know, that there-in the Hughes inquiry that there are a number of recommendations specific to prevention.

And Commissioner Hughes outlines a strategy of housing, of social services, family supports that need to be put in place to support children. I think that when I meet with-when I travel the province and meet with agencies and authorities, they too are interested in providing those necessary supports for basic needs and seeing that that number can be released, but it will not be at putting children at risk. That's not how we're going to reduce it. It's about providing good quality housing, nutrition and, I think, employment and education, and when there is a family in crisis, making sure that we have the least intrusive strategy to put in place to support that family.

So often there's a program that we call family enhancement that will go into a home and provide some supports. There are also other initiatives such as family support workers that do the same.

So there are a number of opportunities that we have based on the Hughes inquiry to enhance our system, to renew partnerships with all of our stakeholders, and also to look at what have, you know, been some of the barriers that families and agencies have experienced, and how do we break down those silos and look at providing those necessary supports.

Mr. Gerrard: I-as I see it, one of the issues here is that putting a child in care is not risk free, all right.

We saw that recently with a child who died in care, and there have been a number of other instances. But the larger problem is that it can be very traumatic for a child, be a long-term trauma for the child to be taken away from their parents.

And so, you know, I guess the question would be, you know, since it is not risk free putting a child in care, that there has to be some balance of risk so that you don't put a child in a worse, you know, circumstance than the child would have been at home. So would the minister agree with that, and, again, what specific measures is the minister, you know, taking? There's some very general approaches, but I didn't hear specific measures.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is an initiative that we have been working with our agencies and authorities called differential response, and it's a prevention strategy about working with communities and families and preventing kids from coming into care. I think it's really important.

I will say this again and again that our No. 1 priority is child safety, that we need to be as confident as we can at that time when that worker is doing the assessment, that that child will be safe in the home, maybe with some supports and maybe with, you know, some counselling service for parents—we have made referrals to parents to parent resource centres.

We have—when children come into care, we are very familiar with the trauma that happens. I have spoken in the House, previously, about a foster parent who acknowledged that, and one of her outcomes from that acknowledgement was that she and her sister made blankets—so for when that child came that they had something that provided with them comfort.

We know that workers every day are faced with that harsh reality of the decision, and that decision will change a child's life; it will change that family's life.

We need to make sure when the children are placed into care that we are providing opportunities, if possible, for family reunification; that needs to be a priority for us, and we need to continue to do that. When a child is in care, we have training for foster parents that is being put in place. There are a number of measures that we do when a foster parent is being licensed: the Child Abuse Registry, a criminal record check is happening. We are—we have standards in place, we make sure that they have a social worker or

a foster parent placement worker that they are able to speak to if they run into any concerns and have a conversation. They have an advocacy organization called the Manitoba Foster Family Network that also provides them with training opportunities and support. So it is a comprehensive plan.

I don't think anybody takes lightly the number of children that are in care. They don't take it lightly when they're in the front lines, and they're making that decision. We at the department do not take it lightly. We see that we have a responsibility to work with agencies and authorities to make sure that there are policies in place that support families and, ultimately, if possible, work with families for the reunification.

* (16:50)

Mr. Gerrard: The minister indicates that family reunification is a priority. Now, is the minister referring to the extended family, as well as the parent, where that happens, is the—what measures is the minister taking to, you know, let people know that's what her priority is?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The minister doesn't case-manage, but there are policies and standards that we put in place, and the legislation gives us direction as well, about what are the responsibilities of agencies when a child is placed in care. I think that the workers, the front-line workers, I have spoken to, family reunification is one of their priorities when possible. And, yes, it extends to the extended family as well.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I'm fully aware that the minister's not involved in case management, but the minister also has to, you know, let people know what her priorities are. And is family reunification one of the minister's priorities?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, I've had the privilege of meeting with agencies at—that the southern authority work with, so I have met with them. I have met with front-line workers with the northern authority. I've also met with the CEOs of all of the agencies, and I've made it very clear that an interest that we have is to work on family reunification when possible.

But I've also made it very clear that the priority is the safety of the child, and that we need to work together and ensure that, when we are working on reunification strategies, that the issues identified have been addressed, that there's confidence that the family has the support they need to parent the child, and continue to nurture and love them.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister has read the book by Andrew Turnell, called the Signs of Safety, and whether—what her view is of the approach taken in that book?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I can't say that I've read the book, but I'll certainly take a look at it.

Mr. Gerrard: It shows what can happen in, you know, an approach that was used and is used today in Perth, Australia, and it talks about, you know, the risks of a child being in care as well as the risk of a child staying with the home, and approaches that can ensure safety of the children in the home.

And, you know, some of the people who are involved, even including at senior levels, in Child and Family Services, are talking about this, and I think it would be smart for the minister to read this particular book.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I understand that it is a model that both general authority and the Metis authority are using, and they're using it in co-operation with the structured decision-making model that they have implemented as well. So it's—that training is happening as we speak with the front-line workers. And so I will certainly look at that material.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, the minister has talked about the large number of kids in care, and she's talked about keeping the child in the home where possible. What effort is being taking by the—by herself and the department in terms of, you know, promoting keeping the child in the home where possible?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Chair, as I stated earlier, that each family that we work with, that is unique in their own way, they come from different areas of the province, their family units are different, their family circumstances are very different, and decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis.

Decisions have to be made by the individuals that are in the front line, and I trust that they are using the tool that we have given them to make the best decision for the safety of that child.

Mr. Gerrard: I was, in February, in New Zealand and talking with people there about the approach that they are using. We have 10,000 kids in care. They have a population of—total population in New Zealand about four times of what we have, and you might expect that they would have 40,000 kids in care if they were like us, but they have 4,000 kids in care.

One of the things that they do is make a very big effort to be ensured that there is an outreach to the extended family and involvement of the extended family. And the—I have run across some instances recently where there has been a lack of outreach to members of the extended family who could've been resources for the parent or parents.

And I just wondered what the minister's viewpoint was of ensuring that there was outreach to the extended family and to involve them, where possible, as a way of keeping the child within the family.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Placing children with extended family is our first priority, and I don't have the number about how many, but there's a significant number of children that are in care are with extended family. When I meet with the front-line workers, that's what they talk about, the importance of keeping children within their own community, and keeping children within their own family is a priority. And I have confidence that when they make those decisions that there are—I would assume that it would initially start as a place of safety, as a short-term plan, and then, if the stay needs to be longer, that they would look at licensing the home as a foster home and providing that safe and nurturing environment for that child in their own community when possible.

Mr. Gerrard: The child and family services in New Zealand, the equivalent, employs quite extensively family conferencing. It is occasionally used here, but much, much less often. And, in the approach in New Zealand, the family is asked to provide a solution and, very often, something like 85 per cent, I understand, that solution is acceptable in terms of keeping the child safe. So I wondered whether the minister had looked at family conferencing and whether this was something that she, you know, encouraged or discouraged.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's very difficult to take a model. We can review a model from another jurisdiction; we do that all the time. But to make a direct comparison, apples to apples, is not fair to either country or province, and we need to make sure that we are evaluating what is the best practice.

And, as he states that there is family conferencing, that does happen. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata one of the leads on that within Family Services here in Winnipeg for us. I know that Nelson House has another strategy that they like to apply.

We're interested in keeping families together, but our No. 1 priority continues to be the safety of the child has to be our priority.

Mr. Gerrard: In approaching this issue of keeping the child in the family and having family conferencing, I think that it is important that we look at what's happening elsewhere in jurisdictions which are succeeding in certain ways better than we are and that, in New Zealand, is an important example that should be looked at.

And so I would hope that the minister—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

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