

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

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(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CHIEF, Kevin	Point Douglas	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 20, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the quarterly report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the year ended March 31st, 2016.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure's Supplementary Estimates for Legislative Review for 2016 and '17.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

World Refugee Day

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize World Refugee Day in Manitoba. June 20th is celebrated as World Refugee Day in solidarity with refugees in Canada, and around the world, to promote the awareness of refugee issues and challenges in Manitoba.

Canada and Manitoba have a long history of being places of refuge for people from around the world, for helping and protecting refugees. The wisdom, diverse experiences, unceasing courage and remarkable resiliency of refugees enrich our province and strengthen our narrative that Manitoba and Canada are beacons of hope and open our doors for those in need.

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted on December 24, 2000, a resolution naming June 20th of every year as World Refugee Day to build awareness, empathy, support and respect for refugees. The province of Manitoba is one of the most diverse provinces in the world, and its people continue to welcome refugees and provide supports to them and their families so that they have a dignified life in a safe and free environment.

Education is one of the most important elements in healing the physical, emotional and cognitive wounds caused by war, persecution and deprivation of basic needs. Schools throughout Manitoba strive to create safe, inclusive, caring environments that have welcomed hundreds of Syrian and other refugee children and their families.

I look forward to joining with members of the public to celebrate World Refugee Day later today on the Legislative grounds.

Steinbach Pride March

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the organizers of the inaugural Steinbach Pride parade—Pride march, scheduled for July 9th. Michelle McHale and her organizing committee have joined us in the gallery today.

We all witnessed the devastating events that took place in Orlando recently. I shared the grief and commitment of support of the NDP caucus at the vigils for the victims, hosted in both Winnipeg and Steinbach. The vigil in Steinbach was attended by over 200 people, showing that support for LGBTTTQ* people exists across the country—the province.

The upcoming Steinbach Pride parade on July 9th brings LGBTTTQ* community members and their allies together to show support for human rights and love for everyone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. With Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and now Steinbach all hosting Pride celebrations this year, we are proud to see this solidarity with Manitobans extending across the province. The vigil in Steinbach and the Pride parade fill me with hope because, in spite of a terrible tragedy, safe places for LGBTTTQ* people, particularly youth, continue to grow in Manitoba.

Thank you, Michelle McHale, and everyone involved in organizing Steinbach's first Pride parade. We've come a long way, but there's still much work to be done. Our NDP caucus has always stood for LGBTTTQ* Manitobans and their rights and will continue to do so. We have registered for the Pride march and will see you in Steinbach on July 9th.

Jessica Mayes

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Madam Speaker, I'm honoured here today to rise to recognize a constituent in my area that has made a positive change in her community.

Jessica Mayes comes from the small town of Pierson, Manitoba. After being inspired by WE Day, she was the founder of a sustainability group in her school in 2012. Since that time, the group's accomplished including reduced waste in their recycling program by replacing plastic bags used to collect recyclables and usable—with usable burlap sacks.

They've also started a compost program in all the classrooms. The compost project has evolved into vermicomposting, using worms to digest the organic waste and produce a natural fertilizer which is used for their school's greenhouses. Not only did the group get the students involved and educated about sustainability, but the members of the community took notice and also wanted to be—and get involved by offering their help and even supplied the group with the worms for composting. It was—brought the people together to learn about something important as well as to make a positive impact, not only for their community but for drawing attention to the issues of sustainability.

These efforts have not been not unnoticed. They are now being recognized on a national scale. Jessica is being awarded inaugural Prince's Youth Service Award for sustainability category. She was chosen out of hundreds of applicants.

I would like to applaud Jessica for her efforts. It is commitment and leadership like this coming from a young person which allow the province to thrive and prosper in the coming years. Ideas like Jessica's are not the drop of—are like a drop of water; they create a ripple effect. She has said that at times the group was just herself and a few people, but that has all been taken to make notice of change. Sustainability is arguably one of the largest issues that we face. Without sustainability environment in

this province, we will experience more issues into the future.

I would like to congratulate Jessica, who is sitting in the gallery today with her grandparents, for her wonderful commitment to our planet and to—for inspiring so many others to take action.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:40)

Violence Against Women in Public Service

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, I rise today in solidarity with my sisters across the world who have committed their lives to public service.

Within the last week, we've witnessed the horrific murder of UK Labour MP Jo Cox alongside, here in Canada, targeted, misogynistic attacks against Alberta Premier Rachel Notley.

Thursday last, between these two incidents, my own constituency assistant received an anonymous phone call from a man who warned me to watch what I say in this House. What's more, throughout my campaign in seeking this office, I faced vitriolic and attacking speech culminating in having to be escorted out of a forum by a good 10 people while a man stood at the front exit screaming profanities at me while declaring that I was going to get it.

The reality is that women engaged in public life across the globe are consistently intimidated, threatened, sanctioned, silenced, ridiculed and, in some cases, tortured, raped and murdered. These threatening and lethal actions are generationally rooted in the legislation, regulation and marginalization of women's space and agency.

The command of public service, discourse and governance is not the exclusive domain of men. Women and men are equal to one another, and together we balance out perspectives, ideologies and the manifestation of privilege and power within our public service duties.

It is not enough to say that women have the right to be engaged in public service, but men also positioned within public service must support their sister colleagues in combatting misogyny in all its forms. And so I encourage all my brother colleagues here today to consistently and publicly denounce violence against women engaged in public service.

And, finally, Madam Speaker, to the individuals, including the gentleman who called my office last

week, who believe they have the right to shame and silence women—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

2016 World Curling Silver Medal Champions

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the recent silver medal win at the world senior men's curling championships in—held in Karlstad, Sweden, by Team Canada rink of Randy Neufeld, Dean Moxham, Peter Nicholls and Dale Michie. Two of those members are joining us today in the gallery: Skip Randy Neufeld and Dean Moxham.

After competing in the round robin portion of the tournament with an 8 and 0 record, Team Canada lost the gold-medal game to the host country, Sweden, on April 28th, 2016.

The Neufeld rink, which curls out of the La Salle Curling Club, earned the right to represent Canada by winning the 2015 Canadian championships last spring in Digby, Nova Scotia.

Two of the members of Team Canada are from Portage la Prairie. Dean Moxham is from Oakville; Dale Michie resides in Portage la Prairie. Both are active members of the Portage Curling Club and have enjoyed many successes at the local and provincial level and now have a national championship and a world silver medal to add to their accomplishments.

Manitoba is home to several world-class curling rinks with many Manitobans competing at the national and international stage. This province is home to several championship trophies, and Manitoba rink won curling gold at the Olympics.

The rich curling tradition in Manitoba is a source of immense pride for our citizens. Likewise, Portage la Prairie has a rich curling tradition, with many successful individuals and teams coming from the Portage Curling Club. The recent success of Mr. Moxham and Mr. Michie adds to this great tradition and sparks additional pride in our athletes, community and our curling club.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating Dean Moxham, Dale Michie and—sorry, Randy Neufeld—sorry, and Peter Nicholls along with their teammates on the great accomplishment of the world senior men's curling championships.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Immigrant Services Government Support

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, today is World Refugee Day. We stand united in support of vulnerable people and we celebrate the courage and conviction of refugees.

Madam Speaker, just last week, the Winnipeg Free Press announced that Manitoba's population growth is hitting modern-day records. The Manitoba Bureau of Statistics points out that Manitoba is also seeing incredible growth in immigration to the province.

I ask the Premier: Why, at this time of incredible growth, is his party calling investments for immigrants wasteful government spending?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I thank the member for pointing out the optimism that all Manitobans feel and tell her that it's just an early indication of the attitudinal change in this province towards growth.

People are excited about the province's prospects; they're coming here. We're seeing a growing population that's tremendous. We have real challenges to face, and we'll face those together, but I think that all Manitobans respect and appreciate the opportunities that are to be found here and we are very open here, of course, to being the new home of hope for people from all over the world.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: That optimism had been around for over a decade now.

Madam Speaker, just last week, our critic asked the Finance Minister about support for newcomers, who are engineers and licensed professional nurses, to make the process easier for their credentials to be recognized and to find the training they need. Given our immigration growth, this is critical.

I ask the Premier again: Why does he think these supports are wasteful government spending?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, first of all, Madam Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't add my personal congratulations to Randy Neufeld from La Salle and Dean Moxham from Oakville and thank Dean's wife Dawn for their tremendous work with junior curling around the province as well. They're just tremendous citizens

in the province, and I just wanted to add my congratulations and thanks to them again if I could. And I wanted to also say they are fortunate that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) are occupied here; otherwise they would've had greater challenges on the road to their championships.

Madam Speaker, the member is right to raise the topic she raises. She speaks about optimism being around. In this respect, she's right. A renewed optimism is present here in the province. But, you know, for example, small-business optimism was at record lows in March of this year and now at record highs in June, and I think that's a tremendous indication of the new-found optimism that Manitobans enjoy.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: I still don't hear an answer why support for immigrant services, new immigrants, are wasteful government spending?

Madam Speaker, \$208,000 to support an engineer's qualification and \$450,000 for Assiniboine Community College licensed professional nurse, LPN, program. This government cancels and cuts, and their party calls it wasteful government spending.

How do they think they can grow the economy without supporting immigrants get good jobs?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member is right, Madam Speaker, to raise the concerns about frustration with new immigrants to our province. Those concerns have grown over years of inattentive lack of leadership from the previous administration. But I would point out to the member that it was a Progressive Conservative government that introduced to this province a very important program that is the reason that many of our immigrant population has come to the province, and—*[interjection]*—of course, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), in the midst of his babbling, would understand that that program was the Provincial Nominee Program, which this government actually didn't introduce, a previous PC government introduced.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to continuing with oral questions, I would just like to draw the attention of all members to the public gallery where we have

seated, from Glenboro School, 18 grade 5 and 6 students, under the direction of Marilyn Cullen.

* (13:50)

This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen).

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

Newcomer Support Grant Funding Commitment Inquiry

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, the government has consistently refused to tell Manitobans specifically where they are finding their so-called savings and what they will cut.

Can the Minister of Education please confirm if they have kept our former government's commitment to increase funding to the newcomer support grant by \$300,000 or did they cut that too?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

We certainly value—as this government, we value immigration to Manitoba very highly. We know that it not only helps the individuals involved but it also helps the province build more strongly on—in a great future, an inclusive future that involves everyone in our community.

We are working with new immigrants to make sure that they have the supports that are necessary to make sure that they adapt well to Manitoba and that they have the supports that they need to prosper in this province.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Maples, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Saran: Madam Speaker, the newcomer support grant is a targeted grant for refugees and war-affected children. Today, on World Refugee Day, we are now hearing from the government that they are cutting support the NDP had committed to, which will help some of our most vulnerable children adjust to life in Manitoba.

Why won't the Education Minister commit to providing additional funding to help refugee children when they need it most?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

We are certainly committed to making sure that new immigrants to this province have the support

that they need at their critical time. Whether it be partly through the education system and getting them back—or getting them back into the workplace, I think those are both areas where we can help a lot. But the member must remember that on April 19th, Manitobans did make a different choice.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Maples, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Saran: There are many newcomer refugee families in Manitoba today who are counting supports like these.

They deserve to know the answer to this question: Is the Education and Training Minister cutting supports our NDP government had committed to that will help war-affected children at school?

Mr. Wishart: I would remind the member that we have put forward solid support to the education system, with a 2 per cent increase—or more than 2 per cent increase in the K-to-12 funding and a 2 and a half per cent increase to post-secondary.

But we are continuing to provide the additional necessary supports to new immigrants in this province, and we are certainly working with them to have—so that they can have a successful life here in Manitoba. We work with the fairness commission to make sure that their credentials are proved as necessary so that they can get back into the workplace as quickly as possible.

I think that Manitobans made a different choice on April 19th, and I think they want to see us carry it forward.

Hanover School Division LGBTQT* Rights Recognition

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Education Minister continues to refuse to intervene in the Hanover school issue, citing local autonomy. The farthest he was willing to go was sending a letter offering voluntary training to school trustees. It's not nearly enough. This is about human rights.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) intervene to make this training mandatory?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the honourable Opposition Leader for the question.

We certainly continue to work with the Hanover School Division, and we want to encourage as much

local discussion as possible. I think it is very constructive to have a discussion in the community. I understand that the family in question has taken advantage of their right that they have here in Manitoba to go to the Human Rights Commission, and I respect them for that. I think that we'll work very strongly with the local school division, and, hopefully, we can find a resolution before such time as Human Rights Commission has to reach a conclusion.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: This government's responsibility is clear. They must be responsible for the supervision, control and direction of all public schools and all other schools. The Education Minister's tepid and voluntary measures are not enough.

Will the Premier act to ensure full recognition of diversity, of LGBTQT* rights in the Hanover School Division?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

As we have said before, we are working very constructively with the local school division. We do respect their local autonomy. It's something that appears to be lacking across the floor, but we are working with them to try and find a resolution to the situation, but we do also respect the individual's right to go to the Human Rights Commission. I think that we still have further opportunities to work with both parties and we're certainly prepared to do that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: LGBTQT* rights are human rights, and human rights are not optional and can't wait. They are not subject to the opinions of a local school board or local schools.

Why won't the Premier act to ensure respect for diversity and ensure our LGBTQT* kids have a safe place in each and every school in Manitoba, including in the Hanover School Division?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the question from the member.

We're certainly always supportive of making sure that every child in this province has a safe place to go to school, so we are certainly prepared to work very strongly with the school division to make sure that that certainly takes place.

But the member also needs to have some respect for the Human Rights Commission and that process. You can't intervene in every case. We certainly have safety-safeguards in place and to make sure that due course is followed. It is not a question of the Leader of the Opposition's opinion as to whether or not they should act.

**Hanover School Division
Compliance with Human Rights Code**

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I bring your attention the following: The Hanover School Division has two meetings left before they finalize the policies that will be in place for the next school year.

Will the Minister of Education intervene to make sure that the human rights of all children, but specifically LGBTTQ* children and those with LGBTTQ* family members, are protected under those policies and in accordance with the Manitoba curriculum?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

I recognize that the school year is winding down. Many people out there are looking forward to the end of this school year, not the least of which is probably many of the students. But there is a process in place. I think the member should respect the process, and once it's begun, it should be taken through to its fruition, and I do hope that they find a way to continue the discussion between the family and the school division.

A constructive discussion is probably the best way to change opinions in the long term, and we certainly are looking forward to a constructive discussion as part of the process.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's one issue whether or not the Hanover School Division has contravened any human rights, and that will be resolved by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. However, it is a completely separate issue as to whether or not the Education Minister will act. He has the authority to remind the Hanover School Division it must operate according to the Human Rights Code.

Will he direct the division to make sure their policies comply with the Manitoba Human Rights Code?

* (14:00)

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

I think we've been pretty clear all the way along that we are working very strongly, aggressively, with the Hanover School Division in regards to making our services available to them and encourage them to do whatever is necessary to find accommodation to meet the needs of this particular family in terms of their human rights requirement.

But as I mentioned earlier, they have chosen to take their complaint to the Human Rights Commission and that, too, is part of the law of this land. And, certainly, we support them in that right to do so and hope that they can find a resolution that way.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: Again, the Education Minister can act if he so chooses. I would point out that Michelle McHale and Karen Phillips's kids are only kids once. The same is true of all children in the Hanover School Division. In fact, 17-year-old Mika Schellenberg is graduating this year and has personally experienced the impact of the status quo in the Hanover School Division.

Is the Minister of Education really going to wait for another class of students to graduate before taking steps to protect their safety and the quality of their education?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question.

I certainly want to congratulate the student on her graduation or pending graduation. I certainly hope that she is able to put that to her best advantage and move forward in her life.

But the school division is in the process and I think that any timelines at this point in time are at least partially in their hands as to how they work with the family, and I want the discussion to continue between the school division and the family. Hopefully they can find some resolution before the end of the school year which, as I know, is not very far away. But, certainly, it's a constructive process in terms of working together.

Thank you.

Child-Care Spaces Government Intention

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): During the last campaign, the Minister of Education announced that additional centre-based child-care spots would be committed to later in the campaign. Recognizing that this commitment addresses a mere 5 per cent of the wait-list, the press asked if this would be their only child-care commitment. The Minister of Education promised we could, and I quote, expect more commitments in the campaign. But, Madam Speaker, no commitments were made.

Can the minister comment on these additional child-care promises?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I appreciate the question from members opposite.

This side of the House is absolutely committed. We are committed to enhancing the access for child-care systems in the province of Manitoba.

We know that our plan—and we know with the current system that there's too much red tape and barriers that are happening to starting up the child-care system. We also know that there's not enough home-based carers. That's a part of it. And that's why our plan, we think, is a strong plan moving forward for the children of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: Madam Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Families: What exactly is the plan on child care for this government?

Mr. Fielding: We're ecstatic about what our plan is in terms of child care. We obviously know that child care is something that's critical. It's critical to people in the working world; it's critical to our economy. That's why we're so excited about our plan.

We know that ECEs are important. We know that home-based child care is important, and that's part of our plan going forward to increase spaces for our citizens of Manitoba.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: Madam Speaker I'm not sure about anybody else on this side of the House, but I'm still seriously confused and—at what the plan is.

Would the Minister of Families explain to us in point form what the plan is of this government on child care? It is a very simple question.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Fielding: I very much appreciate the question, and, you know, it's interesting coming from a government where you had left over, after 17 years, over 12,000 spaces that are part of this.

What's actually going to have to happen, Madam Speaker, is the new member—and I respect the new member; I think she's a very passionate individual—but she's going to have to have some uncomfortable conversations with people at the caucus table. She's going to ask—have to ask some members in terms of why they left so many people on the waiting list for people that are need—for child care. And that's why we think that our plan makes a lot of sense, and we're going to have access for child care for the citizens of Manitoba.

Thank you.

Provincial Nominee Program Expansion Plan for Business

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Looking for investors to invest in Manitoba needs to be a priority of this government. It is the small- and medium-sized businesses that strengthen our economy.

Would the minister responsible please share with the House today if the new government is planning on expanding the Provincial Nominee Program for Businesses or leaving it as it is?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): We're certainly interested in immigration, and the business branch of the immigration program will certainly be something that we are looking at developing further, in the future. We have—there has been—historically, there has been some issues under the previous government, and so we're certainly looking at better ways to make this program work better in the future and get better results for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Deposit Agreement Compliance

Ms. Lamoureux: I would encourage expanding the program.

We all know and understand the importance and benefits of foreign investment. According to the May 2016 follow-up of recommendations from the Auditor General, it has been recommended that the government, and I quote, develop a process to follow up on nominees who do not comply with the deposit agreement.

This makes me incredibly nervous. Was there no follow-up with the previous government?

My question is: To what degree and how, exactly, does the government plan to ensure that applicants are complying with the deposit agreement?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question, and she has certainly hit the nail on the head.

There was, certainly, some issues because of lack of follow-up and the very poor management of the program. We are looking at ways to deal with those problems and to make the program—in concept, the program actually could work very well and could bring a lot of very valuable 'entrepreneurs'—entrepreneurs to Manitoba, and we certainly support that.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Business Application Approvals

Ms. Lamoureux: I would like to thank the minister for his answer; however, I didn't hear exactly what the plan was.

Would the minister please share with the House today how many provincial nominee business applications he would like to see approved come to Manitoba in the 2016-17 fiscal year? And, of the 2015 business applications that were approved, how many of them are still operating businesses?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question.

We're certainly interested in finding ways to actually increase the number of business entrepreneurs that might come, under this program, to Manitoba, and very much aware of the fact that there was a very high failure rate under the previous program.

We don't actually blame the entrepreneurs solely for that. We think, actually, the administration and the way things were run by this government—the

previous government—was certainly a big factor in that. Leadership is always an issue, and we didn't see any.

Air Canada Act—Bill C-10 Senate Committee Presentation

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, we know that growing the Manitoba economy is an important priority for our government. Jobs in the aerospace industry are integral to our economy, and it's important that all levels of the federal government know that we are standing up to their proposed Bill C-10 to protect Manitoba jobs and the Manitoba economy.

Could the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade please inform the House of his presentation to the Senate committee studying this legislation?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I want to thank the member for that question.

*(14:10)

Later today the Deputy Premier and I will be presenting to the Senate committee on Bill C-10.

We continue to consult with local businesses, with labour and the aerospace stakeholders. Manitoba stakeholders are united in seeking a direct and long-term commitment to Manitoba aerospace from our federal partners. They have expressed grave concern Bill C-10 is being rushed through for no apparent reason.

Manitoba's aerospace sector employs over 5,400 people and is truly world-class. It is a sector that we support and want to see thrive. Madam Speaker, we stand up for good jobs in Manitoba and a stronger economy for all Manitobans.

Mental Health Court Brandon Location

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, problem-solving courts such as drug treatment courts and mental health courts are effective in changing the behaviour of offenders, sometimes with lengthy criminal records, and improve public safety.

Manitoba's first mental health court has been operating in Winnipeg for several years with good results, but the proposal to create a mental health court in Brandon has now been put at risk by this government. The mental health court in Brandon is supported by the mental health community, by judges, lawyers and many others in that city. In fact,

there's a working group dedicated to getting this court established.

Why won't this Minister of Justice stand up for Brandon and commit to getting a mental health court running in Manitoba's second largest city?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank my honourable colleague, the critic for Justice, for asking the question.

Of course, we have two sound representatives from Brandon in the Manitoba Legislature. We've—I want to—*[interjection]* And I just want to say to the member that one of the things, you know—of course, the members opposite had 17 years to make this happen. It wasn't a priority under their government.

We are, in fact, doing a review. We announced this review during the campaign. It's what Manitobans elected us on and it's what we're going to deliver on.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Justice Initiatives Funding Concerns

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Well, I thank the minister for confirming it's not just her but the two MLAs from Brandon that won't stand up for Brandonites.

A commitment was made by the previous government to establish a mental health court in Brandon, but that is now at risk. This minister says there's a review under way but won't say if or when the review will be completed. The minister confirmed—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. The honourable member to continue.

Mr. Swan: The minister confirmed in Estimates there's not a single dollar in this year's budget to support a mental health court in Brandon, nor are there any resources for additional problem-solving courts anywhere in Manitoba.

Why is this minister unwilling to step up to make any commitment to expanding successful and cost-effective justice initiatives?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank the member for the question.

Of course, we were faced with—as a result of 17 years of NDP mismanagement—with a \$1-billion deficit that Manitobans are facing today. So there's going to be some tough decisions that are—that need to take place. Not only that, but there's an over-\$800-million cost of servicing that debt as well. That's eight—over \$800 million that could have gone to programs such as this prior to when this government—when the NDP government was in power.

But because of that, they chose not to do it. They chose not to make this a priority. And now, Madam Speaker, now, all of a sudden, first time in opposition, now, all of a sudden, everything's a priority.

Well, that's not the way it works.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, I remind the member—the minister opposite that it was actually the previous government that created the first mental health court in Manitoba and that member, and every Progressive Conservative member, voted against the money to do that.

I saw comments in the Brandon Sun about Brandon's community mobilization unit. And it's based on the Prince Albert model, which, in turn, followed a successful violence-reduction project in Glasgow, Scotland. A similar program is now operating in the William Whyte area of Winnipeg called the Thunderwing Block by Block program. But the Minister of Justice admitted there's nothing—not a single dollar—in this year's budget to expand the size of this project nor expand it to any other communities.

Why is this government and minister unwilling to support community programs shown to improve outcomes not just in justice, but health care, education and family services—

Madam Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for question.

Of course, what we did vote against in the past was the incredible NDP mismanagement of 17 years after their watch, Madam Speaker, and I would say that after inheriting, as a new government, a \$1-billion deficit as a result of that 17 years of mismanagement, there are some decisions that need to take place.

We ran on the election campaign with a review on capital projects. That's exactly what we're going to deliver on.

Rail Line Relocation Government Support

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I'd like to start today by acknowledging all the first responders in this province for the important work that they do. When we find ourselves in crisis, we rely on them to come to our aid as fast as possible. Unfortunately, in Winnipeg, EMS first responders are often delayed by things out of their control, like being stopped at a train crossing.

Given the mayor of Winnipeg supports proceeding with the rail relocation feasibility study that was provided for in last year's budget, does this Premier (Mr. Pallister) support proceeding with this important study?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): This government is going to take all previous commitments under consideration as we move forward. It—infrastructure is based on return on investment and making strategic infrastructure investments, so we will take this under consideration.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, the Premier believes Manitobans are 'shart'—smart shoppers, so why can't he see that an investment now to support this study will pay massive dividends down the road? By reinventing Winnipeg as a multimodal transport hub and freeing up land now for urban renewal and geographic reconciliation, we will also be saving on expensive and divisive infrastructure costs.

Will the Premier move ahead on this important initiative?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, the previous government had 17 years to act on this particular item. They chose not to touch it until the dying days of an election when they went out and promised the world to everyone, and they had no intention of doing this. This is same as we've seen with so many other—\$600 million worth of promises that they had no intention of doing. And now, with them, everything is a priority.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, this initiative is just not one we can afford to jeopardize now by stalling. The impacts of real-rail relocation are wide-ranging, and, in some cases, lives depend on it.

Will the minister simply support the establishment of the intergovernmental working group to support this feasibility study?

Mr. Pedersen: A \$1-billion debt, longest waiting lists in health care, 12,000 kids in care, 12,000 kids waiting placement in child-care spaces, and now, suddenly, they have a new priority. They had 17 years to do this. They should have got on this before if they thought it was a priority. However, now, in opposition, everything is a priority.

Primary-Care Clinic—The Pas Funding Commitment Concerns

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): This government has been consistently ignoring the needs of our northern communities, particularly when it comes to strengthening our health-care services. In my constituency of The Pas, residents are worried that plans for our new primary-care clinic will be scrapped under this government's review of strategic infrastructure projects.

Madam Speaker, this clinic is desperately needed, a much welcomed project initiated by the former government. The current health clinic in The Pas is struggling to retain doctors and can only be open half days. Residents, including my family, are forced to go to the emergency room to get a prescription filled.

Can the Minister of Health confirm whether or not their primary-care clinic in The Pas will be under review?

*(14:20)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, that was less of a question and more of a list of all the things that her government failed to do when they were in government.

And I would say that the member's absolutely correct. They did fail to get doctors to come to the province and actually stay in the province. They did fail to get a lot of the different health facilities to stay open adequate hours. She's right; they failed to do all of those things when they were in government. I support her in that question.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lathlin: With no mention of a health-care strategy for the North in this government's Throne Speech, and very little in their budget, northerners feel—are feeling ignored and undervalued.

A primary-care clinic would provide accessible and cultural-appropriate services for residents of The Pas, OCN, and the surrounding communities. It's among the top five lists of urgent-of new urgent-care facilities the province has needed to build.

Will the minister commit to continuing to fund this clinic?

Mr. Goertzen: The member is correct. It is among the top five priorities. It's been among the top five priorities, along with other issues in northern health care for many, many years, Madam Speaker.

There has certainly not been the appropriate attention paid to the different challenges within northern Manitoba with health care, but not just in northern Manitoba. That extends to southern Manitoba. That extends to all of Manitoba, including Winnipeg. In fact, the only thing this government was ever really consistent on is they failed on health care right across the province.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a final supplementary.

Northern Manitoba Communities Government Health-Care Strategy

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I'm not hearing any commitments from the minister. Clearly, he doesn't want to admit that there's no real strategy to address health-care needs in my community and the rest of northern Manitoba.

Northern families need better access to healthy foods, mental health supports and integrated health and social services. We need doctors and nurses to stay in our communities, and who have come from our communities. We need investment in our northern hospitals, not cuts this government delivered the last time they were in power.

Will the minister admit that this government has not presented a real comprehensive health-care strategy for northerners?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, again, Madam

Speaker, the list that my honourable friend, the member for The Pas, presents is absolutely correct.

The former government failed to ensure that doctors were actually staying in the province of Manitoba. The former government failed on a northern food strategy. The former government failed to ensure that there was an integration of services among different places.

The member for The Pas is absolutely correct. They failed on all of those things and that's why we've committed to be the most improved province in Canada at the end of our term on many different issues.

Infrastructure Spending Government Direction

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Madam Speaker, Manitobans know the NDP record well when it comes to infrastructure spending for political gain.

The member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) and his colleagues in the opposition want our government to make infrastructure decisions on the basis of political ridings, rather than acting in the best interests of Manitobans.

Could the Minister of Infrastructure please inform the House on the plan our government has when it comes to infrastructure for all Manitobans?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I'd like to thank the member for Riding Mountain for raising concerns about the statements made by the member for Fort Rouge in the Estimates committee.

Unlike the previous NDP government, our government does not believe in using infrastructure money in an attempt to buy votes. Infrastructure decisions will now be based on needs of Manitobans from every part of the province based on strategic return on investment, not on politics, as the way the NDP did it.

Dedicated Stroke Unit Government Intention

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, one of the most urgently needed investments in Manitoba is for a dedicated stroke unit. We are a long way behind most provinces. We need this on an urgent fashion. The government has given lip service to this.

Last Thursday the Minister of Health provided a very long list of ongoing projects. The dedicated stroke unit was not on that. I ask the Minister of Health: Is he sincere in going to move forward on a dedicated stroke unit?

Why was it not on this long list of projects listed last week?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I know that the member is a busy guy, because he only has three members within his caucus, and so he's running around from room to room and trying to cover off the different Estimates.

The reason it wasn't on that list is because the question was specifically about projects that are currently under construction, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bell's Purchase of MTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

Manitoba telephone system is currently a fourth cellular carrier used by Manitobans, along with the big national three carriers: Telus, Rogers and Bell.

In Toronto, with only the big three national companies controlling the market, the average 5G unlimited monthly cellular package is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg, where MTS charges \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition and will result in higher costs for cellphone packages in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to do all that is possible to prevent the Bell takeover of MTS, and to preserve a more competitive cellphone market so that cellular bills for Manitobans do not increase unnecessarily.

And this petition is signed by many fine Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Before calling government business, would you please canvass the House to see if there is leave for this House to set aside private members' business for the purpose of considering second reading on government bills tomorrow morning?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for setting aside private members' business during tomorrow morning's meeting for the purpose of considering second reading of government bills? *[Agreed]*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I thank the House, and could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I have a few questions about the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) failure to disclose shares of corporations that he owns in Costa Rica. With someone who talks a lot about transparency and accountability, it's hard to come up with a valid reason why the Premier thought it appropriate not to disclose his ownership of the shares of various corporations, as required by law.

But the question I have is: Did the Premier ever receive any written opinion from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner telling him that he did not have to disclose his ownership of shares in the corporations in Costa Rica? One—and I apologize for my Spanish pronunciation—Finca Denetes Doce S.A., and a numbered corporation, 3-102-580018 Ltd. SA.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for his interest in the issue.

I got verbal advice from this adviser and the previous one, to answer the question correctly and honestly. And so I did that. In—on this year's form, I added the additional information of my own volition and disclosed it, but it wasn't required. That was the advice I received from both the present adviser and the previous one.

Mr. Swan: I'd like to ask the Premier whether he ever requested a written opinion from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner on whether or not he had to disclose his ownership of shares in the two corporations in Costa Rica.

Mr. Pallister: I didn't. Maybe the member could tell me why I should have done that, but I didn't do that. I met with the adviser—this one and the previous one—so that I could seek their advice, sought their advice, disclosed the assets to both of them in my conversations with them, and was given the advice—by both of them—that they fell outside of the parameters of the questions that were asked on the form.

So I answered the questions on the form in a forthright manner consistent with the advice I was given. I guess I could have asked for a ruling from both of them in writing, but I was—I didn't see why, and they never advised me to do that. So, I guess, I'm asking the member to take my word for the fact that I raised the existence of the assets, but I would hope he would.

Mr. Swan: Well, the Premier asked me why.

The reason why I'm asking the question is that the conflict of interest act is clear that, if somebody believes that there is an asset that need not be disclosed, they can avail themselves of a written opinion from the commissioner, which then gets filed in the Clerk's office, which can then be used as an answer in case an MLA raises the question, in case a voter raises the question, in case a Queen's Bench judge raises a question in the event of a court application. So the Premier's confirming that he never requested a written opinion from the commissioner on whether or not he had to declare these corporations.

I'd like to know: Did the Premier ever provide either the current or the previous Conflict of Interest Commissioner with anything in writing respecting the nature of his ownership of the two corporations in Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: Our discussions were private, but I'll share with the member that they were verbal and so, no. The answer—honest answer would be no. I just disclosed the assets that I had.

I might have—I expect I had in my possession at my initial meeting, as I recall I did, written documentation of my holdings for the discussions that we had. So I guess, in a sense, I provided some things in writing, but as far as filing a document or anything like that, if that's what the member's asking me, no, I didn't file any documents or anything of that nature.

Mr. Swan: Given the fact that the Premier availed himself of seeking a written opinion and didn't, and as far as we know there is nothing in writing from the commissioners, it really does seem like the opposite of transparency and accountability. To now, today, after the Premier has been discovered to own shares of corporations in Costa Rica, to now make what he calls a voluntary disclosure. I think many Manitobans believe the Premier didn't disclose his—these two corporations in 2012, when he had two chances to do so, in 2013, in 2014 and in 2015 because he didn't want to and because he thought he would never get caught not disclosing his corporations.

The Premier's confirmed he's got nothing in writing from the commissioner, or the previous commissioner, and he's confirmed he's got nothing in writing even to show that he made full disclosure of the nature of what he owned in Costa Rica.

I'd like to ask the Premier: are there any other corporations in Costa Rica or anywhere else in the world that the Premier has failed to disclose since he returned to the Manitoba Legislature in 2012?

* (15:10)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm disappointed the member would impugn my integrity or attempt to in his preamble. I'm disappointed in that. I thought more highly of his integrity than he's just revealed with the question.

My intention, as I expect is his and I would assume is the intention of all my colleagues, is to abide by the advice they receive from the commissioner when they meet with him or her, as the case may be in the future, and I certainly did that.

Mr. Swan: The question I had for the Premier is whether he's failed to disclose any other corporate

interests in any of his disclosure statements since he returned to the Manitoba Legislature in 2012.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the member's preamble reveals, I think, a desperate attempt to impugn my integrity when he says, failed to reveal. I listened to the advice of the commissioner; the commissioner advised me that I had no reason to disclose the asset, so I didn't disclose the asset.

Perhaps the member would like to elaborate on how he thinks a possible conflict could exist because someone holds foreign property. Simple ownership of foreign property implies—I don't think implies wrongdoing on the part of anyone. A significant number of Manitobans own foreign property, so to suggest that the simple ownership of foreign property is somehow a betrayal of someone's trust is, I think, awfully bizarre. I abided by the advice of the ethics adviser. The ethic adviser said you don't need to disclose those assets. I didn't disclose them. So asking me about other assets I didn't disclose is hardly pertinent to the question.

I disclosed all assets pertinent to the ethics commissioner's requests for information, as reflected in the forms that I was given, answered all questions openly and honestly. I actually disclosed more information than I was required to on occasion in my last form because it was already a matter of public record and I felt that it was clear that the public would want to know more details, so I gave them more detail through an additional piece of information that I filed in the document, but it wasn't on the bequest of the ethics adviser, it was of my own volition.

So, you know, again, I guess I'd have to ask the member how he feels he's more of an authority on the rules than the actual ethics commissioner himself.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm surprised to hear the Premier (Mr. Pallister) go down this road, given that I'd tabled copies out of the declarations that he himself had signed and filed in the House from 2012, from 2013 and 2014, and I filed those in the House just about a month ago—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan). *[interjection]* We recognize now because when you stop, they had cut you off there, so.

Mr. Swan: Right, I thank the Chair for that.

I'm asking the question because I had tabled copies of the Premier's declarations in the House from 2012, 2013 and 2014 about a month ago, and in 2012 the Premier failed to disclose not only his shares of his Costa Rica companies, and I've heard what he has to say on that and I supposed we'll agree to disagree, but I'd like to ask the Premier why he didn't disclose his ownership of the shares in two Manitoba corporations, namely Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd., and Pallister Investments 22 Ltd. in his disclosure form dated September 20, 2012.

Mr. Pallister: Well, as I recall, we did a company reorganization after that which created those, so they wouldn't have existed. I guess that's the best answer I can give the member. So, declaring a company that doesn't exist would seem a little bizarre.

On the issue of the—what he keeps referring to as nondisclosure, again, I met with the ethics commissioner, as all members, I believe do, and took the advice of the person I met with, who I would assume would have a great familiarity with the regulations and laws that he was advising me on. And he advised me, not necessary to disclose assets as I told him I had, so, you know, I mean, if the member is chastising me for not taking the advice of the adviser, I guess he should say that, but I certainly did take the advice of the adviser, assuming that that was the correct thing to do. Filled out the forms as I was advised to do, forwarded them, and that's, as I understand it to be, the process, that was the process I followed.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm not chiding the Premier, I'm just—I'm asking questions about his declaration forms. Is it the Premier's position that Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd. did not exist on September 20, 2012?

Mr. Pallister: I think Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd., in my recollection, was created in 1985. I could be off by—I'll just say to the member I'm not exactly sure, but we could check the corporate record on it. And Pallister Insurance Agency is the corporate entity that holds the—my, you know, company in—that's located in Portage la Prairie and has for 30 years.

I'm just trying to get a copy of the 2012 one as well, so I can know what the member's referring to in his question. And—if I could, can I continue?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, and I think the member had asked about Pallister Investments 22. Again,

we did a—the member's familiar with corporate structuring. We did set up trusts for our children, our—we reorganized our company in—I'd have to double-check the forms to see the year. I think it would have been approximately in 2010, maybe, but I should be able to find that out if the member's interested in that.

To do a family trust, to set up the start of a family trust, that was the intention. On this I do not claim great expertise, but I have other people advise me on that too, and they suggested that you needed to take inactive assets out of your company to do that. There's some rule about—you have to have—a certain percentage of your assets have to be actively involved in the operation of the company. Over some years, we'd accumulated some profit that remained in that company. I think the phrase they used was it was offside there, because there was too much accumulated in it, so we set up a holding company, I believe that's what it's called, and Pallister Investments 22 became that entity to take the savings out of the company to move it over so that we could set up a—the start of a trust, which I believe—the member's a lawyer so he would probably know a lot more about this than I do, but I—that was the intention of Pallister Investments 22.

* (15:20)

What I would point out to the member is, essentially, Pallister Investments 22 and Pallister Insurance Agency are two different corporations, but essentially the same thing, because the Pallister Investments is just the money that's come out of the insurance company over 30 years.

Mr. Swan: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that, and I'm not going to haggle on whether Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd. was incorporated in 1985 or 1987. I certainly recall seeing the signs along the highway—on Highway 3 to and from Morden and Carman and other points.

But my question is this: That being said, the Premier, I'm sure, will acknowledge once he sees this, that he had not referred to any interest in shares in either of those two corporations when he first returned to the Legislature in September 2012, nor his next filing, which was when the new legislative session started, in his declaration that he signed November 27, 2012.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: I have to recognize you. The honourable member from Emerson.

Point of Order

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Chair, what does this have to do with Estimates?

This has got nothing to do with Estimates. This is a personal attack, and they want to do something, then do it outside of Estimates, not in this situation.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan), to speak to the point of order.

Mr. Swan: Of course, it has been the pattern in this Legislature to proceed with Estimates in a global fashion, which allows examination of a number of different items.

As I said right at the start of my questioning, the Premier has spoken a lot about transparency and accountability, and the place that starts is in documents which are required to be filed by this Premier and other members of the House, every year at the start of the session. In Manitoba, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Act is—it's a self-reporting system. There is no means for anyone else to complete somebody's forms. It's a self-reporting system that everybody has the responsibility to comply with the act, and I'm asking the Premier questions about whether or not he has complied with his responsibility as a Cabinet minister and an MLA under this act.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chairman, I submit that there is a Conflict of Interest Commissioner, and that's where his question should be directed.

This here is for Estimates, and it's not for this—what he is doing now in a personal attack.

Mr. Chairperson: It isn't the job of this Chair to rule on the quality of the questions or the quality of the answers. I would suggest that members do try to keep their questions in regards to the budget, but it is something that I cannot rule on as far as the quality of the questions or the answers.

We are in Executive Council, which is questioning the government, I guess. So that would be my ruling on that.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chair, I challenge your ruling. This situation here is totally different. It's a personal attack.

Mr. Chairperson: Just—could the member from Emerson just hang on for a minute, please? *[interjection]*

I would like to address the member from Emerson.

In accordance to subrule 52(4), ruling on points of order by a Chairperson in Committee of Supply and in Committee of the Whole House are not subject to appeal.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: We will move on with questioning.

Mr. Pallister: I don't—I'm not saying I like having my integrity attacked, but I respect the member's right to ask questions here, and I'm doing my best to answer them.

So I'll back up and just say the member should note in 2012 that I did declare Pallister Insurance Agency on my form as owning the land on the—under the section on land, I put Pallister Insurance Agency in there. So the assertion I didn't declare it is not right. The capital stock question—I was advised that my capital stock wasn't worth \$500 per holding, so that would be the reason there that—but the next year, I added it just so there wouldn't be any confusion that I didn't have a company that did something other than hold land. So that would be the reason it's in all the subsequent forms, just to avoid the confusion.

But the capital stock of that company, according to my accountant, isn't worth \$500 per share. And I believe that may be the same rationale the ethics commissioner said, it's not the—with these Costa Rican companies, they aren't of a significant value based on the criteria set out on these forms. Nonetheless, I've declared the existence of them earlier to the ethics adviser and now on my forms each year

So, you know, I don't think there's any doubt as much as the member might try to make out that I have some kind of a tax haven. I recall as that was the angle of attack that the NDP used during the election campaign. They were actually implying that I was somehow associated with—what were those papers called? The what? *[interjection]* Panama Papers. That I somehow had millions of dollars in offshore accounts and that I was somehow trying to hide that. I think that was the clear insinuation of the NDP tactic during the election campaign.

And I assure the member that such is not the case. My wife and I saved up for approximately a total of well over 40 years. We purchased a lot; we

built a retirement home. We have—I have told the ethics counsellor about it. He tells me it's not something I need to report, the previous one and this one. I didn't report it until this year. The reason I reported it was because I felt that I had to defend my integrity in respect of the accusations that were made during the election campaign about hiding things.

The company structure that we were advised to follow in Costa Rica was to not leave your assets personal but to put them into a structure so that your liability was limited. I think a similar rationale to why people set up companies in Manitoba, to protect yourself. And so we had two companies in Costa Rica. They own—one of them owns the land and the other one owns a vehicle and a quad. As far as the arguments about—the insinuations about the Panama Papers or anything else is concerned, I think it's sad and laughable, but it is, I guess, what sometimes politics come down to in some quarters.

Mr. Swan: Well, I can tell the Premier (Mr. Pallister) I'm not asking about the Panama Papers. And, actually, right now, I'm not asking him about his Costa Rica corporations. I'm asking about his Manitoba corporations.

So it's the Premier's position that in 2012, when he didn't disclose shares in Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd. and Pallister Investments 22 Ltd., it's because he takes the position that his shares were not worth more than \$500 in each one. Is that correct?

Mr. Pallister: That's what the position was of the ethics adviser.

I would encourage the member to read the question. And if he was to read the question, he might like to rephrase his question. I never asserted what they're worth. The question, if you read it, is very straightforward. It says, and I'll read it: I hereby declare that I and/or the following name dependents hold a beneficial interest, share, warrant or option in 5 per cent or more of the following issued capital stock worth over \$500 per holding.

* (15:30)

It was the advice of the ethics commissioner this was not the case, they didn't have to—I did not need to report it to comply with the act as he interpreted it. That was this year's advice, that was last year's advice and this is earlier year's advice.

Mr. Swan: So just to confirm, again, with respect to the Manitoba corporations, the Premier doesn't have a written statement or written opinion from the

Conflict of Interest Commissioner. He's relying on what he says is a verbal discussion that he had with the commissioner.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's how I get advice from advisers a lot of the time, and that's the advice I got from these guys.

I don't know how many MLAs have got written advice that they've requested from ethics advisers, but maybe they have reasons for that. I just kind of take people at their word, the ethics commissioner especially. He gave me his advice, I took his advice, I followed his advice.

Mr. Swan: So, then, why did the Premier (Mr. Pallister) then disclose his shares in Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd. and Pallister Investments 22 Ltd. the next year in his declaration that he signed on November 20, 2013?

An Honourable Member: Andrew, I'm sorry, I missed that.

Mr. Swan: Right, I can repeat the question.

If that is the Premier's statement, then I'm wondering why he then disclosed his shares in Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd. and Pallister Investments 22 Ltd. the very next year in his disclosure form, signed November 20, 2013.

Mr. Pallister: Same reason I disclosed my Tiger Dams—oh, I'm sorry, it wasn't Tiger Dams. I thought for a second—I was just confused there. I was thinking that was me that had those Tiger Dams. That wasn't me. No, it was another thing.

The same reason I disclosed the Costa Rica properties, I mean—you know, I want to clear this up, so I'm trying to be—I'm going beyond what the requirements are of the act, to make sure that my position can't be assailed as being in conflict, or that I would not be rightly accused of being in conflict.

It's the same reason when I was in the House of Commons I recused myself on several occasions from dealings with the Finance Committee in the House of Commons because I had assets which might have put me in a state of conflict if someone was to raise that. I hold, as I know the member does, my integrity as something important and to protect. And, so, though I had declared the ownership of my personal corporation in the year prior, and it was not a secret. As the member knows, I mean, operation of a small business requires advertising, so there were, actually, a fair number of people—not just in Portage la Prairie, in my hometown, but around

the province—who knew of the existence of this company. But it was important, in the context, I think, of the role that I would have as—in the opposition at that time that I declare that I have that company. And so I added it to the form, just as I added the Costa Rica data this year's form.

Mr. Swan: All right. Well, then, I'll just try and understand, then, the next year. The Premier another declaration form, dated November 24, 2014, which did not include either of these two Manitoba corporations.

But, fair enough, the Premier, I think, filed an updated disclosure form just three days later, and referred to his shareholdings in Pallister Insurance Agency Ltd., but not the other company, Pallister Investments 22 Ltd.

Why did the Premier, then, in 2014, decide to disclose one corporation, but not the other?

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry to the member. I don't have a copy of all my filings; I just have the basic forms. So I don't have the additional filing he refers to.

But it would be pretty clear that I disclosed my assets as per the instructions of the ethics adviser. I'd mentioned to the member, and I'm going to—I'll have to double check on the dates of organization of the family trust to know exactly the year of that, so I'm not able to respond accurately to his question in respect of the Pallister Investments 22.

But, again, I guess I would go back to this: the fundamental intention, as I understand it, of this legislation and of these forms is to ensure that members are not in a state of conflict, and the member might like to elaborate on how having a hold co. with investments in it would put a person in conflict in the first place. That might be helpful. I certainly know, as the member does, that our present system, in respect of these things, needs to be revamped and that's why we're looking to upgrade it and improve it, because it seems that there is the potential for misinterpretation in respect of some of these things. And I know that that can be dangerous to a person's integrity, when people in our position are attacked for their behaviour, for example, for taking nondisclosed gifts and things like that. I know that's not easy. But I would encourage the member in this line of questioning to understand the intention of the legislation itself.

Mr. Swan: Well, I appreciate the Premier doesn't like the law, but the fact is, he's bound by it, and the—what he's telling us today is that, in 2012, he received

verbal advice from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner that he didn't have to disclose either Manitoba corporation, that in 2013 he was advised that he should disclose both corporations. In 2014, he was advised that he should only disclose one corporation, and then lo and behold, now in 2016, he's filed a new declaration that includes both corporations.

I'm not—I understand that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is upset with this line of questioning. I think he's imputing in my question a lot more than I am. I simply want to ask the Premier, given his statements about transparency and accountability, has the Premier just been careless with respect to his corporations here in Manitoba, or does he expect us to believe that he's received different advice four times from the conflict of interest commissioners?

Mr. Pallister: I recognize that the member has done his courtroom preparation, but I reject his entire premise. On the 2012 form where he refers to me—just made reference to me not declaring the existence of a corporation, I, in fact, refer to it specifically not once, but four times on the form. I don't think that that supports his thesis that I'm trying to hide assets at all, so I would be very careful in the insinuation if I were the member.

Mr. Swan: Well, I appreciate the caution from the Premier, but I'm asking questions in Estimates, and, again, I would point out to the Premier, that he does not disclose any shares in those two corporations in 2012. He's told us, based on a verbal discussion with the then-conflict of interest commissioner with nothing in writing going either way, that he didn't have to disclose shares in either one of those corporations. Then, in 2013, the wind changes, and the Premier decides to disclose both corporations. The wind changes again in 2014, and the Premier only discloses one corporation, and the wind appears to have changed again in 2016.

And, frankly, at this point, I'm not—I'm actually going to give the Premier an opportunity to say that he's simply been careless with respect to the Manitoba corporations and the way that his shares have been described in his conflict of interest declarations since he returned to the Legislature in 2012.

Mr. Pallister: Any carelessness here is on the part of the member in the insinuation that the ethics commissioner doesn't know his job. That's the clear insinuation in his comments so far today. And in respect of the declarations, as I've told him, they're

right on the form. So, as far as his desperate attempts to assert wrongdoing, I think he—his party went too far during the election campaign, in desperation, I expect, and now he's perpetuating that wrongdoing by attempting to impugn my integrity, and more than that, he's attacking the integrity of the ethics adviser who gave me the advice I followed.

* (15:40)

Mr. Swan: Well, this Premier has made it impossible to know what he did or didn't tell the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. There are provisions in the act which say that the Premier obtained a written opinion; that written opinion would require full disclosure of all facts regarding the assets, and we're left in a position where the Premier, by his failure to ask for that report, has left us guessing.

Frankly, I don't believe that the Premier received different verbal advice from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner in four to five years. That seems very difficult to believe. Knowing what I do about the previous commissioner and the current commissioner, it seems very unlikely that they would ignore a clear directive in the law which says that every member of the Legislature is required to disclose their holding in shares of corporations anywhere in the world as long as their shares are—have a value of over \$500 per holding and represent 5 per cent of the value of that corporation.

So, I've actually given the Premier an opportunity to admit that he was careless in completing the forms. He's chosen not to do that. He says that he's got verbal assurances which not only cannot be backed up by anything else he's provided but defy common sense. So I know the Premier advice from anyone and I doubt he's going to take advice from me.

Can I simply suggest the Premier get a copy of this year's declaration and use it as a guide for next year so he can start a practice of making complete declarations each year, as required by Manitoba law?

Mr. Pallister: First of all, I did follow the advice of the ethics commissioner, and the fact that I added information beyond what is required is what's causing the member such confusion.

And I would invite the member to put on the record how many written directives he's received from the ethics commissioner or any other member that he's talked to, because what he's doing is implying that there's some wrongdoing or deception

on my part, but I don't believe for a second that unless he can produce it here today he ever got a written directive from the ethics commissioner. So I don't think his case is very well made.

I got directives from ethics advisers, I followed them. I continue to follow them. I intend to follow them. I actually intend to spruce up this legislation so that it actually will work against the very thing that the member's trying to do in future, and make it more clear to all members that declarations will be required in—on a number of other fronts beyond what is required today.

And I'm told we have the least effective, least far-reaching legislation in the country. We'll research that and verify it, but it is my intention that we do make sure that we protect each other's integrity here with a new and improved regime so that things like the member is asserting today don't plague members in the future.

Mr. Swan: Well, it's ironic the Premier (Mr. Pallister) about strengthening a law that he's been frankly unable to follow since his return to the Legislature.

I just want to deal with one thing. The Premier talks about getting advice from ethics advisers; does he mean the two gentlemen who've served as the conflict of interest commissioners since his return to the Legislature in 2012 or is he talking about other ethics advisers that he relies upon in preparing his declaration?

Mr. Pallister: I'm talking about the conflict of interest people that I've talked to, two different ones since I came back here.

Again, the member says I'm unable to follow the law, so it's pretty clear that what he is doing is demonstrating he has an inability to read the actual form and to accept that the ethics adviser, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner could actually read the form as well.

The adviser told me that I did not need to declare the property based on the questions on the share's page. I did not declare the property based on the question on the share's page, and the member is impugning the integrity of not only me but he's questioning the competence of the conflict of interest adviser at the same time.

Again, I invite him if he's every received a written direction, he's basically making the assertion that because I never got a written direction that

somehow I'm guilty of some wrongdoing. I'd invite him to put on the record if he himself has ever got a written direction from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. And if he has, perhaps he'd like to table what that said.

Mr. Swan: Well, I could put on the record that I don't own any corporations in foreign countries and, in fact, I don't happen to own any companies in Manitoba either, but if I did I would be disclosing my interest in those companies on my conflict of interest disclosure every year, as I'm required to do by the conflict of interest act.

Mr. Pallister: And I'm just curious, since the member is so forthcoming, if he would do that in spite of advice to the contrary, and if he'd do it if his capital stock issued was not worth \$500 per holding, would he do that? Would he go beyond and above the requirements? Would he disclose the information if he was (a) advised not to and (b) if his capital stock was worth less issue than \$500 per share?

Mr. Swan: Well, it's interesting, the Premier now with his back to the wall, decides that he's the one who gets to ask questions. These are the Estimates for the opposition to ask questions of government. I think the Premier, by his responses and non-responses today, has made it very clear.

So I will pass it to my colleague from Flin Flon to move on with some other questions, and I thank the Premier for maybe not the most pleasant discussion we're ever going to have but a telling one nonetheless.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I guess we'll ask some different questions.

Mainly, what I want to talk to—about today is project labour agreements. I understand that the Premier or the government wishes to no longer employ project labour agreements. Can I ask if that is the government's intention?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I'm sorry that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), you know, feels petulant about my responses, but, again, I would put on the record that I have responded fully and honestly and have taken the advice of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner throughout my time here. And I would also put on the record for the member that my shares in Costa Rica weren't disclosed because I was advised that it was not necessary for me to disclose them because they do not have a value subject to the question on the form. And so I seriously doubt that the member, in his reporting of

assets, would disclose assets that were not required to be disclosed, but I did that this year nonetheless.

So, again, I'm sorry that he has chosen to respond petulantly. I have some affection for the member, but I don't have much affection for anyone who tries to impugn the integrity of another person without justification of any kind, based on falsehoods. The form itself is clear. The shares are worth less than was the threshold, as is required on the form. So the member can talk about written opinions all he wants. He's already failed to provide any evidence that he himself ever got one. And impugning the integrity of someone who fails to get a written form when it's not required, when one hasn't got one themselves, doesn't put anybody in a very good position of leverage in respect of making an argument, I don't think, other than a hypothetical and desperately political one.

So I would encourage the member to understand that impugning the integrity of another human being without justification of any kind is not an admirable quality in any person regardless of their political stripe and not one I certainly admire. It disappoints me, in fact.

In respect of the project labour agreements question, yes, our intention is to allow non-unionized companies to bid on government work. We think that that's the right thing to do and the fair thing to do. A significant majority of the companies that do, for example, heavy construction in Manitoba aren't unionized. This doesn't mean to say that unionized companies would be prohibited from bidding. I should make that very clear to the member. We're not trying to—just because the minority of companies are unionized, we're not trying to prohibit them from bidding on jobs. What we're suggesting is that in the interests of fairness and openness, that companies that are unionized and aren't unionized should both have the opportunity to respond to tenders and do public work. They, after all, are comprised of working men and women who pay taxes in this province and who volunteer for their local community clubs, probably, or raise their kids here. They share the same challenges in life, and they should have the same opportunity to do work here.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that answer. I guess I have to ask or respond to the comment that he wants to allow non-union contractors to bid on projects. Is the Premier aware that, since at least 2005, non-union contractors have been allowed to bid, the same as union contractors,

on project labour agreements under the auspices of project labour agreements? And that was an agreement that was negotiated by Wally Fox-Decent back in 2005 specific to the East Side Road Authority but then it's workable for any project. So nothing precludes a non-union contractor from bidding and being successful on these projects under the terms of project labour agreements.

* (15:50)

Mr. Pallister: I just—for the member from Flin Flon, I've just given a response to a question he had asked me last week. If that's okay with him, I'll just—I'll read the response into the record and get him that information he had asked me that—*[interjection]* Yes, okay.

This was in respect of The Labour Relations Amendment Act, and Bill 7 is intended to help restore democracy in the workplace by making secret ballot votes mandatory before a union can be certified as a bargaining agent for a group of employees. This will allow all workers to exercise their democratic right to vote on whether or not they want a union to represent them. Currently, if 65 per cent of employees sign a union card, the Manitoba Labour Board can automatically certify the union. This means workers are forced to share their choice to certify or not certify a union with their coworkers and their union organizers, which may result in workers feeling somewhat pressured into making a choice that does not reflect their true wishes.

We believe that requiring secret ballot votes for all union certification is a better option for Manitoba workers. Workers deserve the opportunity to make decisions about union representation in privacy and with confidence, knowing that they will not face intimidation or retaliation for expressing their true wishes. We also know that voting with a secret ballot's the fairest and most accurate way for any group of people to make an important decision.

Recently, concerns were raised that the bill might reduce protections for workers—this is the part the member had raised specifically—might reduce protections for workers against intimidation and harassment. And I can assure *[inaudible]* that that's not the case. The Manitoba Labour Board is currently required to ensure that employees are not subject to intimidation, fraud, coercion or threat and that their wishes for union representation were expressed freely before a union is certified. So this section was put in place when the act was amended

in 2000 to eliminate secret ballot votes. So it was linked to the elimination of secret ballot votes for all union certifications. This was a committee amendment. It was made due to vigorous opposition from stakeholders that were concerned about employee intimidation during certification drives. They were worried about workers being coerced by fellow employees or union officials into signing union cards in order to reach the 65 per cent threshold for automatic certification.

This section was intended to clarify and emphasize the right of workers to make decisions free of intimidation and coercion, given that the right to guaranteed certification vote was being taken away. Okay? Due to changes proposed by Bill 7, this wording will no longer be necessary because a secret ballot will be required for all union certifications. And the board will no longer rely solely on membership cards. This will reduce the opportunities for intimidation as workers will now have the right to make their choice in the privacy of a voting booth instead of in front of their coworkers and union officials by signing a union card.

The proposed changes made by Bill 7 will not diminish the protections for workers that have applied for union certification. In fact, the act currently contains a number of provisions intended to ensure that certification votes are conducted fairly and remedies are available to prevent or mitigate the possibility of intimidation or coercion by employers during the certification process. For example, both employers and unions are prohibited from electioneering and distributing printed materials at the workplace on the day of the certification vote.

The act also provides employees with the right to join a union and prohibits employers from interfering with this right. Employers also cannot lay off, transfer or fire employees or make changes to their wages or their working conditions while a certification application is being considered.

And, finally, Bill 7 will not impact the Labour Board's ability to certify a union without a vote if an employer or someone acting on their behalf has interfered in the certification process to the extent that the true wishes of employees are unlikely to be determined.

So, the protections remain.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for getting back to me with that.

Today's question is about project labour agreements, and I asked, prior to the Premier's to a previous question, if he was aware that, since 2005, with a deal that was negotiated by Wally Fox-Decent, that both union and non-union contractors are eligible to work, to bid on projects covered under project labour agreements. So, contrary to what he said, that this forced unionization on workers, that's not the case. Is the Premier aware of that?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, but they also are required to pay considerable additional costs into a pot of money that is available to a designated union that is designated by the government as the recipient of said pot of money.

And this, according to the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, the Winnipeg Construction Association and numerous other people that I've spoken with who have expertise in this industry, is an unnecessary inhibitor to the ability of companies to compete in a fair and level way without incurring additional costs beneficial not to the taxpayer but—and not measurably beneficial to the production of a good or service for the—on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

So the argument that has been given from some is that by requiring this pot-of-money approach to be taken—which has been discarded as illegal in all of Europe, is discarded in most United States now and other provinces are moving away from—the argument that's been made here is it will preserve labour peace, and we won't have strikes and walkouts and such things.

But there is no record of that prior to the introduction of this—adoption of this technique or approach by the provincial NDP government. We haven't had a significant strike or loss of time due to a strike in a long, long time in Manitoba. And that's way prior to the adoption of this project labour approach, which the government certainly utilized during, for example, the construction of the Red River Floodway, as an example, and other projects.

So it's not an extinct bird, but it's getting along the lines of the whooping crane in a lot of jurisdictions around the world.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the Premier for that.

Again, I hope that the Premier and the government of the day are aware that nothing precludes a non-union contractor from bidding on a job under a project labour agreement. And the

Premier talks about a pot of money, that somehow, non-union contractors are obligated to give a gift to the union and nothing in return for that. And, of course, nothing could be further from the truth, and I'm sure the Premier is well aware of that. The money goes towards things like safety training, because there's two places, generally, that provide the best safety training. One is the government and the other is the unions. So unionized contractors generally have better safety training programs. The unions provide better safety training.

And I know, myself, coming out of a union, that the training I got as far as safety and the ability for us to train unionized workers to make it safer was far and above what was ever provided by a non-union contractor. In fact, even without a project labour agreement, some of the stuff that I did as a union safety guy, as a union trainer, was to provide training to non-unionized workers. So that, really, was the basis of why the non-union contractor paid that money out, was so that all workers were offered the same protection, were offered the same level of training so that they could all have the same level of competency.

Does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) agree with that premise?

Mr. Pallister: Having had a little bit of experience in the workplace over the years as an employee in a not necessarily always a safe environment, as a farm boy—every farm boy's got a story about almost dying—I value safe workplaces more than most, and I value what the member's referencing in terms of training very much. And I look back on my life, early days on our farm, with more than a little bit of a sense of being fortunate that we, with the limited training we got around that farm, that we didn't have more accidents on that work site.

But I would say this: there's a tremendous amount of training that goes on in unionized and non-unionized environments, because that sentiment is felt just as much by employers whose workers have decided against unionizing as it is felt by employers who feel a compelling sense to protect their employees.

And I wouldn't want it misrepresented that only union shops were the places where protection of the workers was uppermost in the minds of people or a priority. That is—certainly would be misrepresenting the facts of the case. Greatest resource we have is our people, and every small-business person understands that.

* (16:00)

That being said, I think any initiatives that we can undertake to assist in upgrading safety in the workplace are useful, and I am very appreciative and respectful of the work of our collective bargaining agencies or organizations in our unions in respect of advancing safe workplaces. I think it's positive and a really good thing.

That being said, I know of advances that have been undertaken by employers and their people, who have not decided to be unionized, that have been also incredible in respect of the results they've achieved, so I don't think it's an either-or. I think we can advance the cause of a safer workplace, respectful always of the end goal which is to make sure we reduce the number of accidents and reduce the amount of workplace risk that our workers are exposed to.

Mr. Lindsey: Having come out of the agricultural sector myself, where there were no rules, I would like to point out that it's because unions have pushed that there needs to be workplace health and safety rules in the agricultural sector to protect workers in those fields, why the agricultural sector is safer now than it once was.

I'd also like to point out that in the mining sector, that once upon a time was the bad boy of all industry, that they were heavily unionized, and through the efforts of those unions providing safety themselves—to the members—as well as making sure that the companies that they represented provided safety training, that that's no longer the case, that unionized mining companies are no longer the bad boys of industry.

So there is definite benefit to unionization, which were thought to be important as far back as the 1960s when then-Premier Duff Roblin first introduced project labour agreements as part of a hydro dam construction. He recognized that by bringing that in, it was going to require no work stoppages, which would make the project come in on time and lead to being on budget, because the costs of everything were known upfront. The workers' wages, all the benefits were known upfront. There was no work stoppages, strikes throughout the course of the project that would change those numbers.

So it was—it—that was the basis of the project labour agreements, so that it would make a better value for money, which is what the Premier to espouse. Except now the twist seems to be that,

along with Bill 7, which makes it more difficult for unions to organize, doing away with the project labour agreement, will make it more difficult for workers to achieve decent levels of pay on these jobs, as well as decent levels of protections, because without the unionized contractors being there, those levels will go down as we seen in jurisdictions such as the US, that the Premier quotes, that don't have the same level of unionization, that also have horrendous safety records, that also have workers working for lower wages.

So, again, I would ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister) if he can supply any statistics on projects prior to project labour agreements being in effect as opposed to projects since project labour agreements were in effect, or projects that didn't have those type of agreements as opposed to ones that do. If he could provide those statistics that help him and the government decide that project labour agreements were a bad thing.

Mr. Pallister: Just go back for a second, the member's preamble, because you talked about—we were talking about safety for a minute and then the member alluded to wages. I would encourage him to understand that there are many private-sector employers in this province that pay as well or better than union shops.

You can do some cross-comparisons and, you know, I wouldn't want the general assertion to be out there that you have to be unionized to make good money, because there's a lot of companies that pay pretty nice wages to workers who aren't unionized as well. And I think it'd be up to the workers to decide which company they choose to work with.

And the member's ideology I understand, but I wouldn't want it on the record that somehow—that it wasn't—that the private sector somehow didn't pay fair wages. There is a Construction Industry Wages Act, as well, that sets a regime for compensation as minimums, but I know of numerous heavy construction companies, for example, that pay in excess of the minimums required. So I just wouldn't want that assertion to be out there. I know the member wouldn't want that out there as it would reveal a rather extreme and unsupportable bias against the private sector.

That being said, the—in terms of the safety aspects the member raised, there's a tremendous amount of work going on in terms of safety training, and I'll go back to the heavy construction industry again. WORKSAFELY programs that are

out there, these are offered to unionized workers, non-unionized workers. The idea here is, through the Heavy Construction Association, to benefit all workers and all companies in the process of doing courses. There's a—I'll just read a few examples, but just this month, for example, core leadership course in safety excellence offered at the Heavy central offices. That just was last week. A flag person safety course—that's next week; traffic control co-ordinator courses—again, they're not limited to just union members. So there's, you know, a company—workers can decide if they want to unionize or not. If they decide not to, they're not cut out of these courses.

So I wouldn't want—again, I wouldn't want the assertion to be out there that, you know, only the 23 per cent—was the last number I saw—of companies that are unionized in the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association care about the safety of their workers, because three out of four are not unionized, and they're availing themselves of training courses and programs all the time because they care about their employees and they care about them as people as much they do as assets, I expect.

So, you know, there's lots of courses going on—excavation and training safety courses, train the trainer courses, leadership courses in safety excellence, principles of health and safety management—that's coming up in August. Again, lots of programs available to improve the safety of our workers around the province. Union or non-union, that shouldn't be the issue. The issue should be improving safety. I think that's really the key here, is to make sure that our companies are protecting their workers and to make sure that we adopt approaches which support that happening.

Mr. Lindsey: I acknowledge what the Premier is saying, but certainly the world has changed in the few—last few years where injuring and killing workers is no longer socially acceptable, and the world has changed in its outlook on that.

But I want to get back to—can the Premier provide any statistics on pre-project labour agreements, post-project labour agreements as far as the economics of either-or?

Mr. Pallister: I expect the member was speaking facetiously, but, again, suggesting it's no longer publicly acceptable for workers to be injured or killed—I don't believe it was ever publicly acceptable in our province, ever, and I doubt that there was another province in Canada where that was ever publicly acceptable, so I can't—you know, I can't

let that sit there as a comment. Public safety is everybody's business, and I think if the member is saying that—if he's implying that employers are more aware now than they used to be, that's one thing, but referencing injured and dead workers in the context of this discussion as being publicly acceptable at one time is just not—that's beyond the pale.

There—the group that has principal representation, I suppose, in the heavy construction industry, in response to the member's question about costs—I was very, very concerned when the government—previous administration adopted the project-labour-agreement approach on the Red River Floodway. I forget the exact numbers, but it was tens of millions of dollars they felt at the time of additional costs were being imposed on the industry and therefore on the taxpayers in the provision of the services that they provided in that construction project.

* (16:10)

The arguments, as I said previously, that were made at that point in time—remember, we're not talking about the 1960s now, we're talking about 2000s, and relationships, I suppose, can change over time, but the willingness of the union organizers to work in the context of co-operation with non-union companies, I think, has very significantly changed over those years. Quite frankly, many of my friends in the heavy construction industry that have union shops also work, very co-operatively, with non-union. It wasn't always the case. Non-union firms that supply—the culture's changed quite a bit, I think, over the years from one of adversarial relationships, almost, you know, where, you know, you're not a union shop, we don't deal with you, that type of thing. And the culture has shifted to—instead of built working against one another, the attitude now is we build things, and we build them together.

And so I'm not suggesting there isn't the possibility of conflict in a negotiation, there always can be, but I am suggesting that the arguments that once were made for certain practices are not as supportable in the present context. And that's, I suspect, why many jurisdictions have gotten away from using this model, because it adds, also, a burden of paperwork and red tape to the mix that many companies—unionized or not—don't particularly enjoy. They'd rather be building something or fixing something or maintaining something than doing paperwork inside an office.

And that seems to be the makeup, I think, of most of us. We'd rather be doing the real work of getting out to see our constituents than, you know, doing paperwork in our offices. I think that's natural.

And so these are some of the reasons I expect that other jurisdictions—some of the reasons more than expect, some of the reasons have been shared with me by industry participants as to why they would like to see a sort of a more straightforward, level playing field when it comes to tendering practices and getting value for taxpayers with the best possible outcomes with their projects.

Mr. Lindsey: So, from what I can gather from the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) response, is there was some consultations, some discussions with industry on their desire to have the project labour agreements done away with.

Was there any consultation with labour groups on that same issue?

Mr. Pallister: Well, we'd have to check with the Infrastructure Minister when he gets into Estimates. I'd encourage the member to check with him on the specific nature of the consultations that he has undertaken.

Certainly—I just want to back up for a second if I could on the safety side, and just share with the member, as well, some other initiatives that are under way in terms of workplace safety. And these are safety procedures that are available, again, to unionized companies, non-unionized companies. Their teams of employees, whether they've chosen to unionize or not chosen to unionize isn't the pertinent issue, the pertinent issue is the safety of those people.

So, for example, there are Safety Talks—and I'll just read from the bulletin here: Safety Talks are an essential tool to educating and informing your employees on current and relevant workplace safety and health topics. Each safety talk gives you the following: content of talks is specific to construction projects and meet legislative requirements; Safety Talks is distributed to all core certified companies; Safety Talks supports internal, external core audit requirements. So, as the member knows, there are requirements for taking a certain number—and I don't have the expertise on this to know the exact number of hours but if you want to be core certified as a company, you have to do a certain amount of safety training as a minimum requirement. And, so, these are core certified courses we're talking about,

available to non-unionized or unionized companies—that's not the issue.

So in—this year, there's safety talks on a—I won't read the member the whole list, but I expect he would be interested in this because it is, you know, it's improving the safety of workers—fatigue awareness. This is an important one, I can tell you. The workplace bullying and harassment; there's a session on preventing Lyme disease because a lot of people are out and as he knows, there's a lot of bush involved in some of these projects, getting them ready to go. That bipole line, for example, I think they were talking about 500 kilometres of land that was unnecessarily brutalized by the—that project, bush that was pushed down. A lot of workers, unfortunately, had to be involved in that project unnecessarily and at a great cost to the taxpayer and ratepayer.

There's safety talks on concrete reinforcement, and I think they're talking in a real sense, not a figurative sense, about concrete reinforcement in that particular seminar; housekeeping; push-pull safety; protecting workers from heat stress; thunderstorms and lightning hazards; manual material handling; shovelling; digging; industry best practices session on road safety; falls through unsecured shafts or openings; mounting and dismounting on excavators, there's a course on that; preventing slips and falls; safe lifting and your back; preventing tripping; winter survival; winter personal protective equipment; frostbite; black ice awareness; slips, trips, falls on icy surfaces; driving on country roads. Now that's one that the member and I don't need a seminar on; we've done enough of that. But I expect there are some folks who actually could benefit from a training seminar on that. I never even thought of that as a possible topic until I just read it off the sheet. That's something you take for granted when you're born and raised in the country, I think. You've got excavation and trenching safety; winter work gear; transporting equipment; snowplow operation; bees and wasps during outdoor work; pneumatic tools; health hazards of cement; and equipment refuelling.

And that's just a sample of the kinds of safety work that are being done, not on the basis of ideology just for union shops but for non-unionized and unionized workers alike.

And there's an array of those kinds of examples out there that I'm sure the member would be impressed by.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for reading through a partial list of safety talks. He certainly doesn't need to attempt to school me on workplace health and safety. That's what I've done for the last 20 years of my life. So I'm fortunate and glad that I did it in a unionized environment and also helped non-unionized workers in the process.

So, again, I asked if he could supply any statistics that would back up his desire to do away with project labour agreements. So far, he's failed to provide any such statistics, and I have a funny feeling we're not going to see them today; I could be wrong.

But project labour agreements as they tie into community benefit agreements: Is the Premier and this government in favour of community benefit agreements?

Mr. Pallister: Now, Mr. Chair, I got to tell you. I have enjoyed the discussions that I've had with this member, and I expect we'll enjoy many in the future. But I take it as a personal challenge, and maybe that is why he raised the question in the way he did, when he suggested I wouldn't be forthcoming on answering a question, because I've been very forthcoming with the member throughout our sessions and I will continue to be.

Now there is no reason to believe that restricting the number of participants in a bidding process in any way, shape or form would actually assist us in getting better value for Manitoba taxpayers. And this is the fundamental challenge that a lot of small businesses face when there is—when there are the requirements imposed on them of a project labour agreement.

I know the member favours—and he deserves to be proud of his work within his union environment, and he should—he—and I commend him for that. But a lot of great work goes on in non-union shops too. And I don't think it's right to work on the assumption that simply because he's done good things in his life in a union environment, others couldn't have done good things in a non-unionized environment.

So that's, I guess, the point I'm trying to get across. I know a lot of people worked awfully hard in the Department of Agriculture over the years on programs, and I'm attempting to get some more detail for the member, but I had personal experience with this in respect—he referenced farms and the risks around farms.

* (16:20)

And I know from my former life as a financial adviser, I dealt with disability and illness issues quite frequently, trying to protect workers in case they had fell ill or—and to get them compensation, worked very hard to prevent the lack of financial resources being available to them if they fell ill or were hurt on a job-related or non-job-related accident, right.

And I know how important it is when someone, especially when someone's ill or injured, I know how important it is for their—themselves and their family to have those financial resources available. I spent a lot of my life making sure that we did everything we could to provide, for example, disability income when a worker was off. So—because workers' comp works fine if you have an injury related to work, but it isn't very good if you're, you know, if you have a car accident not related to work or something, you're out of luck. So we set up programs for workers over many years in the private sector to help make sure that they had those benefits.

Now, I know what the member's thinking. He's thinking, if they'd have been unionized, they'd have had them, right. That isn't always the case—wasn't always the case. And I know the member will know that it isn't always the case, regardless of union or non-union. And so I appreciate his work. I hope he appreciates mine too, because I care very much about protection for workers. It's something that I've spent a lot of my life working for. And I think in this we share that common goal.

As far as the project labour agreement additional cost, that's—it's cited in—I would say, common sense, first and foremost, that if you're going to make it more difficult for a small business to bid on a job, you're going to find the costs are going to go up, ultimately, because many of the small businesses will bid competitively. And that is what this is. According to the Heavy Construction Association, it's one of the impediments that has been there with the closed bidding process that project labour agreement entails.

I would also say there is a principle at work here that many espouse. Merit Contractors, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Christian Labour Association of Canada, Winnipeg Construction Association have all advocated for a model—a managed open-site model. And it is very commonplace around the world, a managed open-site model. It is not discriminatory in any way against union shops, in fact, quite the contrary. And what a

managed open-site model does, it uses multiple project labour agreement models, in a sense, within—depending on the project, the type of company, organization, you can allow an alternative union, non-union, a union.

The managed open-site model sets general obligations for everybody on the site, such as, for example, the number of hours you can work a week, so that—get into this fatigue issue, that is a big issue on heavy site. And people, I think, who work in—well, we don't work in an air-conditioned environment here, but many people who work in an air-conditioned environment in the middle of summer don't understand the stress that a worker is under working outside on a construction project. You know, a 40-hour week on some of those sites is an enormously long period of time.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that.

The question was about community benefit agreements.

Does the Premier support community benefit agreements?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I hope the member's not, you know, not objecting to my answer to his preamble, because he did reference that I wasn't going to answer, and then I did give him a response on his previous question, which he said I wouldn't. So I hope he'll acknowledge I did give him an answer and I hope he will review Hansard and appreciate the incredible detail that was contained in that answer as well.

The community benefit agreements, you know, again, I think there's probably good opportunity. I know that the Infrastructure Minister's just itching to get into Estimates and would probably dearly love to give the member all kinds of incredible detail on that when he has the opportunity. If he does get the opportunity, I'm sure that the member will have all kinds of incredible detail made available to him by someone who has far greater expertise on that than I do.

Mr. Lindsey: I acknowledge the Premier for answering a question. Certainly beginning to get a clearer picture of his consultation process but, again, I want to know if the Premier supports the concept of community benefit agreements.

Mr. Pallister: I'm all for communities benefiting, if that's what the member's asking, but I did want to

give him more detail on this safety training program that is offered through Manitoba Heavy Construction Association. I think he'll benefit from knowing about this. It's—because it is, I know, particularly of interest to him.

And this references driving on country roads. This is a program—now, the member—now, I've got to respond here, Mr. Chair, because you yourself didn't respond but the member for Agassiz (Ms. Clarke), the new member for Agassiz responded there. I think that it's because she takes for granted the skills that she has developed over many years driving on country roads in Agassiz. And I know they've been enhanced in recent months as a result of her participation in a contested nomination that was a very big contest in that part of the province—very interesting contest, there. And I know that she availed herself of the opportunity to travel on many of those roads, and I know that she'll be urging the Infrastructure Minister to make improvements in many of those roads as a consequence of the neglect of the past 17 years, of course, which all Manitobans are suffering as a consequence of today.

But I would mention that these hazards that the member for Agassiz is particularly familiar with include, but are not limited to, some of the following, and I would reference driving on country roads. And this is in the preamble, now, of the WORKSAFELY Manitoba Heavy Construction Association program, which I would emphasize to the member is not a union initiative but, rather, is a certified safety program offered through the COR standards program, which is a national standards program.

Now, I know that the member would be interested in knowing some of the topics that are discussed in this program. We have uncontrolled, poorly marked and hidden intersections create collision hazards. Bumps, ruts, soft shoulders or sharp drop-offs could cause you lose control of your vehicle. Narrow roads and bridges create collision hazards, especially, I should mention, there's a lot of single-lane bridges around rural Manitoba as a result of the years of neglect under the previous administration—lack of investment in maintenance and repair.

Blind road conditions from rolling terrain—and there's a fair bit of that as you get into those foothills to the north area there, up around Birnie and that country. You get up off the escarpment, the old shore of Lake Agassiz there, you know, that ancient glacial lake, the remnants of which are Lake Manitoba, Lake

Winnipeg and Lake Dauphin, and you get up onto the ancient shoreline and there's actually a road that goes along that escarpment.

Well, we enjoy that occasionally as a family. You go from—you can go to the Trans-Canada from Portage and you get to about the west of Austin, there, about Sidney, and then there's a road that goes right along the escarpment to the north-northwest, and it goes right up through the beautiful little communities of—well, there's many small ones there. Firdale is one. And continues up through Arden, which you'll know if you travel Highway 16, and then beyond. And right up to Birnie. And then you get up to intersect with the highway that goes—I think it's 5, might be 5. And, then, you can take Mountain Road back and get across over towards Erickson. It's a beautiful piece of the province; I'd recommend that one for travel.

If anyone's going to Riding Mountain, for example, I would say take that angle road. Don't take 16, it's just ordinary. You go on that—if you don't mind—take this course, first, and then you'll be able to drive on that—those roads.

There's also driver fatigue, which can be an issue. School buses and service vehicles frequently stopping; dirty, cracked windshields or burned-out headlights obstructing vision and/or visibility; and then it—this course gets into a lot more detail, which I'll share with the member in a moment.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Pallister) will share, in infinite detail, all sorts of things that have no bearing on the question that I just asked him.

People in communities in northern Manitoba are concerned about opportunities to work, are concerned about opportunities for advancement, are concerned about opportunities to participate. And, again, I'll ask the Premier if he supports the concept of community benefit agreements on some of these projects so that people in those northern communities in particular, but not just them, can participate in the growth of this province.

* (16:30)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I share the member's concerns about creating opportunities in the North and elsewhere, but in particular I wouldn't reference more than three dozen visits by caucus members of the opposition—at the time opposition to the North—to northern communities to meet with groups, individuals, community leaders. I was very impressed by the dedication of the then-opposition

and I think it was in no small part because of the incredible outreach that they engaged in that they developed a Yes! North strategy, which influenced many in the North to believe that they would no longer be taken for granted, as had been the case with the previous administration through those long 17 desperate years of missed opportunity and oversight that was negligent in most respects, Mr. Chair.

I would say the Yes! North initiative is a real good opportunity. It is something that we announced as part of our 100-day commitment to the government. We already set up a working group of Growth, Enterprise and Trade people in program areas. They've been meeting to explore options for developing and implementing this initiative. And I will sincerely, as I have in the past, encourage the member if he has any ideas in respect to specifics, we talked a little bit about this the other day, I am open to hearing them and I would like to incorporate suggestions he may have into what we do together in the North, because I think it goes way beyond partisanship in spite of my sarcasm earlier.

I do think that there is an opportunity for us to do some real good things. There's—there are—clearly we talked about a few things in the run up to our campaign and during our campaign where we see some real potential. I know some of the members—not him, I don't think—but some of the members of the now opposition have ridiculed our belief that tourism holds real potential for the North, but we do think it does. We think it's a beautiful part of the province worth promoting, and so we are very, very interested in working with northern communities to encourage tourism to their areas.

I've really enjoyed my visits to the member's riding, and I think it's a beautiful part of the province. I think it's something that—I know that communities worked really hard to promote. There's been some real good commitment demonstrated over a long time on a number of the festivals and attractions that are there, and I think there's very likely more that could be done. If more people knew about the beauty of that area, more people would go. And I think we could—you know, we see tourism as a major opportunity. It is a major growth area in a lot of the western world now.

I think partly because with the baby boom and so on, people that have worked, you know, throughout their lives have some—a little more in the way of financial resources than the member and I did when

we were growing up, and I think they are looking for travel opportunities and to explore. And so what's happening in a lot of the world, not exclusively North America, but in South America, in Europe, and in Asia, is that tourism development is moving ahead as a percentage of the GDP in almost all jurisdictions.

Here in Manitoba we lag the country in promoting our own province, and I think there's much that we could be doing. So if the member had ideas in terms of how we could work within the North, not exclusively his own riding I know he'll advocate for his own riding, we all do. But I also think there's real opportunities there, and I think it's worthy of us pursuing these things together. I think that Manitoba is the country's best kept secret, quite frankly, and the North, there's no exception to that.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for supplying us with no end of detail. I apologize if I missed the answer to my question somewhere in that detail.

Does the Premier support community benefit agreements when it comes to doing these projects?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I am addressing the seed of a thought that's in the member's question. I expect there is a seed there, and I think the thought is do you want to see economic growth in northern communities. I think that's what he's asking and I'm attempting to address that with my answer.

I think the idea here is to see communities benefit. I think that's why the member is asking the question, and that's why I'm talking about ways in which our communities can benefit, and specifically talking about examples like the Yes! North initiative of our government. Like—well, quite frankly I would say that, you know, our communities can benefit in a number of ways from some of my earlier detail in respect of some of the safety things. We shouldn't lose sight of that. Certainly, the member—former member now, for Thompson, on numerous occasions was raising concerns ironically about the quality of highways and insisting that we should support his efforts to, you know, to build highways once every five years. We have a better plan on that. Our plan would be actually to engage in construction of good roads in a focused and clear manner on a regular basis as opposed to infrequently as the previous Infrastructure minister espoused.

But I also think it's important to understand the sensitivities of the member for Thompson—and it

comes to mind when the member speaks about community benefit agreements—that the member for Thompson worked very hard during the NDP leadership race to benefit from his association with The Pas. He went up there. I understand he also had the support of family in his recruitment of members to support him in that riding and, unfortunately for him, despite selling a number of memberships in the area, wasn't able to get them out to vote for him in the leadership process. Allegedly, though, it—the story seems to change—allegedly it was because the then-leader of the NDP, also a leadership contestant, went up—didn't go up as a leadership contestant. He went up to The Pas as a premier and promised jobs. He and the deputy premier promised jobs for the people at OCN. Now, that's not my idea of a community benefit agreement, but that may have been the previous administration's idea.

Community benefit agreements should be structured in such a manner as to benefit the community and shouldn't be structured to benefit political participants in a leadership race. Nonetheless, as a result of the premier's visit to The Pas, he was able to secure less support for the member for Thompson who had sold the memberships and more support for himself in the leadership process. Promising jobs—I believe the allegation from the chief of OCN was he promised the band that he would get them jobs at Hydro or used the deputy premier at the time to make those promises.

That's not our concept of what community benefit agreements should entail. We think that communities should benefit based on their priorities and their assets, their areas of endeavour and potential, and that's what we're committed to working with communities on, not going to those communities and promising them things and then not delivering on them, as was done in the previous administration, sadly.

Mr. Lindsey: So, I guess the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) talked about some things with communities that may benefit. Will the Premier commit that projects that take place such as, but not limited to, building roads, if there's an opportunity to train, educate, community members to work on those projects and not just work on those projects but through their work on those projects be able to secure employment at ongoing projects. Will the Premier commit to making sure there's agreements in place that would allow members of communities to

participate and get the training and education and the skills to move forward?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I appreciate the member's line of questioning because it is an area that should concern us all. I think it's highlighted, actually, in the recent Auditor General's report that was done on ethics, and I'm going to read some sections out of that—and the member, I know, will find it riveting—momentarily.

But it's also going to be highlighted in an Auditor General's report that's coming out very soon, apparently. It's been delayed quite a while, but it is an investigation into community benefit agreements themselves. And it'll be coming out from the Auditor General's office probably some time in the next few weeks. And it'll also do an analysis or evaluation of how those benefit agreements have been managed by the East Side Road Authority specifically. And so this will provide us with an opportunity as members of this Legislature to review how those benefit agreements have actually been run and how they may be able to be run better in the future.

* (16:40)

I think that that opportunity is one—I know the member will be interested in that report, because there are very real benefits that can accrue to people within communities around the province if these agreements are managed properly. And if they are not, then of course we have to find out how they can be managed better, and make sure that we're doing the best we can to derive the real benefits for the people of the community as opposed to the benefits of those who may be handling the program.

Mr. Lindsey: I'll turn the questioning over to my colleague from Fort Rouge.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I'd like to know whether the Premier plans to intervene on the matter of the Hanover School Division ruling that issues around LGBTTQ* communities are sensitive comment—sensitive content, rather.

Mr. Pallister: I'm—I have great confidence in the Education Minister and I encourage the member to express confidence in his handling of this issue to date, and I believe that the important issues that have been raised in the context of the discussion in Hanover deserve to be debated respectfully and fully.

Mr. Kinew: What is the Premier's views on the matter—what are the Premier's views on the matter?

Mr. Pallister: My views are that there's a process that the community needs to avail itself of, that complainants have to be treated fairly and respectfully in all aspects of the handling of these issues and that the board must conduct itself in a responsible and mature manner in its handling of these concerns.

My views are that there is a—my understanding is that there's been an advancement of this as a human rights issue, and that in the same context, that should be handled respectfully as well.

Mr. Kinew: I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is aware that the Manitoba Human Rights Code protects—rather, prevents against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Am I fair in that assertion?

Mr. Pallister: My understanding is that there's been a complaint filed with the Human Rights Commission regarding the specific issue the member raises, and being respectful of the process, I would not wish to prejudge in any way the hearings that will ensue as a consequence of that, so as not to jeopardize in any way the concerns being handled in a fair and entirely unbiased manner.

Mr. Kinew: I think there's, you know, two separate issues. You know, there is the human rights complaint that was announced today, but then there's also the prerogative of this government to exercise a legal authority that it has over educational matters here.

So setting aside the matters that may be germane to the human rights complaint process and not wanting to jeopardize that either or prejudice in any way, I'd ask, you know, the First Minister, you know, whether he believes that the Education Minister has fully upheld his responsibility to abide by the Human Rights Code in the province in the intervention that he's made to date.

Mr. Pallister: I think the member is asking me something which requires me to go to a place that I don't think I should go, for the simple fact that out of respecting the process that the people have raised.

I do not want to say or do anything that would jeopardize their ability in respect of raising their concerns through this process. And so I would need to be more confident than I am that I'm—that I am—I don't—again, I want to make sure that they're able to get all the protections that they need, through the process, and I wouldn't want to do anything to jeopardize that happening, make any comment which

would be taken in the context of our present discussion, regardless of my colleague's assertion that setting aside for a moment adequately separates me from associating my comments with the previous situation he's raised. I would say it might well be taken that I was talking about the situation he just raised moments ago, regardless of his admonition that it not be such.

So I wish to encourage the member in his interest, but at the same time discourage him from the line of questioning for the fact that I should not venture into expressing views about this or related issues around this complaint. This is a quasi-judicial process, as he knows, and it's one that we should respect.

Mr. Kinew: The Manitoba Human Rights Code prevents or, you know, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and on the basis of gender. We also know that the curriculum in Manitoba teaches about human rights issues in grades—early grades like grades 2 and grades 3. Therefore, it seems to me that talking about LGBTTTQ* issues would be necessary in the early years so as to ensure that when human rights are being taught and the human rights protections afforded to Manitobans under the law in this province, that there would be some inclusion of those topics.

Setting aside the comments made by trustees from the Hanover School Division, there has been a policy in the area to deem LGBTTTQ issues a sensitive topic, but it seems to me as though there's a tension there. How can we have teachings about human rights, which includes things like sexual orientation in early years, and then, at the same time, rule that talking about some of those issues protected under human rights law are a sensitive topic which cannot be taught until high school?

Does the First Minister, you know, share my view on the matter, or does he have a different opinion?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, and my growing affection and admiration for the member aside, setting aside that for a moment, the member is asking us to set aside something which is now the subject of a complaint filed with the Human Rights Commission specifically as raised earlier in the discussion, has cited his personal preferences in respect of how it should be handled and then asked me how I think it should be handled.

He's clearly talking about the Hanover situation and I've tried to explain to him that I cannot go there because I would be putting at risk, in my estimation at least, I would be putting at risk the independence of the Human Rights Commission in its dealing with this issue. I do not want to do anything which would jeopardize the protection and rights of the participants in this case. I want to be sure that those are protected, and so, you know, he's got me in a position where I can't enter into a discussion setting aside what he already knows we're talking about. That's a hypothetical I just can't accept.

Mr. Kinew: Does the business of government continue while the human rights complaint goes ahead?

Mr. Pallister: Well, if this passes for the business of government, I suppose so.

Mr. Kinew: Would that include the Education Minister continuing to have legal authority to act on matters pertaining to education in this province?

Mr. Pallister: Not only would it include that, it would also include the necessity for all members of the Legislature to respect the Human Rights Commission and the cases that are before it as well.

Mr. Kinew: And would that also include that the First Minister continues to have conversations with the Education Minister and continues to be able to direct him to undertake certain matters around the Cabinet table?

Mr. Pallister: It would include that, but not be limited to that. It would include me listening to suggestions from all members of the Legislature, members of the public who would choose to intervene and are interested, but would not, I would submit to the member, would not include me intervening in a case before the Human Rights Commission.

* (16:50)

Mr. Kinew: Whether or not any of us are deemed fit to appear before the adjudicator at the Human Rights Commission, you know, I think that there still is a possibility of intervening with the Hanover School Division this year as they're engaged in the conversations that will set forth the policies that will govern, you know, how education is delivered next year—the next academic year in their school division.

So will the First Minister undertake to have a conversation with his Education Minister on this topic, to try and advance, you know, an outcome that

would ensure that there is both safety for students who may identify as LGBTTQ*, or for students who have family members who may identify as LGBTTQ*, but also for all students in the Hanover School Division who have a right to understand the human rights standards that are currently in existence in this province?

Mr. Pallister: I would not undertake to do anything that would jeopardize the ability of complainants before the Human Rights Commission to be fairly heard, and to be—have their case adjudicated fairly and without bias.

Mr. Kinew: So, for greater clarity, does that mean that he will not have this conversation with the Education Minister?

Mr. Pallister: For the purposes of the Estimates process, I don't wish to share my conversations with the member. You know, if the member wants to ask policy questions, or questions of fact, that's fine. But as far as discussions—when I have discussions with colleagues, or with members of the opposition for that matter, those are not germane to the proceedings here.

Mr. Kinew: Well I, you know, am respectful of, you know, privilege around the Cabinet table and the conversations there, but I would like to put on the record that I would encourage the First Minister to undertake in his private conversations with the Education Minister to advance this.

You know, it's my personal belief that this is one of the human rights issues of our time, and certainly in the conversations that we've had in question period this session, it seems to be one of the most germane human rights issues. At least, of the conversations that we've had to date.

So I would hope that, even if it's not appropriate in the First Minister's view, to share those conversations at this committee table, that he would still carry on with those discussions, and perhaps there could be a reasonable outcome.

With that in mind however, does the First Minister agree that it would be optimal if this issue could be resolved in the next two weeks, so that there could be a policy in place that all sides agree to in advance of the next academic year?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member used the word optimal. It would be optimal—it would be in the best interests of all complainants, present and future, that go before the Human Rights Commission, not to

substitute activism, which causes one to want to—and look, I've been an activist, the member's an activist—but it is important when cases are being heard before Human Rights Commission not to substitute solutions in advance, motivated by activism and by sincere desires, to see certain beliefs met.

For a process that we have established together, here—the previous government claims to have strengthened it—which are designed to adjudicate and arrive at fair outcomes. To—what the member is asking me to do is essentially to take the place of the Human Rights Commission, and to take action on a complaint which is before it now, motivated by a desire to see people fairly treated. The member is asking for something which is actually dangerous in its application because it substitutes his vision—and my own—for the wisdom of a human rights commission that has to juggle the rights and responsibilities of all citizens in a difficult case. All their cases, actually, I think are difficult.

And so I would encourage the member to understand that in his—no doubt sincere—desire to see an outcome he would like, he must not be persuaded that instant action is a better remedy than the Human Rights Commission can offer.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I think—as I think through other processes that have been before the Manitoba Human Rights Commission or the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, I don't think it necessary that being committed to the fair process and being committed to respecting the outcome of that process precludes taking action. And I think that a reasonable person would probably assume the same, and, you know, I know the First Minister to be a reasonable man. Therefore, there may be other considerations to which I'm not, you know, aware, that are going on.

The decision that stands out in my mind is the, you know, Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision earlier this year that the federal government is discriminating against children on reserve in its underfunding of the provision of social services. So, this was a long-running human rights case. I believe it was some 10 years in the running from the time that Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, Phil Fontaine, then national chief of the Assembly of First Nations and others took the federal government to court. It has taken for the tribunal to hand down its verdict, apparently, for there to be the generation of political will to act to remedy the situation.

I pose that scenario in front of the committee because I don't think a reasonable person would have begrudged the federal government from having remedied that inequity during the course of the commission's deliberations on the matter. I think, you know, politicians are free to exercise their prerogative to weigh in and, you know, administer both policy, program regulation and other sorts of interventions. In this case, it seems to me as though a relatively, you know, layperson's reading of the matter would urge some form of action, some form of additional action on behalf of some of the ministers of the Crown, you know, just again to reiterate that human rights are taught at early years, that there are human rights protections for sexual orientation in the province and that a school division has ruled that those—some of those topics protected under the Human Rights Code cannot be taught about until high school.

So, to me, it seems as though a reasonable person would see that there are grounds to act, so I would like to ask whether the First Minister does see that there are grounds to act. Even if he can't share what the action will be or what the conversation will be, does he see grounds to respond to the situation at hand?

Mr. Pallister: The member cites a reasonable person. I was fighting for indigenous women's rights with—strongly supporting many indigenous women across the country for some time, and we all felt that a reasonable person would have acted on that a quarter of a century before. But substituting myself as a reasonable person or the member substituting himself as a reasonable person in place of the Human Rights Commission charged with the responsibility for overseeing the case would be a gross error of judgment.

Mr. Kinew: But, if the First Minister's work on the issue of real matrimonial property law is cited as a precedent for action, then why not act in this instance? I'm having trouble understanding the usage of the analogy and then why it wouldn't direct the First Minister, even if he can't share with us the details today, that there be some sort of follow-up and some sort of action on this issue.

Mr. Pallister: I'm suggesting to the member that activism and a desire for an outcome should not be confused with this process. This process has to be respected. The desire for a policy outcome to change in the absence of this could be one we could cite in all we want. The sentiments of reasonable—

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I had asked the Minister of Health the other day about the issue of problems with high rates of dental caries. It's particularly a problem in certain areas of Manitoba, but it has been a problem for quite some time. These dental caries in young infants result in them having to have very significant surgical procedures and, you know, the impact can be very significant in terms of their ability to eat, their ability thereon to grow and the extent of this problem really hasn't changed all that much over the last 20 years.

So I'm asking the Minister of Health, what is his plan in terms of preventing this problem and saving the health-care system some significant dollars at the same time?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I thank the member for his question. Certainly, I know that there are individual programs that currently exist, but he's correct. Not—there's not been a great deal of improvement over the last couple of decades—have not, in the last five weeks, put together a go-forward strategy, but it's certainly something I look forward to discussing with officials in the department.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm wondering what the minister's plan is in terms of who he would be talking to and whether he would be interested in having individuals contact himself with regard to a significant plan in this area.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. I thank the member for River Heights for the question. Certainly, I'm always interested and our department officials are interested in hearing from Manitobans who have ideas into how to make the health-care system better, to make it more innovative and to make it more cost-effective.

Mr. Gerrard: There has been, over the years, a significant amount of research done in this area and there are problems, very often, with infants being fed juices which are sugary and a bottle early on instead of milk, partly because of the significant cost of milk in some communities. And this—you know, this I said, is clearly a significant problem.

Would the minister, you know, has the minister given any thought at all to how he would approach, you know, trying to, you know, ensure that we have the changes to keep kids healthier in this area?

Mr. Goertzen: No, it's a good question, one that was similar—alluded to in question period by another member. Certainly the high cost of food in northern and remote areas has been a significant problem in many, many jurisdictions in many areas of Canada that deal with remote areas. I know it's something that federal governments have looked at as well and been engaged in to some extent over the past years and it's a challenge that plagues many different levels of government in other provinces.

The program that currently exists, the AFFIRM program, has had some success in lowering the price, for example, of milk, which was raised by the member for River Heights. Would we like it to see the price more normalized to other areas? We would. It's not an easy solution as obviously a lot of different challenges and costs that go involved there, but certainly it would be a goal to reduce some of those costs even further than they've been reduced currently.

Mr. Gerrard: There has also, interestingly, been a significant amount of research. We suggest that there may be a link between vitamin D and the laying down, not just of bones, but of teeth, and in particular there's some research which suggests that the amount of vitamin D that a mother has during pregnancy, because the early on—the laying down of the enamel and the bone for the teeth is important, and so I would suggest that the minister look, you know, at diet, but also look at this question of the possible role of vitamin D. There certainly could be a look at the possibility of supplementing with vitamin D, to raise the levels of vitamin D in pregnant mothers to see if this would make a difference, for example.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the member raising these issues. I think it's a learning process for—well, clearly for me, as a new minister, but even for the staff that are senior staff and have been within the Department of Health for years. Certainly, one of the things that

I've heard from staff is that they're always learning and that there's always new research and there's new ideas that are coming forward. You sometimes wish you could afford everything, but a lot of things that don't cost an awful lot of money, the member's alluded to some of those. They have to do with more practices than necessarily high costs.

So I think that everyone within the department, including senior staff and myself as minister are open to different ideas. We want to make our decisions led by research, of course, recognizing that there's sometimes conflicting research, but where there's a consensus, generally, you know, and we're able to do so in a financially prudent way, it makes sense to make decisions that are led in a—by a research evidence-based approach, and I appreciate the member bringing forward these suggestions.

Mr. Gerrard: The relevant research in this area has been done by Dr. Bob Schroth at the University of Manitoba, showing a significant correlation between the level of vitamin D in mothers and the subsequent problems with tooth—early childhood tooth decay.

There was, indeed, a study done here in Manitoba which looked at whether supplementation of vitamin D could make a difference. The problem, it turned out, is that the levels of vitamin D which were provided to the mother, were not enough to sufficiently or to significantly change the levels of vitamin D in the mothers. And so, you know, initially it seemed like it was, sort of, a negative result. It was negative in that it, you know, it showed that we needed, if this was to be effective, that we have higher levels of vitamin D. And, indeed, the evidence over the last 10 years has shown that, in general, the levels of vitamin D that were being used, oh, 15 or 20 years ago, were probably, in many instances, too low and that we should have been looking at higher levels.

I mention this because I think it is important that, as Minister of Health, the minister, you know, knows a little bit of the background and is able to follow through and look intelligently at this, at where, in fact, we can act now and where we need some more research.

Mr. Goertzen: We've taken down the notation on the researcher and the nature of the research and I know my staff will follow up with that and ensure that it's being looked at by the right people in the department and certainly I would be happy to see a summary of it.

You know, the issue of vitamin D and testing of vitamin D in Manitoba is an interesting one, in that there's some evidence, of course, that one can overtest vitamin D in Manitoba just by the nature of our climate, that vitamin D deficiency is almost a given, in some cases, in the nature of our climate. And testing it sort of just confirms that, maybe not to a lot of purpose, but the member hits on a specific point about those who are in pregnancy and the impact of being vitamin D deficient there, and that's just a particular subgroup of the general population. So, it's an important point and I'm glad that he's raised it.

* (14:50)

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think that the—if the minister follows-up with Dr. Bob Schroth, who has done a lot of research in this area that, you know, an approach can be developed to address not only the potential for dietary changes, but the potential for vitamin supplementation, in this case with Vitamin D.

And, you know, hopefully, we can prevent this problem in the future so that we don't have to have the many surgical procedures which are now being done on these children and the high costs associated with that surgical procedure.

The minister knows full well that I have talked a lot about the need for a dedicated stroke unit, and I wonder if the minister could provide some sort of an update on where things are.

Mr. Goertzen: It's obviously early days. We have committed in the election campaign to a dedicated stroke unit, only had very preliminary discussions about that. However, we have certainly tasked different people within the department to do some work on that particular issue and other issues that we ran on in the election, so I hope to get more of an update in the days ahead, but it's an election commitment that we made. I don't think we committed to having it open in six weeks—I'll double-check on that, but I'm pretty sure we didn't commit to having it open in six weeks. I don't think the member would want us to have it necessarily open in six weeks. There'll be consultation that will be needed to make sure that it's done properly, put into the right place, and that consultation will, of course, take a bit of time and the resources will have to be found within the government, but a commitment was made during the election and it's certainly our intention to honour that commitment.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. In terms of the stroke unit, I wasn't—expected it to be necessarily fully operational within six weeks, but I was hoping that there would be some, you know, significant progress. It is quite clear from many, many studies going back to the late 1980s and through the 1990s that stroke units, as I think the minister is probably aware, have a very significant beneficial effect, both in terms of reducing mortality and in terms of reducing morbidity, and that when one is looking at putting in place a stroke unit there may be some upfront costs, but the estimate is that there would be some very significant savings because, in fact, the disability associated with stroke is one of the most expensive, you know, conditions that—in health care, partly because disability with stroke often needs very long rehabilitation. That rehabilitation is not complete and so that there can be long hospitalizations; there can be a lot of time in rehabilitation facilities and where, in fact, one can act quickly and, you know, break up the clot, because in a significant proportion of these, there is a clot which forms in the blood vessel and blocks the blood supply to a portion of the brain and then that causes a stroke, and if you can open up that blood vessel quickly with a clot-busting drug and do it within the confines of a stroke unit then your chances of the maximum benefit are significant and the potential for people who would have had very significant damage from the stroke or even death to have recovery and to do very well is certainly there.

Mr. Goertzen: The member is correct, obviously, and he has, you know, great history and professional background in some of these issues, and we recognize that in health care, and I'm learning it in different sectors within health care, that seconds matter and seconds are precious, and so a stroke unit is certainly one of those areas where if you can reduce the amount of time that a person has been—undergone an episode and where they can get the life-saving treatment they need, every second is important. I think it's one of the reasons we committed to it during the election. The mandate letter that I've been provided by our Premier (Mr. Pallister) is, I think, good. It relates to transparency. It gives you focus. It gives direction. But it's not all achievable overnight, and that's why some of them have mandates that relate to four-year terms and some of them relate to eight-year terms. And I know that there's far more good ideas in health care than the Treasury will allow us to do immediately, and that if one was allowed to sort of do things without any sort of financial considerations, many things could be done.

But, you know, in reflecting on that, some would argue that the previous government really paid no attention to financial constraints, and yet there was many failures. The member himself will have pointed out those failures in the Legislature over the last many years, and that money itself is never going to be the solution. It has to be spent appropriately and wisely and in the right places, recognizing that there is still only one taxpayer, and the taxpayers have to ultimately fund these issues.

So it's not for a lack of good ideas, that's for certain, but maybe for a lack of enough people to pay for all of those good ideas. And we have to be mindful of the fact that Manitobans have a heavy tax burden as it is.

But he is correct, the issue of a stroke unit and a dedicated unit will save lives, I believe, over time. It will take seconds off of—precious seconds off of those who are undergoing that particular medical trauma, and it is important. If it were up to me, you know, could we have had it opened tomorrow, I think all of those in our government and everybody in the Legislature would say that's great. But, obviously, we have to ensure that these things are done responsibly, done in a way that make the most sense in terms of how they're done, done in consultation with medical professionals over time and done in a way that's sustainable. So those factors all play a part of it, but it doesn't take away from the importance or the resolve of this government to ensure that that happens in the promised time frame.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the things about stroke units and—is that the stroke unit in Winnipeg can function not only for the direct treatment but it can also function as a vital knowledge point for the province, as it were. And as we are linking people in who are paramedics, for example, or doctors around the province to the expertise, if there is a dedicated stroke unit, so that is where people can go for expertise and so that it will enable and facilitate the care and the help for people who have strokes and, in time, perhaps, even the prevention of strokes.

But, certainly, if somebody has a stroke, whether it is in Steinbach or Brandon or Thompson or anywhere else within the province, that because, as the minister knows, time in this instance is brain, that is, that you can save a brain by having things done quickly, that it has the potential then to be able to provide much better care, not just within the stroke unit but province-wide, and to help in organizing the care province-wide in this instance.

So I will hope that the minister, in setting up the stroke unit, looks not just at what's happening within the stroke unit but at the links to province-wide care of individuals with stroke.

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, those are valid suggestions, and I think the department is thinking about ways that we can, as much as possible, have a province-wide mindset to different things. It wouldn't necessarily apply to this issue, but, you know, there's always discussions about how do you provide services locally but plan provincially, so I'm mindful of those suggestions from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). It's still, you know, early days in terms of the thoughts and planning around the stroke unit, although it has been happening and there have been discussions within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority in terms of location and what would be the appropriate and suitable location. So that's an initial sort of thought process. There's other plans, as well, in terms of the scope of the unit, but all those suggestions are helpful from the member.

*(15:00)

Mr. Gerrard: This co-ordination of specialized care province-wide, as we've been talking about in terms of stroke, there are other areas. We have, actually, very good co-ordination of treatment of cancer, but another area where it has been suggested or promoted is in the area of bone and joint health.

Now, Alberta has long had an Alberta bone and joint health unit, which is designed to bring together expertise and co-ordinate a network of care province-wide, and building on the evidence and the research knowledge to improve care and to reduce costs, interestingly enough.

There has been some effort at looking at the possibility of having a Manitoba bone and health co-ordinated approach here in Manitoba, somewhat similar to Alberta.

Is that something that the minister would consider looking at?

Mr. Goertzen: It's a good—you know, anywhere we can find co-ordination within the health-care system, whether that is something like the CancerCare programs, and the member cites the co-ordination, and I was able to see first-hand some of that in visiting with CancerCare Manitoba, but also know from my own home community and the other hub CancerCare units in—throughout rural Manitoba, that co-ordination is generally positive and certainly is helpful.

And, again, it's about sort of thinking provincially but hoping to deliver as many programs as possible locally, recognizing that it isn't always possible to provide every program in one's local community, that would be ideal. There are cost factors that come into that. But as much as anything there are, as the member knows, resource issues and trying to ensure that we have the right people who can do things, but also who are willing to do them in areas of the province where we don't have a lot of disruption of service. That is a challenge for many areas of Manitoba.

My friend from The Pas raised a particular issue in question period about that and the challenge of keeping professionals in certain areas to provide the services that people want to have within those communities. Those are ongoing challenges and pressures that the previous government faced, that our government, I imagine, will face and the governments across Canada are facing.

In terms of the orthopedic program related to Alberta, that is not a model, of course, that we have structured now. I do think that there are ways, at least initially, where there could be better co-ordination and discussion between those who are within that community of practice to try to better co-ordinate some of their efforts. It might not fall into the exact way that the Alberta model does, not to suggest that's not a good model. There are some things Alberta does that are, of course, very good, and others that we might do a little bit better. But I do think there could at least, at the initial outset, be better co-ordination or, at least, better communication between those who are involved in the orthopedic community of practice.

Mr. Gerrard: Just along those same lines, I attended a two-day workshop last year which dealt with how one could bring together not only the orthopedic surgeons, but the whole variety of other health professionals who are involved in the area of bone and joint health. And so there is some potential to bring together an initiative which would help province-wide, but which also brings together a variety of individuals in different areas of bone and joint health.

So, with those comments, I will hand this microphone over to the MLA from The Pas. And I think she has some questions for you.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I'm honoured to be sitting here this afternoon with the privilege to ask our Minister of Health questions in regards to health

with Manitobans, in particular with northern Manitoba.

I just wanted to go back to the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. There's 94 recommendations here, and seven of them address health. And there's just some questions I have here in regards to honouring the calls to actions, and our government's plans to do so, such as for all love—all of the calls is to—or all levels of government to come together when we're talking about provincial, federal and our First Nations government.

I just wanted to ask the government's plans on how to increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field, in particular, in northern Manitoba where we can speak our language to each other.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, the member raises an excellent point, and, you know, there's sort of the general concern that we have, and that she had in the previous government, about how do you, first of all, get enough people to practise within the province of Manitoba in the various streams of medical profession.

*(15:10)

That's sort of the initial challenge, and every province is dealing with that. And then there is the specific challenge about how do you get medical professionals to practise in areas that are more challenging to get people to practise in and to live in, where there's often a high need in terms of medical desire, but there's also a relatively few people who are practising, which makes it challenging, sort of a Catch-22, but it makes it challenging to attract more people because they like to practise with a general group of individuals.

And then there's the other challenge about how do you specifically attract people to practise maybe within their home community or within their own culture. So there's sort of a three different prong of challenges that we have. The Truth and Reconciliation recommendations were specific in asking all the levels of government to work at trying to promote Aboriginal health-care providers to practise within the Aboriginal communities, and that's, I think, an excellent recommendation, along with providing education for those who are working in high-density Aboriginal populations to have training just to have a better understanding of Aboriginal health issues, also a recommendation that I think is particularly valid. We support all of them,

of course, as the member does, but those two stick out in my memory as being particularly critical.

But the challenge remains in terms of how do you get people who are Aboriginal, indigenous, to move within the field. One of the things, I know, that's been happening within the northern RHA and maybe it's a very personal approach, where they're trying to look at those who are nurses, Aboriginal nurses within the community, and encourage them and help them to go and advance their skills to become nurse practitioners, which is trying to upskill individuals to stay within the community. That is, I think, one certain initiative.

There are other programs that exist in terms of helping with educational programs and streaming. I think that has some effect, but a lot of it can be very personal in trying to find individuals within the community who have a personal desire to help the community in a certain way. Either they're already doing that and you can identify them and try to upskill them into another level of medical profession so they can help even more individuals and maybe make them more desirous of staying in the community.

I remember when I was in law school, we had one of my friends who was Aboriginal, he came into law as a mature student, specifically because he wanted to be trained as a lawyer, not because he wanted to work at any of the big five firms in Winnipeg or go to Toronto and work off Bay Street, but he specifically wanted to help the northern communities which he called home, and I always thought that that was—that was particularly—touching might not sound like the right word, but in a way it was because that wasn't sort of the common experience of individuals who were in law school.

Most of the law students were trying to achieve something considerably different than that, and so I had a lot of respect for him for that. And I think sometimes we have to do a better job of being more individual, and with the RHAs in terms of identifying those who are interested and willing to stay within the community, support them with some of the programs that already exist but then find those who are already doing some of the work and seeing if we can even advance their skills like they're doing with the northern program of taking nurses and trying to support them to become nurse practitioners. Not an easy solution; not an easy thing to address quickly; the member will know that, being far more familiar with the communities than I am, but

certainly one that, you know, would like to try to make better.

Ms. Lathlin: Just to share with some—just some experience I have in that area. I both sat on the OCN health board and OCN education, and it just seemed like there was joint conversations that need to be had in order to start recruiting at an early age, start recruiting those students with talents in the sciences and math so we could start, if you will, you know, moulding them to go on to the—growing our own doctors, if you will.

And we did have a success with a Metis woman from The Pas where two levels of organizations came together and funded her education for medical school, and now she's practising within her own community in our own hospital.

So I just think, you know, with future conversations and consistent conversations with our Aboriginal organizations to work together and increase that number of our Aboriginal people to enter the medical field. And also there's the ACCESS program, too, at the University of Manitoba, good conversations could be held there too, and I feel like all this can be achieved by a little bit more funding in those areas. So that's where I think it is achievable if it's considered, you know, in future budgets.

So, with that, just on the same lines as well, I just wanted to ask about how—what's the government's plans to ensure—provide cultural competency training for all health-care professionals?

As an Aboriginal woman, in my own home community and elsewhere, I just find that a lot of us have been treated badly, poorly, if we don't speak in which is not our first language, people speak loudly at us thinking that they'll communicate better rather than pointing out there's a language barrier. So with that it's always been very important to me, and as an MLA for The Pas in northern Manitoba, we do receive a lot of phone calls to our office regarding how people are treated within our hospitals, and I just find that the cure for that is the cultural competency training for all health-care professionals. And I just wanted to say where's the government's plans with that to have that happen province-wide as well and as well in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: The member makes a good point and, you know, particularly when she talks about that sort of personal connection within the communities and how do you get individuals to, you know,

commit to a certain training program and to come back to the communities. Certainly, I think that that's a particular issue within the northern community and their Aboriginal and indigenous communities. But I hear that also in other communities in Westman, and sort of my area struggled for that for a while just in terms of, you know, getting enough medical professionals to stay.

So I think that the issue is maybe more acute for sure in the communities that she's speaking of, but it is a—certainly a general problem that we have overall. But I mean I—but her approach is the right one I think, you know, having that individual connection within our communities and encouraging our local youth, who have a particular interest that she identifies maybe in science or have an aptitude in it. Can we encourage them to go through the program, can governments who—all levels of government, you know, encourage and support that and find a way to get them to then come home, right, because it's one thing to get the training but you want them then to come and practise? And you can do some of that through return-for-service agreements, but there's only a limited amount that you can do on that.

The point that the member raises regarding making sure that there's sort of cultural sensitivity training among those within the health-care profession is alluded to as a specific recommendation in the TRC report. I understand that there's been work that's already undergone—been ongoing within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and that there's been a program that's been in place within the WRHA, and there are plans to see if that program can be effectively used across the province.

So it is work that's already ongoing, and potentially this program could be moved throughout the province to—not, you know, not just to adhere to the TRC recommendations, sometimes you feel that when you're working off a checklist of things that have come from a report or a commission, that you're only doing it to check the—put the box off, that's it been accomplished. I mean, I think that this is worthy in and of itself quite apart from the recommendations. It's something that could've been done previously, and I think, frankly, it's something that is welcomed by the medical profession.

I certainly haven't heard anything that would indicate otherwise, and so it's not simply a matter of adhering to recommendations that have come from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but I think it's just something that's probably overdue.

* (15:20)

Ms. Lathlin: Again, in the spirit of truth and reconciliation here, jurisdictional issues. I used to be—I had the honour to work with a round table of our folks regarding jurisdictional issues on reserve and off reserve, federal-provincial, to provide health-care services on reserve and, in particular, and this is coming from home as well, and I'm pretty sure from a lot of our people here, but we get phone calls and visits, table-kitchen visits, coffee, regarding families living with—they're raising people, persons living with disabilities and, in particular, with my community, The Pas and OCN, they're right beside each other, divided by the Saskatchewan River and connected by two bridges. However, people living with disabilities on OCN cannot obtain the services from the Province regarding respite or other services, if you will, and it seems like they feel like they have to move to the other side of the river in order to obtain those services. And I just wanted to know, like, what can I share and what can I work towards, you know, including a lot of us here at the table, to ensure that people living on reserve, like, we're all Manitobans, you know, in the future, like, is there future plans to get rid of that bureaucratic clause that prevents people on reserve to obtain those services?

Mr. Goertzen: It's a good question that I've heard before in that context, but also in other contexts, as well, about trying to find a way to break down some of those—the barriers for provision of health care that happen between jurisdictions, RHAs sometimes as well. Some of those barriers exist, and so I've certainly heard that in different parts of the province.

You know, some of this was supposed to be addressed in issues of Jordan's Principle, and came forward, for many members of the House, but I know that the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) often spearheaded that particular issue and trying to ensure that the individual would receive the service essentially from whomever they connected with first and then the jurisdictional problems would be worked out after medical service had been provided, which I think makes sense.

There is some tribunal and legal issues that are currently ongoing around that, and decisions that might change the scope of Jordan's Principle. Partly as a result of that, I think the federal government has had contact with my department, the Department of Families, I believe, also the department of indigenous affairs, about trying to work out a model

that better addresses the principle providing service and working out who is the responsible funder after.

Now, the member might say, well, we've heard this before, and that might be my, sort of, gut reaction as well, but that is the current status that the federal government has indicated, that they want to have more discussions about how we can ensure that the principle behind Jordan's Principle is actually in effect through the various departments. The member touched on disabilities, and, of course, that's under the Department of Families now, and then if there's issues within indigenous affairs that are somewhat tangential for this as well.

So—but I understand that there is new dialogue that's undergone with the federal government, so, you know, my hope would be that there'll be some advances made on those, because I can see how that is extremely frustrating. And I've visited The Pas a number of times. Just an aside—as an aside, the member's father took me around The Pas once during a Trappers' Festival, and it was—I think he felt pretty confident in his own electoral success, because he treated me better than some of my own colleagues do when I visit their own ridings and taking us for bannock in the different places there, and I was appreciative of that visit. It was one of the first times I got to visit The Pas. But I can understand clearly the frustrations between the community—or the town of The Pas and OCN.

Ms. Lathlin: Thanks for sharing that story with me. That's where I learned how to show respect and—for all our colleagues here in the House.

With that, speaking of The Pas, I just wanted to find out more, and plans, if you can share, when I went through the Speech from the Throne, a mental health and addiction strategy was mentioned. And, currently, I am in community meetings, if you will, with The Pas, many, many community partners addressing both how to find out what we currently have and what we don't have.

And I want to know, once we have our community partners meeting once again to find out what we need to advocate for in terms of expanding those resources in The Pas and in surrounding areas, I just wanted to know if this strategy includes northern Manitoba and, specifically, where and what resources that I can share with our community that we can—we have access to, instead of us being medevac'd out or—to drive, which a lot of us don't have the gas money or the hotel money or people

that we know that we can stay here while we have our medical.

I just wanted to know specifically: What are the plans to address that, to alleviate that stress, especially when it comes to mental health and addictions and just health-care services, period?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I wish I could tell the member that, you know, that there'll be a time when there are as many or more resources than there are those who need them when it comes to mental health and addiction. It is certainly one of the more challenging areas in terms of ensuring that the resources are not only in place but that they're matched in the right way, because, you know, on the addictions side, people are dealing with, you know, many kinds of addictions, and though, often, though, you know, it's rooted in something that's happened within their life or it's a different challenge within their life and you need to sort of get towards that too. It's not just treating the physical addiction, as the member knows. There's a lot of things that go on behind that cause the addiction to happen.

We have committed to bringing forward a mental health and addiction strategy and to have those two combined together because there is a pretty strong correlation between the two, not universal, obviously, but pretty strong correlation between the two. That process will begin more in earnest in the fall.

I would be very interested in hearing the member's suggestions on that. It certainly will include the North. It will include all parts of Manitoba, but the particular issues that are happening in the North, I'd be happy to hear about that.

I'd be happy to—I'd love to find the time to visit The Pas again, and not just to see if her hospitality matches that of her dad, I'm sure that it would, but you do get a better understanding, obviously, if you're meeting with people within their own context and within their own homes.

But, certainly, it would be part of the overall strategy that we'll start in terms of earnest in the fall we hope.

Ms. Lathlin: I'd like to take up your offer to visit us in The Pas again and I'd be happy to host you and your staff in northern Manitoba. Northern hospitality, we like to call it.

I just wanted to share that maybe I can forward you information that we had with the northern health summit that was held last year in Flin Flon. And it was particularly focused on mental health. And I'd like to send you the information, the powerful PowerPoint presentation that was at the end of day. We had a whole-day discussion on it, on recommendations where we're weak and where we're strong in regards to mental health.

And just one story that particularly stuck with me was: a man in one of our northern communities suffers from severe depression and anxiety. There's no mental health worker within his community. So I liked how he described his way of getting support, is that when the school bus driver is done for the day, he hops on the bus and goes for a ride, and that's who he vents to, that's who he gets advice from. So, you know, I felt sorry for this man, but, you know, that's what's a lot of us, you know, not only in northern Manitoba, but everywhere, it seems like that's what we, you know, resort to.

* (15:30)

So I just wanted to know with—after reviewing the recommendations, you know, I'd like to be involved with addressing these gaps, if you will.

And, again, in, like, specifically within the budget, like, is there anything for this fiscal year particularly allotted to, like, mental health in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: You know, the member makes a number of good points. I wasn't at the northern health summit. I'd be happy to even review with her the recommendations, if there's certain things, if you just want to sit down for a bit, and she can certainly point me to the areas in particular that she finds particularly pressing, and I'd be interested in her perspective on that. And I'm not sure how long the Legislature will sit yet, but, you know, we can either do that before the House rises or after at some point.

But I think, at this point, what the department is mostly engaged in is trying to find out, you know, what resources are available, what are the needs, what programs are effective. One of the—you know, criticisms is too strong a word, that I suspect that every government faces this to some degree, but one of the concerns that I've raised in previous committees is that we have a lot of programs in some areas, but we don't really know what the end result of them is. We don't know how effective they are. Hasn't really been a very strong analysis about what's

working and what isn't. And I image that it's easier just to continue to fund something and just to continue on that way without knowing what the results are.

So the largest engagement right now, from the Province, and I suspect that this will be—fit, then, into the mental health and addiction strategy, is to find out what is actually happening but also what's working, and then that really hasn't happened maybe as much as anybody would like it to have happened. I suspect the previous government would've wished there was more of that too.

So it has to do more with determining what is happening before we just simply, I think, try to move resources from one area into another. We have to know that it's actually being effective and that it's having outcomes.

Now, not every mental health or addictions program strategy, we know they're not going to have 100 per cent effectiveness. My father was an alcoholic. I can tell you from living with the disease, through him, that there's many times when it just, the treatment just doesn't work, for whatever reason. So it's not about ensuring 100 per cent success rate within programs, but it is about ensuring that there is sort of proven evidence that things are relatively effective and that the money is going to the right places.

Ms. Lathlin: I see, like, well, here we have ACCESS centres and QuickCare clinics.

I was just wondering: What are the future plans to expand those resources in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: You know, at this stage, there's been a lot of changes sort of within the health-care system. The ACCESS centres and the QuickCare clinics have added certain capacity within the system, and there's no question that there are people who use both of those facilities in different parts of Manitoba.

I think the question is whether or not we're getting as much output from the resources that we're putting into them. So I'd like to have that discussion with individuals within the health-care system to see whether or not the money that's being invested is getting the sort of return that people expected.

Obviously, when the QuickCare clinics and the ACCESS centres were initially conceived, they were—they had certain expectations around them. I don't know what all those expectations were, what the previous government might have expected from

those centres. I think that, and I mentioned this to the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) in a previous committee meeting a few days ago, that I think that those who are using the QuickCare clinics, that what they're reporting back through surveys and through reports, is that they found the experience to be generally good in terms of what they're having from their nurse practitioner-managed care. There are frustrations around the hours, about whether they're open long enough. And, I think, what happens sometimes is people show up, you know, they hear about the QuickCare clinics, they're not quite sure what it necessarily means, they're more inclined to see a doctor, but they're willing to give it a shot because they're concerned about the long wait at an ER. So they go to the QuickCare clinic and it's closed, and they may not ever come back again.

And so that is one of the analysis that I'm trying to undertake is how much of that can be improved. The other—on the ACCESS centres is a little bit different, and there was a report that came out from the University of Manitoba regarding the ACCESS centres, and the fact that those who are using those ACCESS centres tend to have more sort of complex needs. And I think that that's probably what they were intended to deal with. So I think that that is important. Ensuring that they're in the right places and they're fully staffed is another issue, because we've seen, I think, in Manitoba, a lot of different facilities have opened up, but there is frustration from people that they're maybe not open the right hours, they're not open when they expect that they're going to be open, and that causes them maybe not to come back to those facilities.

So some of that analysis is happening. So there aren't immediate plans to expand those centres. We want to make sure that they are being utilized properly first.

Ms. Lathlin: I've—I wanted to ask about the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative and the government's plans to carry on with this home-grown solution, if you will.

I've had the honour to visit Cross Lake and come across a few families who are growing their own chickens. So I think that's a pretty fun family event to—*[interjection]* Yes, you're right, but—so you're growing your own protein, you're growing vegetables, you're growing gardens. In particular with OCN, with the LED Plant Factory, I've had the honour to visit that facility when they were just—they were just setting up, and now there's produce.

And I believe they're generating—it takes 25 days for a product to be produced—head of lettuce, kale, spinach.

So with that—that's, like, a home-grown solution to help fight our diabetes epidemic that we have, including my family. We're all type 2 diabetics. And, also, too, to fight the high cost of food in northern Manitoba. And I believe OCN's goal, and I hope other First Nations engage in this similar tool to fight this, is to start expanding a market, if you will. Instead of paying high prices in northern Manitoba for produce, like, you know, it's cheaper to feed your family Kraft Dinner and hot dogs than broccoli and chicken or anything else that's healthy.

So I just wanted to see if Minister of Health is going to work with other departments to ensure that this funding is going to be followed through, because it's a great initiative, home-grown, in northern Manitoba to fight this.

Mr. Goertzen: So the program that the member refers to is being maintained. I'd be very interested if there're—particularly on the home-grown side of things, if you can grow food, obviously, closer to home, it alleviates all the costs of the transportation and the other issues that are a part of that challenge.

But, certainly, the program is being maintained within this budget. And, if there are ways that it can be enhanced in a cost-effective way, I'd be open to that.

The OCN initiative of being able to grow those products closer to home is exactly the kinds of things that I think you'd want to have. Many, many years ago I was involved with the grocery industry as I was working my way through university and got assigned to the produce department. So I learned a little bit about the costs of food and transportation and, certainly, those challenges are significant when you're dealing with some remote areas. And so, if there's ways we can help that program in a cost-effective way, and promote programs like that, that makes sense.

* (15:40)

Ms. Lathlin: I just wanted to ask about the northern health transportation policy. We're—you're basically—it's basically a policy that has not been updated in 20 years, and, usually, when people think of updating or reviewing, it means cuts. But I just find that by making cuts to that policy, especially to our families who don't have the necessary means to travel six

hours south to attend a five-minute appointment or something—what is the government's plans to look at this transportation policy and not make it so stressful when our people hand in their claims, and they only can claim, like, maybe, like, one fourth of their expense that they had spent just to attend a medical appointment?

And that's been a policy that's been giving us a headache for many, many years, and I just—you know, I just wanted to work with our government to have it reviewed, if you will, and make it more agreeable for our patients that do have to travel from northern Manitoba to Winnipeg, Brandon, elsewhere for medical appointments.

Mr. Goertzen: Sorry, the member identifies a program that is utilized by about 20,000 individuals in any given year, primarily in areas of Thompson, Flin Flon, and her own community of The Pas. So it is a significantly used program. Might not—might be people using it more than once, of course, but there might not be 20,000 specific individuals, but 20,000 times a year approximately, the program is identified.

It never was under the previous government or any other administration intended to pay for the full costs of transportation. It was always intended to be a subsidy. My understanding from officials is that the amount of money that's been going into the program has increased over the last many years. It will likely increase again because there's simply more people using the program.

I can't promise the member that it will ever go to a full payment. It—I think the intention of it was it would be to defray some of the cost of accessing treatment in other areas of Manitoba, especially as the utilization continues to increase for it. So I wish I could give her an assurance that at some point there would be a full payment, but I suspect that that would be unlikely under any government, given the current cost situations.

She raises another point about the administration of the program and how it's administered. That's not something I've heard specifically before. I'll take a look at it. I'm suspecting that it's probably the RHA that is administering the payback, the subsidy portion, when there's an application and—but I'm not sure why there's perhaps a challenge there or an inconsistency, but it's certainly something I'm willing to look at.

Ms. Lathlin: Such as, like, updating the policy, for example, there's a clause in there where the escort will be given meal money but the patient won't be given any money because 20 years ago they were able to charge in the hospital cafeteria. So a lot of that doesn't happen anymore. So I get complaints like that. So maybe if that could be looked at and set with today's of how it's run, you know, in our hospitals all across Manitoba.

And with that, in regards to the northern health transportation policy, we do have a system called telehealth, and I used to be involved with a national Aboriginal telehealth knowledge circle, and there was—there's a lot of good things that these systems can do, especially in isolated, remote communities. We can even deliver a baby through that system. And I've always been concerned that this tool is not being promoted enough, maybe not being, you know, encouraged to our doctors to agree to use to treat patients, because I just find a lot of our folks, including myself, will come to Winnipeg for an appointment and it may last, like, maybe less than 10 minutes, and people shrug their shoulders and go, I could have, you know, done that, you know, through telehealth or something. And that was the whole point. So I was just wondering, what are the government's plans to enhance this system and perhaps get rid of some of the stress that our families have to go through such as missing work, loss of income, missing school, to utilize the system to help us, meet us halfway to meet our health needs services?

Mr. Goertzen: So that's a few points the member raises. Certainly, I think probably all of us as MLAs could take some responsibility for that, even within our own communities, sort of promoting telehealth more broadly. It probably isn't something that we do enough because the member's right, there's a lot of different issues that can be raised. So, I mean, it's something that we can raise, that I'm willing to raise with the college and others within the health-care profession about trying to promote that is an option.

I think there's also a broader look just in terms of the whole telehealth program, to see whether or not it can be made better using different forms of technology as well. Certainly, there's many people who, of course, use the telephone, and I've got two of them sitting in front of me, but those phones also have all sorts of other applications that can be used and whether or not telehealth could be changed in a way that becomes a bit more user friendly. I'm not sure that the population generally considers

the telephone to be the most user-friendly thing anymore. But if there's a way to do some of that, mindful of the fact that this is personal health information, you want to ensure that everything is secure. But if there would be a way to access the services that are currently being used through telehealth and augment that into a form that's using modern technology, we might get better pickup as well from individuals.

I know, for example, I used to, when I'd have problems with my home telephone or my home television system, of course, I'd pick up the phone and I'd phone the number that was on my bill or that I'd find online, and you would have to wait for 30 minutes or whatever it was, and you'd finally get to speak to somebody and you'd tell them your problem, and they would probably tell you that you actually called the wrong line, and they'd transfer you to another place where you'd wait for another 30 minutes, and on it would go.

*(15:50)

And so I'm not sure the people's perception of that system is always the most efficient. Nowadays, if I have an issue, I'd go on to the provider's site, and they have a link where you can chat with an individual, and it typically goes much, much quicker.

So there are different forms of technology that the people within the department who are responsible for Telehealth, I think, are considering to make it more accessible and maybe have more people use it, but also I think it's a good point that us as individual MLAs—and I'll put that on myself as well, about ensuring there's more messaging out there about the use of Telehealth, but also to ensure that there are other ways that we can sort of use this particular system because it does—the member's right; it does save an awful lot of money within the system, and it's proven to save money. So it's something that would be worth looking at, potentially doing more, effectively using more modern technology.

Ms. Lathlin: Also, investment needs to be made, too, for the people to keep those systems going. For example, in Pukatawagan, Mathias Colomb, they have had that system in place for many years except it's hard to find somebody to train and stay who can actually troubleshoot that system whenever it breaks down or if at all. And plus, too, there's Internet tower issues as well that are needed in order to have these systems in place in more communities in Manitoba. And also, too, these systems are equipped with gadgets where you can examine eyes, ears, throats—

like, it's pretty amazing, and you can even, like, you know, you can even assist in delivering a baby, you know, in more remote communities as well.

So, with that, we have a Telehealth system in The Pas and—in the hospital. However, I just wanted to ask more specifically about our hospital. On the fourth floor, we have a walk-in clinic, and it's only open in the mornings due to lack of doctors, and those people who have to take a morning off from work to see the doctor, sometimes they can't be seen because there's just not enough time in the day. So—and I'm one of those folks too. There's no time in the day, so I had to go to emerg to get a prescription on my refill—a refill on my prescription, I meant to say.

So I just wanted to ask about The Pas clinic, the health-care clinic that was put in place there by the former government, and, more specifically, I just want to know: What can I tell our constituents in The Pas about this particular clinic service facility that is desperately needed?

And I know I'm pretty optimistic that once this facility is up and running in The Pas, it will help us recruit and retain our doctors. And I just wanted to know: What are the plans for this, and is this project under review, and when can I tell our constituents in The Pas that we'll have a new health-care clinic that will better service all of us?

Mr. Goertzen: The member is right on a number of different fronts, and I think that, you know, the clinics within the different communities certainly can help to retain and recruit doctors. There are a lot of other issues around that, and I sort of learned, not as Minister of Health but previously dealing with some of the issues with my own community, about the lack of doctors, as it's a multifaceted and sometimes frustrating process to try to determine why communities are struggling to maintain or to recruit doctors. Neither my community or the member's community are small communities necessarily in the context of Manitoba. They certainly have a strong base of population and amenities that should be able to attract people, but it's a difficult, difficult thing sometimes with the various issues that come with why doctors will come to a community or why they won't. Quite often, it has to do with issues around scope of practice and how many different sorts of things they're going to be able to practise in, and so that becomes a part of it. They recognize, of course, that they're valuable across the province, so the financial incentive isn't usually the greatest incentive, because they can usually achieve

that financial goal almost anywhere in Canada. And so that's been a challenge for a lot of different communities.

The clinic that the—or—that the member references was something, I believe, that was committed but not brought to fruition by the previous government. It will be something that we'll consider in the overall review that we have ongoing, and that'll start up in earnest shortly, but it's already been approved over the next several months, and, hopefully, we'll have more to report back after that.

Ms. Lathlin: So, with the clinic, you're currently saying, I just want to confirm, that it's going to be one of those projects that will be under review as stated in your—in the budget speech?

Mr. Goertzen: That would be one of the projects that didn't have approval, I believe, under the former government. It wasn't given the approval to begin, so it'd be one of the things that'll be considered.

Ms. Lathlin: There's been concerns with people from The Pas constituency that they're hearing that their regional health authority boards will be eliminated, and I just wanted to have this discussion with our Minister of Health so I can talk to our people, especially the folks who sit on our board.

Mr. Goertzen: I don't believe there was any plans to eliminate the regional health authority boards. In terms of the size of the boards, I mean, that's something that's been looked at more broadly across government. I think that when there were changes made to the Crown corporation boards, they were reduced in size, I believe, marginally, at least. So it certainly is possible that the size of the boards could be reduced, but I don't foresee any plans that would eliminate the regional health authority boards entirely.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So one of the things that I had tried to do—or was wanting to do for many years and, unfortunately, was just so busy with my file I haven't been able to do it, was to look at reproductive health for indigenous women. So the minister may or may not know that—I'm assuming that the minister knows that there are no facilities for women or young girls who choose to have abortion in the North. And so often what happens is if—and particularly for some of our fly-in communities, right, so, you'll have someone that may be considering to have an abortion, but, if they fly out, everybody knows why they're flying out, right.

And then everybody knows when they're coming back.

Mr. Jeff Wharton, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And the reality is, you know, across Canada and in our communities there's a myriad of perspectives on abortion, and we're not going to get into the debate of, you know, whether or not people are pro or choice. But the fact remains that women and young girls should have access to abortion, and they don't. And so, often times, women and young girls have no choice but to have babies.

And we know that for a myriad of different reasons, you know, there are struggles and there are lacks of support, and so what ends up happening is that we will see children apprehended by CFS. So I'm wondering—and that's just one piece of reproductive health for indigenous women, so there's also the public education in respect of, you know, access to birth control, just a myriad of different pieces that involve reproductive health, and we don't really have a strategy; we don't really have anything that's in place. And, as I indicated, that was something that I had wanted to pursue, but the other files just took so much time and so much precedent.

* (16:00)

And so my question to the minister: Is there any plans by this current government to look at the development of a reproductive health strategy, particularly for northern indigenous women which, of course, would include midwives and doulas. I'm sure that the minister knows that there's actually been a movement in the last year in respect of providing training to certify doulas, indigenous doulas as well in concert with midwives, but also to look at, you know, what are the, you know, what are the plans in respect of having access for abortion.

Mr. Goertzen: I think in the short period of time that I've been minister I've been living the same experience that the member for St. John's (Ms. Fontaine) was living previously in her previous occupation, that there'd been many different files that have consumed my time, and that is not one at this stage that has sort of come up to the top in terms of an issue. But I appreciate her raising it here because it does certainly put it on—the radar, but, no, certainly in the last few weeks it hasn't been—it hasn't—it's been, like the member's experience has been, sort of consumed by other immediate priorities, but it's an issue that I appreciate her raising with that perspective.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for your answer. So I just want to kind of lay out—and again, in the spirit of co-operation, right, and in the spirit of sharing knowledge, I just want to kind of lay out some of the realities, right, particularly when we talk about abortion.

So we know that there's a myriad of analysis or beliefs in respect of abortion, but the bottom line is that women should have the right to choose over what they do with their bodies. But even in the communities we know that there's conflicting discourses, right, so there's, you know, the discourse or the narrative in respect of, you know, that all birth, you know, all pregnancies are sacred and it's traditional, and then there's the narrative, the Christian narrative, that it's life, that it is all of these things. So it's really hard to navigate through all of those different and competing narratives and discourses, but it's at the detriment of indigenous women and young girls who should have the right to choose what they do over their bodies.

I raise that just because it was something that for—and you know, I've been speaking on this issue for many, many years and even myself, trying to navigate through all of those different competing and conflictary discourses is a difficult job. And so, you know, my hope would be that it would be, you know, hopefully, something that the minister would look at, and in that I would, you know, offer any expertise that I may have on this issue to try and look at producing a really good reproductive strategy for indigenous women.

Mr. Goertzen: And I appreciate the member. I mean, her approach to the issue and other issues is maybe unique for the Legislature in that things haven't always been collaborative in many different ways, and I probably have, at different points, I admit, maybe played into some of the discourse, and I'll acknowledge that freely.

There's a place in this Legislature for disagreement and for passionate disagreement, and it's part of what makes the democratic system unique but also, I think, good. In our system we do, sometimes, extend over the line maybe further than we'd like to. I probably have done that in the past, too, but the approach she has in terms of bringing ideas and suggestions and expertise is valuable because none of us are experts in everything. Some would say none of us are experts in anything. We sometimes become great generalists in politics because we hear about 100 different issues and sort

of learn them all at their surface level but aren't necessarily experts in any one of those particular areas.

And so I appreciate the member offering different pieces of advice and bringing forward an issue that I might not have the full perspective on, not living in some of the communities or areas, or with the populations that she's speaking of. So that's appreciated.

Ms. Fontaine: I agree with the minister that we don't know everything. I mean, how can we possibly know everything. And, particularly, you know, how could—you know, how can we understand reproductive health fully for indigenous women, right? It's a complex issue.

So the only other thing—my last question is that I would share with the minister, and I alluded to it earlier, in respect of this movement towards training and certifying indigenous doulas, right? And so I know that, during question period, we've had some questions in respect of the midwifery program, right? And so we know that that's a really important program in the overall reproductive health of indigenous women. It's important in giving options for indigenous women on their birthing plans.

And, again, for me it always comes down to indigenous women's right over their body, over their space. And so there's this movement in respect of training doulas because they're a vital component in respect of that birthing plan. And so, as the minister knows, you know, indigenous women have to come to the south to have their babies. Often, they come without any supports. They are immersed in white space.

I know that our hospitals have tried to do a really good job at incorporating culture, incorporating indigenous identity, and I think that we're really on a good path in moving forward on that. But, at the end of the day, you know, indigenous women are predominantly—in the midst of giving life, in the midst of their birthing, and if you haven't done it—which I'm assuming you haven't, obviously, it's—*[interjection]* Yes. Let me tell you, my first baby was 10 pounds. It's a crazy time, and you're a little emotional, you're a little crazy, and you're in a lot of pain.

And so, you know, for women that are here alone, and that are immersed in white space, with white nurses, white doctors, it can be incredibly alienating and impact on the delivery of their baby.

And so there's a group of women that have been trying, for about a year, to get a doula training program. And I know that I had submitted a proposal to help look at providing that training, and the seed money for that training. And, unfortunately, the writ had fallen. It was just bad timing.

So I would also offer to the minister that, if the minister was interested, I would be more than willing to help co-ordinate a meeting with these phenomenal, phenomenal women that are trying to get this program and this doula training up started here for indigenous women.

I think that's it's something really, really worthwhile, and the investment is not that much to be able to create that support for indigenous women that are birthing their babies.

Mr. Goertzen: So the member is correct, I have not given birth. And there's lots of things that I've done as Minister of Health in the last several weeks that have been unique to me, but I do not think that I'll be able to go that far.

But the whole process, I mean, when my wife and I had our son—and we're very fortunate to have him, we were told that we wouldn't be able to have children, so that was something that was very special for us. But it was, you know, a high-risk pregnancy. Nothing was easy through the whole process until the end. And then, once he was born, it was an amazing experience. We'd almost lost him many, many times along the way.

So I sort of have an understanding of the importance of having people there who can ensure that, for those who have greater challenges within the birthing process, that there is support. I'm—this is something we probably want to have a little bit of a discussion with Education and Training, as well, because they would have some role in the training process, just like with midwives. But, then, also, have a discussion with officials within health in terms of they would be the funders of the positions, even though the training would probably happen under another department.

* (16:10)

It's an interesting discussion though, that the member raises, generally about midwives and where that support comes from. I think the initial idea behind the midwife program was very much to provide support for communities that were high-risk, remote, that may not have the same sort of access to birthing facilities as others did. And it's evolved into

something more than that, but that was certainly, I think, the initial idea behind the midwife program.

So, if there are other programs that are supportive, then that's something worth looking at. I want to have that discussion, though, with the Department of Education as well.

Ms. Lathlin: I just wanted to ask our Minister of Health on 'transender'—transgender health. I wanted to know what are your thoughts on providing 'transenter'—sorry, transgender health care in the North.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, it would be the same as providing health care anywhere in Manitoba. Those who are eligible for health-care services should be able to access those health-care services in as timely and as locally available fashion as possible, recognizing that we have a large province with many different challenges in terms of accessing places, but also ensuring that there are people in those places to provide those services.

So, from the perspective of accessibility, it wouldn't—my view wouldn't be any different than anywhere else in Manitoba for any other group. Those who are legally entitled under our Canada health-care system to receive health-care service, that should be provided, those services under the constitutional protection that they have.

Ms. Lathlin: My other question is to—what is the Minister of Health's thoughts on providing health-care options for our LGBTTTQ community in the North? More specifically, like a safe environment and these options to be provided in the North specifically for this community.

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I think—I know the member wants me to talk specifically about one community, but I believe that everyone, every Manitoban, deserves to have accessibility to health care as close to home as is financially and what can be accommodated within the areas within they live. To me, it doesn't matter what they would classify as their sexual orientation or their particular culture; Manitobans deserve to have accessible health care and to have it in the way that is the best way to be provided within the context of the financial restraints and the ability as the taxpayers to pay for it.

In terms of a safe provision, obviously, everyone deserves to have accessible health care in a safe environment. And this extends to many other sort of discussions that have happened in the Legislature, but there is no group of Manitobans, regardless of

where they've come from, regardless of who they are, regardless of what they declare to be their sexual orientation or any other factor, who should feel that their safety is threatened or compromised in any way, because I don't think that that is what Manitobans would expect, and that's not the best of Manitobans.

So everybody deserves to feel safe and secure, not just living in their communities but also access—and taking part in the different services that are provided at a governmental level.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I want to congratulate the minister for his appointment on a very exciting job that he has now as a Health minister.

My questions are really going to be around this whole issue of parking at hospitals, and it's—the issue came—sort of come to my attention in a very forceful way through my wife about three years-plus ago now. And her brother passed away of brain cancer at the general hospital here, but in the five years that he was dealing with the cancer issue, on a number of occasions, the family members, you know, had their cars towed away, you know, around the hospital. And I know just recently there was coverage of a cancer patient in the paper just last week, I think, where he was resorting to extreme methods by putting foam in parking metres and so on.

But this is not just a Manitoba issue. This is, you know, certainly a national issue. And the member—or the minister wants to check this out, I think he can go nook no further than—CBC, I think it was, a year or two ago, did a big program on this problem and detailed how some hospitals and jurisdictions have actually dealt with it in a favourable way.

And so what has happened is that cities like Abbotsford, BC, have simply banned—the municipality has banned the hospital from charging for parking in that town. And I think there's a couple of others like that.

Now the issue here is that the hospitals themselves, I guess right across the country, are contracting out their parking to, I believe, a company called Impark or something close to that. And what these people are doing is they hire employees at minimum wage or above, but they hire them with a commission aspect to it. So they watch and, when you park your car, they set their watch, and they come back, like, as soon as your metre expires, and they give you a big ticket. And they get a

commission on that ticket. And we just thought that was a terrible way to be running the show here. But, nevertheless, that's what was being done and—in other jurisdictions.

So I'd like to begin by asking the minister if he's kind of aware of this issue in general and if he has kind of any tentative plans to look into what can be done about it.

Mr. Goertzen: I am aware of the issue. I've similarly been following the news reports, but it also came up as an issue previously to that. I'm going to resist the temptation to remind the member that three years ago, when he became aware of the issue, he was in government and would have had full access, I'm sure, to the Premier's office to raise this as an issue. But I'm not going to mention that, because I don't want to overly politicize this particular part of the debate.

But it is important to know that the parking around the hospitals, there's a number of different issues there. One is that some of it is private parking, as the member indicates. Some of it's municipal, and so it's owned by the city. And then there'll be a portion of the hospital, but probably not the majority of the parking, that is actually run by the hospital or probably more likely their foundation. Often the foundations are running the parking at the hospitals. And so it's not as simple as sort of suggesting one group is involved with it. It can be municipal. It can be private. It can be the hospitals themselves. And so it isn't simply one organization.

I know that Manitobans would find it frustrating to go to a facility where they're getting health care and have to pay. I also know it would be—it's frustrating for Manitobans to call an ambulance, have the ambulance come, deliver them to a hospital and then get a bill for over \$500 shortly after. I know it's frustrating for Manitobans to walk into a pharmacy and to find out that they can have a procedure done, but it'd cost them \$25 if they do it at the pharmacy. All of these things, I think, are rightfully frustrating for Manitobans. All of these things have been there now for many years and have come up under previous governments.

I think the commitment that we've made is how can we make things better overall, how can we reduce the costs—and the experience of patients overall. I would love to be able to say that overnight we could eliminate the ambulance fees. I'd love to be able to say overnight we'd be able to eliminate the cost that pharmacists charge for some of their

expanded scope of service. I'd love to be able to say we could eliminate all parking costs at the hospitals. I'd love to be able to say there wasn't a \$1-billion deficit left by the previous government which makes all of those things practically impossible to do at once.

But we have started on the ambulance fees, because we think that that's the appropriate place to start, not that the other things aren't important, but you have to start somewhere. And we've committed to reducing the overall cost experience for patients across the system, and that would be one place to start.

* (16:20)

Now, having said that, I would not rule out or dismiss the idea of sitting down with any of the foundations, and I will speak to the foundations about a myriad of different issues, and one of them that I'm happy to speak about is parking. Maybe they have some creative ideas around how to reduce that cost. I already know that there are programs that allow for long-term parking discounts if you're dealing with chemotherapy or if you're dealing with dialysis. So there has been some work done, but, obviously, it's not enough to make—to alleviate the frustrations that many people would have.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So, yes, the previous government did leave us with a number of different areas where patients are paying for things that they would not necessarily expect to be paying for within the health-care system. Some might call it privatization, but I don't want to inflame the passions of this particular committee by calling it that. But there are areas that we need to start working and start addressing, and we've started with the ambulance fees. But I'm open to discussions on the issue of parking with the foundations, recognizing that not all of the parking around hospitals—in fact, probably the vast majority—isn't controlled by the hospital itself.

Mr. Maloway: I didn't mean to suggest that the minister would, you know, free up—provide free parking overnight here. It's not an issue that can be resolved overnight, and we did take this up in the caucus several times and had, you know, during the campaign talked about how we would deal with it.

And, you know, the—I guess the medical issues boil down to a question of when the cancer patient is visiting or any patient is visiting with their doctor, the doctors have indicated that the patient isn't

paying attention. You know, they're trying to explain to the patient they have to take this medication in such a way or they have to explain to them what their medical condition is about, and they're watching—they're looking at their watches, you know, having to cut their visitations with their doctors short because they've got to get out and plug the meters.

So I think there may be some simpler solutions here that the minister could look at, depending on the hospital situation. I know that my doctor did say, well, if you provide free parking to everybody, then how are you going to deal with all the staff members who are going to park in those spots, right? So there's creative ways that that minister can work on this system and have a—perhaps a, you know, start out on a sample basis, just maybe free parking for cancer patients with a sort of a permit, some type of permit. And take it, like, one step at a time.

I'm not suggesting you're going to do this overnight. But you could do it in stages, and you could test the system out. I'm really asking more of a commitment on the part of the minister not to ignore the issue and to actually be proactive and come up with maybe two or three different models. You don't have to work with the same model. What might work in the—in Dauphin hospital or Steinbach hospital might be a different situation than what you would have to institute for the bigger hospitals in the city.

So I'm just looking for some kind of a commitment whereby he could tell us that he would have a—you know, some sort of—something to report back in, you know, in a couple of months or a few months from now. Like, just, what sort of time frame would he put in place to deal with this issue?

Mr. Goertzen: The member raises the issue of different hospitals having different challenges, and he mentioned Steinbach in particular. The issue in Steinbach wasn't so much parking over the last couple of years. The issue was you couldn't actually get into the hospital once you parked because the previous government had built a hospital entrance that required you to go up 13 or 14 stairs that were steep and difficult to navigate, or you had to take a narrow ramp to get up there. And so the solution that the government put in place was they put a button at the bottom of the stairs.

The button was only operational from, I believe it was 9 to 5. I stand to be corrected on that, but it wasn't much more than 9 to 5. It was certainly within the realm of banker's hours. Actually, bankers work longer hours than that nowadays. And if you couldn't

get up the stairs, you could push the button and then somebody would come out of the hospital, presumably, and help you get up the stairs to actually enter the hospital.

So I appreciate that the member is suggesting that there are challenges within the hospital system, but he knows, of course, that many of these pre-existed and were quite difficult under the current—or the previous government. There have been some steps taken, I understand, to make the plugging-of-the-meters issue a little bit better, that they've extended the parking times around HSC, in particular to allow for greater time. Of course, they still are being paid, but it allows for greater parking time to try to alleviate the issue that the member raised about being in a room and you're thinking about the meter, as opposed to thinking about what your doctor's saying, which is certainly a concern, and we don't want people having that.

I'm open to suggestions. As I mentioned, I'm certainly willing to and expect to be meeting with the different foundations at different times when time allows, and if there are suggestions that some of the foundations have around this, I'm certainly open to hearing that. But, again, we have many systems or many places throughout the health-care system where patients are paying for things that they might not ordinarily expect to be paying for. I would suggest that the ambulance fees are probably one of those, and people might have some expectation of paying for parking, but probably far less for the high cost of ambulance fees they get. They would consider that to be something that is medically necessary. So we've been left with a challenge.

We've been left with many places that the previous government didn't see as a priority to address over the past 17 years, and we had to start somewhere, so we've started with ambulance fees. And, if the member opposite had had a stronger, convincing voice, although I know him to be a convincing member, and I've always been very convinced by him when he speaks, but clearly that fell on deaf ears with his previous premier and he wasn't able to achieve that, even though I've often seen him to be a very, very convincing individual. I'm not sure why he wasn't listened to previously, but we're listening to him, and that's one of the reasons why we've started to reduce the fees on ambulance costs, and, hopefully, over time we can address more issues as we get the fiscal mess in order, knowing that that won't be a quick solution. But you've got to start somewhere, and we've already started on that.

And I would hope that in meeting with the different foundations and different representatives of the hospitals, they might have some suggestions. I'd like to hear their suggestions as well.

Mr. Maloway: You know, the minister's making a big production about the reduction in ambulance fees, but I think people are going to be more than mildly shocked when they find out that all of these ads they ran in the last election—and have resulted in what, a 5 per cent reduction in ambulance fees? That's like \$25. The member for Concordia's (Mr. Wiebe) done the math here, and it's 25 bucks on a \$500-ambulance fee. And, like, how many years has the minister done the calculation? There, he has a calculator handy. Has he done the calculation as to how many years it's going to be before he gets these ambulance fees cut down to a reasonable level?

Mr. Goertzen: I remember the former premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) once saying during one of his economic updates or budgets, depending which one it was, is that he said in Manitoba, up is the new—no, flat is the new down. That was his mantra. And, apparently, the member for Elmwood hasn't gotten out of that mindset because now he thinks that down is the new up.

Actually, down is still down, and we are reducing ambulance fees, and it might not be as fast as the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) would like. Might not be as fast as I would like, might not be as fast as any Manitoban would like, but it's sure moving in a direction that never happened under his former government, and if he's suggesting that reducing ambulance fees is actually a negative thing and that they shouldn't be reduced, well, that was the position of the previous government. So he's maintaining that, and I would hope that he, out of all individuals who saw the clear election result in April, would know that that's not what Manitobans were looking for, and he managed to hang on to his seat, and good for him. You know, I never wish anybody ill will. I don't wish anybody electoral defeat. I like the member as an individual. I like him as a person. I almost want to call him a friend, but I don't want to have anybody too concerned around this committee.

But I do think that he's an honourable individual, but for him to suggest that somehow reducing ambulance fees after he's done nothing on it for 17 years is a negative, harkens back to his former premier who said that flat was the new down. Flat is not the new down, and down is down, and ambulance fees are going down, and he should be

happy about that even if he doesn't like the pace of them going down.

Mr. Maloway: The reality here is that the City of Winnipeg, I believe, sets the ambulance fees, and so I don't know how the minister's going to deal with this. He can reduce them by 5 per cent if he wants, but if they go up by 10 per cent, he's going to be not flat anymore or going down; he's going to be going up even with his reduction.

* (16:30)

So, I mean, it—obviously, there is a, you know, there's a history behind why these fees are so atrociously high, and I would say that's a lot of money to be paying for ambulance fees. The question is, is he going to be talking to the City of Winnipeg about what they can—will—what they're willing to do to reduce these fees? Five per cent's just not an acceptable target given the fuss this party made in this recent election.

Mr. Goertzen: The member says that 5 per cent isn't acceptable, but he seemed to be more than willing to accept as they went up year after year under the previous government. And so I don't know how it is that he can feign indignation now and feel that a reduction in ambulance fees is somehow a negative thing, when he sat with his hands on the lever of power with an ear of the premier, with all the access to power and all the influence that he had as a member of government, and said nothing when the fees went up year after year.

I remember that the member for Elmwood, when he had his brief stint in Parliament, when he was elected as a Member of Parliament, when he reached that grand and high office of MP, he put out brochures that said that he'd spoken more in Parliament than any other MP during the previous year. He actually put in a brochure that no Member of Parliament had spoken more in Parliament than he had. Now, I haven't had the chance to review his entire discourse over his time as an MP, but my guess is, and I'm willing to put—well, I don't know if I can wager, but certainly have a gentleman's bet on this, that if we were to look over all of those words that he spoke in Parliament, all of those words that he said he was so proud of putting on the record in Parliament, that he never once raised the issue of ambulance fees, never once said that that was something that was important to him.

Now, maybe the member will prove me wrong; he'll go through the volumes of Hansard that he had

put on the record with in Parliament, and he'll pull out some sort of an—a quote about reduction in ambulance fees, and if that's the case I'd be more than willing to say that I'm sorry. I think he was more concerned about passenger bill of rights and other sorts of things, not that those aren't important, but that was sort of what his mantra was. But he never talked about reduction of ambulance fees in all of his time in Parliament. He never talked about it in all of his time as a member of the Legislature, and suddenly, he feels the reduction of ambulance fees isn't fast enough. Well, I mean, that's a little bit odd, Madam Chairperson, that an individual who never—never, in all the thousands, maybe millions of words that he put on the record in this House, in a government that spent more than \$200 billion—\$200 billion—in its time in government and never found a penny to reduce ambulance fees, now comes to this committee at this hour, at this time, on this day, and says that a reduction isn't good enough for him. Well, shame on that member, I'd say.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to deal with another issue in the hospitals, and that is the—all the junk food that's sold in there in the vending machines and, you know, any of us walk around the hospital and see people lined up. These are, you know, medical—well, patients, but medical professionals as well, the doctors, the nurses, all lined up at the Tim Hortons in the hospital and buying, you know, Pepsi and Coke from the vending machines, and I just wondered if—seems like we're working across purposes here. Could the minister, you know, investigate as to how we could go about changing out some of this junk food for better food? At least put in some options for people, right, that they—we're talking about a hospital here, you know, I mean, I don't understand why there wouldn't be some requirement by the hospital board.

I mean, the minister is the—all-powerful health czar here in Manitoba, with spending, like, 41 per cent of the entire \$13-billion budget. That's a lot of money. You'd think he could get on the phone and phone the—some of the members of the board or phone some of the people in the hospitals and make an inquiry as to why and how they have to sell such, you know, so much junk food out of their vending machines and in their restaurants inside the—right inside the hospitals. I just found that amazing, that you could go into the hospital and actually come out weighing more than when you went in.

Mr. Goertzen: I think I heard the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), somewhere in that discourse, actually attack Tim Hortons, and if there's

one thing that as a Canadian that I would never do, is attack Tim Hortons. I think that Gary Doer used to have some sort of philosophy that he espoused publicly, so I'm not saying it in any sort of private fashion, that if you ever wanted to get re-elected, the one thing you don't do is raise the price of alcohol, raise the price of beer, as Gary Doer used to say, member's former leader. And I think the other thing you probably shouldn't do is attack Tim Hortons here at a committee, a great Canadian institution.

I do think that there are maybe not enough, but I think that Tim Hortons might say that there are some options on their menu that they would consider to be more healthy than others. The member might criticize me of not using those options enough, and he might be right if he were to make that criticism. But I do think that some of those options do exist within that, but I don't think that that's a bad suggestion, certainly something I'm willing to take a look at. If there are not enough healthy options within the health-care system, recognizing that some of these are, probably, private providers, certainly, with Tim Hortons, but if there is not enough healthy options that are available within the hospital system, I don't think that that's a bad suggestion, and I'll take a look at that.

Mr. Maloway: I'm not trying to reflect on Tim Hortons negatively. I just simply state that that was one of the franchises that I think is in the hospital. I'm not visiting the hospital on a regular basis, here, but it just made sense that, of all the places that you would think you would want to strive to have good food would be in the hospital setting.

And, you know, to me, I'm not, you know, I'm not totally dogmatic about this issue, but just seemed to me that it was pretty obvious that there wasn't a lot on the menus and stocks of good food, healthy food, inside these vending machines.

And so I'm asking the minister in a friendly way, and all of these questions, too, I mean, you know, he can go back and want to fight the campaign over again, which he accuses us of doing every day, I might add, but, you know, it's his responsibility now. You know, we're the opposition, and to quote one of his former famous members, Mr. Abe Kovnats from Niakwa—where was he from? I'm not sure now, but he stated, you know, in opposition you can have it both ways in the—not only the same day, almost in the same speech. Abe would ask, why aren't we balancing the budget, and then he'd be demanding more money to be spent for a road or his favourite

bridge. The reality is that we're out here looking out for the public, which is our voters who voted for us, who elected us all here as members. And it's our job in the parliamentary system, as the member knows, to assume the role of opposition since that's the role that we're currently faced with dealing with.

And he is now not in the role of opposition anymore and he should remember that he is now a minister of the Crown, and it's his duty to provide actual answers to our questions and not, you know, rage on and on and on about an election that he actually won. I have a sense that maybe he's complaining about all the ones he lost.

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I have a particular affection for the last election, because it's the first one that I won overall for a very long time, so I'm more than willing to keep going back—to back to it. You know, if you look at the overall record that I have on general elections, it's not great. And so I'm happy to sort of talk about the last election, and I, you know, I appreciate the member—his perspective on opposition. He's absolutely right. And I've said this publicly in the past. People sometimes say to me after the election that, well, you've now—you're not in the wilderness any more.

I never considered opposition to be that way. I thought it was an important job, important work to do. I was proud of the work that we did as an opposition. We brought forward, I thought, lots of good ideas. And so the member's correct. I mean, that is opposition's role and I support him in that.

I wish him a very long career and a successful career in opposition. I hope he has many years to hone his skills. So I don't take that lightly or take that away in terms of the role of the opposition. I think I said in the last part of the answer that I gave the member that his suggestion isn't without merit, and that if there are issues that there are not enough options, enough healthy options, within hospitals, that that's certainly something that I'm willing to take a look at.

I can assure him that since I've become Minister of Health, I've not built any Tim Hortons in any hospitals, and whatever food options there were available—are available today were the same food options that were available five or six weeks ago. But, not to be overly political about it, if there are ways that we can make things better and provide more options, as has been done in schools, then, certainly, I think that that's something that I'm

willing to take a look at and I appreciate the member raising that as a suggestion.

* (16:40)

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, just to pick up on where my colleague from Elmwood left off with regards to food in hospitals, I—my information is correct I think. The previous minister—actually when the Tim Hortons and other restaurants like that started coming into hospitals, it was actually mandated that they had some fruit options, just straight, fruit so that they could offer a bit of a slightly healthier option. But I do take the member from Elmwood's point, and I think it's a good one, that, as I mentioned previously, that with the minister who is now both the minister for healthy living—sorry, active living and health, you know, to balance those two priorities—or to give adequate attention to the active living portion and to concentrate on sort of preventative health is a bit of a burden, potentially, when the minister has so many other pressing health-related issues to deal with.

So I think it's a good point, and I think it's something that the member was onto something there. And perhaps the minister, going forward, can report back on his initiatives in making sure that there's healthy options in our hospitals.

I also wanted to briefly comment on the member for Elmwood's (Mr. Maloway) line of questioning around hospital parking, and the minister will know it's something that I've, you know, spoken to the press about and something that I've been pushing as an issue as well. And this really came to me as something from one of my constituents, as many great ideas often do. Is—one of my constituents, who his granddaughter was diagnosed with cancer and fought a very brave battle against cancer, but actually she didn't make it. But, in the process, her family and friends spent a lot of money on parking at the hospitals, and it was a very emotional situation and compounded by the fact that all this extra added expense to the family was put out there.

So I think it's a great issue, and it's something that I certainly hope to see some action from the minister going forward. And, as the member from Elmwood clearly stated, you know, this isn't—were not expecting the world to change overnight, but it is something—there's some really good ideas out there.

My constituent, you know, for instance, his idea—and he circulated a petition to this saying there should be a—his granddaughter's name was Candace,

a Candace pass that everybody who would come to the hospital specifically for cancer patients would put the pass in their car and would get some kind of discounted or a free rate for parking. So these are great ideas, and I'm certainly not the only one that's, you know, coming up with these. These are a lot of constituents and others that have great ideas.

So I certainly hope to hear more from the minister on that and maybe—I'm sure my time is coming short here in terms of a question, so maybe I'll just ask the minister if he can comment on that or, more specifically, does he know what the hospital foundations maybe—what kind of revenue are they generating right now from these parking fees that they take in?

Mr. Goertzen: We don't have the individual breakdowns per hospitals. I'm not sure that the foundations—how they necessarily break that down or if they're willing to share that or not. I mean, it's certainly something that I'm willing to have the discussion, again, with any foundation, if there are creative ideas.

The member raised his constituent's concern, and I appreciated him doing that and the emotion around that. It's certainly valid. Of course, the challenge that we have inherited as a government is that there are a multitude of fees. Some might consider them private fees, whether it's ambulance fees or fees that you pay at a pharmacy or parking fees, that patients are left to deal with. And it is a significant challenge to try to reduce those fees as fast and as comprehensively as all of us would probably like to do, along with the myriad other fees that exist within the system when there's been a \$1-billion deficit that's happened.

So we are glad that we're started in terms of reducing the fees on ambulances. I think that that is an appropriate place to start. Maybe not as fast as some would like. Maybe not as fast as I would like. But it's going in the right direction, and it's going in a direction that it hasn't gone for many years under the previous government.

I take the member at his word when he says that he's been a long advocate for the either elimination or reduction of parking fees around hospitals. I think he's been—become a vocal advocate only in the last few weeks. He may have been a more vocal advocate within the context of his caucus previously and not so much publicly, and so I don't dismiss that that might have been the case. But the reality is that these issues have existed for many years, have only gotten worse over the last number of years and, you know,

had the government inherited a surplus or a much different financial situation, there's a lot of different things that could be addressed as quickly—more quickly than they possibly can be now. But we are dealt with the reality of being handed a \$1-billion deficit and consecutive years of, in some cases, record deficits, and many places throughout the government, not exclusively health care, where people are paying fees and they're paying services and they're paying taxes and they're paying levies because, regardless of how much money seemed to come in to the former government, it was never enough. And it never resulted in there being reductions of fees or reductions in costs.

So I appreciate the member's question. I think it's important. I don't like it when I hear those types of stories. It doesn't—I don't think it makes anybody feel good. But I do know that we have to start moving in a direction of lowering the costs for those who are accessing health care. One of those ways is by reducing the costs of ambulance fees. We have moved in that direction. And I expect that there will be more movement in that direction in the years to come, and, hopefully, as things get more financially in order, there can be other things that can be done to alleviate the costs that have come into place under 17 years of NDP government.

But, having said, I'm not ruling out the prospect of speaking with the foundations about different ideas they might have around this specific issue. I just want to put into context for the member the significant challenge that his previous government has left this government.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and the minister will appreciate the fact that, like him, I was just recently appointed as the critic for Health, and so it's given me an opportunity to be a bit more vocal and get a little bit more attention to some of these issues that have been out there for a while. But I think it's never too late to take a good idea and run with it and start the first steps, which is really what has been asked here today is to start that process.

* (16:50)

And—but as the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) also—so—pointed out so well that, you know, these—a lot of these pressures are external pressures, either from the City of Winnipeg—as I mentioned in my previous question—from the hospital foundations and their needs and, as the minister mentioned, from his, you know, the budgetary pressures that those can bring.

So I guess my question is just with regards to dealing with the city, because both hospital fees and parking, I mean, the stories I'm hearing from individuals, is, you know, they go in for an appointment at a hospital and they're sitting in the waiting room and staring at their number, and sort of wondering when it's going to come up and thinking about their parking meter and sort of sweat starts dripping down their brow. And they have to make that decision of whether they're going to run out, and they're going to plug that meter—are they going to plug it for an hour; are they going to plug it for two hours; are they going to have enough time? And—or, are they going to sit where they are and wait for their name to be called and get that important medical treatment.

So I mean it is a burden. It's a burden not just in terms of the costs for individuals and the burden that it places on them, but for those that can least afford it, it can be a burden that can mean the difference between getting the health care that they need or deciding not to get that health care.

So I think it's something that requires some dialogue with the City of Winnipeg, both on hospital parking and on ambulance fees, and I'm wondering if the minister's had an opportunity to undertake that conversation, to begin the dialogue at all with folks at city hall and begin to start thinking about ways, innovative ways, that we can deal with this issue.

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, the scenario that the member paints of one—an individual in a doctor's office and worrying about whether the meter needs to be plugged isn't to be dismissed. And, certainly, I think that was probably one of the reasons why there was a decision by the City to extend the parking time available around the Health Sciences Centre. And so I think that the officials at the City have already recognized that that is a challenge and put in at least a part of a—not a fulsome solution, but certainly moving in a way that makes things a little bit easier.

But I don't want to discount the scenario of an individual in their home who is undergoing a traumatic medical experience, who is making a decision about whether or not they should call for an ambulance and whether or not they should ask for that assistance by calling 911 or maybe they should try to hobble over, depending on what the situation is, to their neighbour who might be some ways away. And they go over to their neighbours' and they find out they're not actually home. And now they have to make a decision about, well, can I actually get back

to my home or can I reach somebody on the cellphone, and sometimes cellphone service isn't that great in many of the areas that I have had the opportunity to live in. And so that becomes a challenge.

And so there are many situations that Manitobans have been put in, unfortunately, over the last number of years that would be considered to be very difficult, and having to make difficult decisions. And the decision about whether or not to call for an ambulance, knowing full well that you'll probably receive a bill in the not-too-distant future, or whether you should get your neighbour to drive you, or whether you should try to drive yourself, or whether you should try to walk, if you're closer to a facility, or whether you should try to hitchhike. If none of those things seem to work for you, that's not an enviable position for Manitobans to be placed in either, but that's the position they've been in for many, many years, and a position that the NDP party never really decided to address until they're right on the last cusp of the election and staring electoral defeat in the eye. And suddenly it became something they wanted to address in a campaign promise. It never probably would have been fulfilled, like so many other promises that the former government made during elections.

I'm glad that our government made a commitment to people to reduce our ambulance fees. I'm happy that those fees have started to be reduced in this budget. Would we like it to go faster? Well, of course we would. We—there's lots of things we would like to see happen more quickly and in a more fulsome way, but we're mindful of the fact that, ultimately, just like individuals are getting the ambulance bill sent to their homes, Manitobans ultimately get sent the bill for everything that we decide in this building.

Everything that has a fiscal or a monetary impact, that we decide it—either around this committee or back in the Chamber, is something that Manitobans get the bill for. And we should never forget that, or lose track of that fact.

And so I've already indicated that I'm more than willing to have discussions with the various foundations. I look forward to meeting with the foundations to hear about what ideas they may have. I suspect that the good discourse that we've had with the City of Winnipeg will continue and there'll be many issues that get raised with the City of Winnipeg over the course of the next number of

years. And I know that we will have a good, positive working relationship.

So we'll continue to move in the direction of reducing the costs that some might consider to be private costs that have come in under the former government of accessing health care in the province of Manitoba. We'll do it in a way that's responsible for those who are paying the load, that it's all Manitobans in terms of their taxes, but also do so in a way that we feel is fair for all patients and all those who are accessing the health-care system in our province.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister talks about fees and costs for patients.

Is the government looking at introducing tray fees or introducing or increasing any other user fees?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question.

There's been no specific discussion about raising fees at this point. There certainly has been a lot of discussion about finding efficiencies within the system, and I know the member sometimes likes to refer to that as waste. I consider it to find efficiencies and I think no matter where you can find efficiencies, regardless of what department it is, you should strive to find those efficiencies. I don't think that there is any department that—of government that couldn't find ways to do things better and to find ways to do things more efficiently.

And, ultimately, that's the challenge for all of us, whether that's us as MLAs or whether that is ministers or government departments. All of us have to recognize that when we come to work, we do so at the behest of Manitobans. And they've asked us to ensure that we are using funds in the best way possible.

I often like to quote my former—my predecessor, Mr. Jim Penner, who used to say that government has no money of its own other than the money that it gets from taxpayers. And I think that broadly that is true. And that was his way of expressing the fact that every dollar that gets spent within government is a dollar that is coming from a particular taxpayer.

And so, when we talk about the need to find efficiencies within the system, it's not efficiencies for the sake of efficiencies. It's not some sort of a mantra or a slogan that's used because it sounds good on an election campaign or fit onto an ad; it's—because ultimately it's Manitobans who are paying for every service that is provided within the province of

Manitoba. And we are subject to their will to ensure that we're using their tax dollars in the best way possible.

And so those efficiencies will continue to be sought. And we'll continue to find ways to deliver services in the best possible way but in a way that is respectful of the fact that it's Manitobans who are paying for those services.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and I mean, this is what's worrisome, is that the minister has repeatedly mentioned sort of the bottom line and, you know, the restraint that he has to, you know, find all these efficiencies within his department. And there's no argument here that there's a value to finding more efficient and more innovative ways of delivering health care, but I think what Manitobans are concerned about is, is they want to hear that the minister is committed, not to the bottom line, but to the bottom line in terms of their health care and the delivery of those services. And it's worrisome to hear when the minister simply talks about health care in terms of dollars and cents. And I think there's some value to talk about it in terms of the human impact.

Is—has the minister considered implementing a health premium in this province?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member shouldn't lose sight of the fact that it's contained within its own Estimates books, that there's been a significant—

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

FINANCE

* (14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Finance, including Crown services. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Since we don't have no staff here, we'll continue. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): It's always a pleasure to start the question by maybe dovetailing my first question to the question period from last week, which is about road safety.

Does the Minister responsible for Crown Services know which programs of the Manitoba Public Insurance are involved in road safety? And cite at least one.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services):

Well, I'd like to thank the member for his question, and I would suggest to him one of the—important ones—they're all important, but one of them is the graduated licensing program that MPI is very involved with. It has developed over the years into quite the program. I'd like to point out that I'm already on my third teenager going through the program, two successfully, and got one more to go, and they do a very good job with the graduated licensing, and I think what they try to impart on young people is the seriousness of driving a vehicle on the road.

We've seen, over the years, some really horrifying examples of young people getting into a vehicle, and whether it's too much speed or not understanding dangerous roads where there are terrible curves; I can remember a few years ago there was an accident on Wellington Crescent because Wellington Crescent seems to be a street that young people want to drive down and end up getting into high speeds and don't realize the hazards of roads that have a lot of curves in them, and it was a catastrophic accident. We believe that the graduated licence program is something that we want to continue with and we want to continue to promote. It has, I believe, saved a lot of lives. It was something that was long in coming.

The thing is is that, you know, when vehicles first started to be driven, of course there were no licences and there was a different way of assessing dangers and hazards, and I think I pointed out in committee last week that, you know, the way vehicles were being built, they were basically without any kind of a seatbelt. Certainly there were no airbags and we've really moved a long way, and thank you to individuals like Ralph Nader, who had a large impact on ensuring that there was safety.

And so, too, have we moved into different kinds of programs. In fact, if you would look at a lot of the European models, people can't even get into driving until they're 18 years of age, and, you know, here, because of—the circumstances are a little bit differently—ours—our graduated licence program allows you to get your beginners, I believe, it is six months after you turn 15, and then the process starts.

So we think it's a good program and I'd like to thank the member for the question.

Mr. Marcelino: Is the member aware that there is a centre for excellence that has been started by the Manitoba Public Insurance?

* (14:40)

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

Before I continue, I'm now being joined by two individuals—professionals out of the department. We have Tina Moody, who is the director of corporate policy, and we have Chester Wojciechowich—Wojciechowski, I apologize, who is executive financial officer.

And the member asks a question about a centre of excellence within MPI. I'd like to point out to the member that, actually, very specific questions are supposed to be left for Crown Corporations Committee, but, in light of his interest in the kinds of things that are going on within the Crown corporations, I'd like to point out that one of the things that we are definitely interested in is seeing our Crown corporations continue to focus on what's best for Manitobans, and what's best for what's going on within the various corporations.

In fact, I would like to point out for the House before I continue too much further that, today, we tabled for Manitoba Hydro the fourth quarter report, which is the first time a fourth quarter financial report has been tabled in over 15 years. So, you know, clearly, we want to have a dynamic system for our Crown corporations.

And we're also very pleased, further to the member's question, that Manitoba Public Insurance has a Centre of Excellence in automotive research and training, and I take it that's what the member was speaking to. It takes the lead on cutting-edge training opportunities in the autobody repair industry.

In fact, I was at a dinner last week where various stakeholders in Manitoba get together, and they are trying to develop a system by where we attract a lot more individuals into the trades insofar as body mechanics and engine mechanics, and so on, so forth. And what I found very interesting, and just a great experience, was how many young women are getting into these trades. And it was really good to see. In fact, there's a young woman who's going to be going to the Middle East to compete on an international level. And it clearly shows the kind of

expertise that we're developing within Manitoba, and we're very pleased with the kind of calibre of graduate.

I'd like to point out that we have Kildonan-East Collegiate, which is a school that produces a lot of great individuals. And we think it's important to continue down that vein because, inadvertently, at some point in time, we might have a fender bender. I've had a few in my life and, certainly, we're going to be in need of some mechanic services, because I doubt there are too many of us in this building who do our own work. So it's important that we continue to support centres of excellence, particularly in the automotive research and training.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), and if the honourable member from Tyndall Park can introduce your staff member, please.

Mr. Marcelino: Yes, I was supposed to have done that earlier.

I have with me Dan Lambert. L-a-m-b-e-r-t. That's his last name. He's with the caucus staff.

My next question would be for the current Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler). And I want to make it of record that, because he—his portfolio—so-called portfolio belongs, according to the summary of Estimates, to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), the Department of the Minister of Finance, when the honourable Minister for Crown Services refers to questions that are too detailed, there are no other sources of questions, except the mandate letter and the framework letter. And, because that's all that's there is.

There's no Estimates of how much the Minister of Crown Services might be spending for the whole year. We don't have a budget that shows how much is being spent for the Minister of Crown Services, except for the \$51,000 that he was supposed to be paid as Minister for Crown Services.

So, I have to beg his indulgence if at all possible, that most of the questions will come from what we know to be important and if there should be no answer forthcoming, I will understand because he's a new minister in a new department that's even—it's under the Minister of Finance.

An Honourable Member: Junior minister.

Mr. Marcelino: I won't call him the junior Minister of Finance because that won't be good. But that's the way that the questions could have been framed, if

only there were some of those green books that were available, except that we don't have it.

My question now is regarding the framework letters. The one that's dated June 13, 2016, to the chairman of the board of Manitoba Hydro. And nowhere do I see in the letter, that same letter that I said was not dated and not signed, that I was given a copy of while we were during the—in the Estimates process, nowhere in this letter to Mr. H. Sanford Riley, chair of Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board, dated June 13, 2016, nowhere can I find any direction regarding the review of Bipole III.

Now, can the minister, please, address that issue of whether the framework letter is supposed to contain, that or was it really something that he's hiding from me or this Legislature.

Mr. Schuler: Well, and I appreciate that the member opposite doesn't find this process as easy to get through, because when I first started out as a critic, it was often very confusing. I've been in business for many, many years, and I still, to this day, find a lot of this quite intriguing, the way it's done. But I am sure that this is the way it's supposed to be done, so.

I want to explain a few things to the member opposite. If he takes his Manitoba Finance Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2016-2017 Departmental Expenditures Estimates, and it's a green book. If he would pull it out—I don't know if he has it handy with him.

I don't—does he have a copy that he can access?

* (14:50)

So if he would go to page 19, on page 19 it goes: Administration and Finance. On page 19. If he goes to A, it says Ministers' Salaries. So, clearly, one is for Crown Services and one is for Finance. It goes Executive Support, out of that number—well, first of all, it's both Finance and Crown Services—out of that number is five support staff, salaries and benefits, and the total amount out of B is—and I'll find the exact number for the member—is \$314,000. So that he would find on page 19 out of section B.

If then the member would go to page 23. If he's on page 23 and he looks at Administrative Support, of those, five of those positions belong to Crown Services. And I will just confirm that one more time, if I could just confirm. I just want to confirm because, again, it's important for the critic to know where the numbers all come together. So on

the administrative support, five of those are from Crown Services.

If he would go to page 27. Of that, Crown Services gets a percentage of each of the category of Other Expenditures, and that—for a total of \$54,000, which is approximately 17 per cent of each of the categories. So Transportation is \$1,000, of which 17 per cent, or \$170, would be for Crown Services. And, you know, and then he can just continue down the line and figure out where—what 17 per cent of each of the categories is, and for a total of \$54,000.

So I think that would explain where in the Finance books Crown Services is found. I would point out to the member that we have been in government now for a total of approximately eight weeks. We have, in that time frame, brought in a Throne Speech, a budget, legislation, Estimates. I can remember coming back after an election when his party was in power, and they could not get this kind of work done. And we have gotten a lot accomplished in a very short time. The NDP had 17 years to prepare for a budget and couldn't get it done in 17 years to present a budget this spring, and we did it in about four weeks, we brought in a budget. Seventeen years, couldn't get it done under the NDP. Four weeks, got it done under our government.

Mr. Marcelino: Just to clarify the administrative support and—we just heard the minister say that of the nine, he is enjoying the support of five. I just want to ask for the names of those five, if available. If not, it's okay. I will understand.

Mr. Schuler: Absolutely, and those are one of the questions that are normally asked in Estimates. I would like to make very clear that full-time position with a Mr. Cameron Bell, who's executive support; Mr. Marian Jaworski, executive support; Barbara Robson, full-time position; executive support, Cheyenne Halcrow, executive support; and Marilyn Ringland, executive support.

An Honourable Member: And what—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino).

Mr. Marcelino: Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what does Marian Jaworski do?

Mr. Schuler: I'm very pleased to have Marian Jaworski. He is the executive assistant to the minister. He is a outstanding individual in the

community. A lot of people would know him from Polish—the Polish community, the Sokol club. He's been very active involved, started it and he started the Sokol Youth Club and has been very active and involved not just in Folklorama but in most organizations across the city. He is a outstanding and high-calibre individual. His last position was—he worked for a Member of Parliament here in the city and did a lot of work in the city, so he knows how to work in a minister's office and knows what needs to be done and does a great job. I'm incredibly honoured and incredibly pleased to have Marian Jaworski join my staff and I couldn't be happier with an individual of that kind of calibre, a great Manitoban like Marian working in the Crown Services office.

Mr. Marcelino: Is he a member of the Progressive Conservative Party?

Mr. Schuler: I have no idea. I've never asked him and he has never told me. I can tell the member opposite, the reason why he was hired is because of his ability, and he is a outstanding individual. I would suggest to the member opposite, perhaps when he has a moment—in fact, if he would like to do it after Estimates today, come up and meet Marian. You will find one of the most genuine, one of the most honest and 'integrity' individuals you're ever going to find. He came here at 20 years old from Poland. His father was persecuted under the communist regime in Poland, and they fled and came to Canada.

And the kinds of contributions he has made to this province, again, is a testament to the immigration that we have in this country. He is just an outstanding individual that does his work—

An Honourable Member: On point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, the member for Assiniboine—

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Point of order—

Mr. Chairperson: On a point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: Mr. Chairperson, the political affiliation of an individual has nothing to do with government business and should not be part of the debate. We're talking about Estimates. It's—the question is out of order.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Just want to let you know that it's not a point of order, but the thing is, you can mention they questioned it on the political thing, but if we can just focus on the Estimates on hand, the topics that we should be looking at.

In the past, we haven't used that as a point of order. We've—it was sort of a normal question that's sometimes asked, but sometimes it does get out of the—out of topic.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, we'll continue. The honourable member—the honourable minister, please.

Mr. Schuler: Just to conclude, Marian Jaworski—just an outstanding individual, and I would recommend to all members of this House, if they have a moment, have a little chat with him. You will be really impressed with the kind of individual he is.

Mr. Marcelino: So, he's not a member of the Progressive Conservative Party?

Mr. Schuler: I can tell the member opposite, I have no clue what his membership holding status is in any political party. I have never asked him. Fact, you know, interesting the member raises that question, because now I'll probably go upstairs and ask him, but I haven't asked any of the individuals who work in Crown Services office, just to let the member know, I have no idea if they hold a membership in any political party. I wouldn't know because I've never asked.

* (15:00)

I would say to members in this House, I am incredibly honoured and incredibly pleased to have been chosen a minister. It's something I've worked hard for, for many years. I knew it was a difficult job; I knew it was very demanding.

I know the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief), who has told me over the years how demanding and how interesting and how exciting it is. And, you know, I'd have to say he didn't even tell me the half of it. And one of the last things that would ever have crossed my mind when I was first appointed a minister and then starting choosing people to work for me, probably the last thing I would ask is are they a member of a political party. And, you know, perhaps I should have but I didn't. I just don't think that that's—in fact, I would suggest to members opposite, I've employed a lot of people over the years, I've been here for a while and had some outstanding individuals work

for me and I dare say I don't know if all of them necessarily voted Conservative. I didn't ask. I wouldn't know and I know for a fact not all of them had a political membership; they probably didn't have a membership in any party. I always tried to find the best individuals who would serve the people the best, and I always say to the people who work for the MLA's office, and now for the Ministry of Crown Services, that we always have to remember the people who put us there.

In the case of myself, the people of St. Paul, whether it's constituency workers, we serve the people of St. Paul and don't ever forget who our employer is. And I make it clear to all my employees, and that includes the MLA. It really doesn't matter what political membership I have because I was elected by all people in my constituency, and I would point out to the House I broke 7,000, the only MLA in this election who broke into the 7,000 mark. And I would suggest to all members that within there are people who cross political boundaries.

And, when people come into my office, never, never would I ask what they voted or what their political leanings are or—in fact, I've helped a lot of individuals who said to me afterwards, oh, you know, next time I'm going to vote for you, and I tell them, you know what, that's actually irrelevant; I don't really need to know what you vote or what you didn't vote.

What's important to me is that you work with—for the people who elect you, and that's the same thing within the Department of Crown Services.

We have a job to do and that is to work in the best interest of all Manitobans, and for the Crown corporations, we've said to the Crown corporations, do what's best for the ratepayers and for the taxpayers of Manitoba.

And I believe we have individuals on these boards who take that with them and they carry that across their shoulders because they know that when they're making a decision, they're making important decisions for men and women who are relying on them because there are now 1.3 million Manitobans out there who go on with their daily lives who, you know, just want to take care of their families or take care of their pension years. Or for the kids in school they just want to, you know, to study hard and know when recess is. And they're not preoccupied they're not concerned with what happens in an individual MLA's office and they're not that overly concerned

about what goes on in a minister's office, until, all of a sudden, it impacts them.

So we can do what is best for all of those individuals that we don't severely impact, in fact, we want to positively impact them. I think that's important and we should attract individuals, men and women, to work for us in our offices who do what's best and rather than what's politically expedient.

So I hope that answers the member's question.

Mr. Marcelino: So I get it, that they are not civil service employees.

Mr. Schuler: Actually, I learned something when I became a minister and I'd like to share this with the member, and he'll probably find this interesting.

There actually are different categories of employees, and the first one of these three of the employees are what would basically be called Civil Service Commission employees. They are professional public civil servants, so those are assigned to the minister's office, they work for the ministry, of which I am the minister. So they are professional civil servants.

I have an SA—and then special assistant, and an executive assistant. They are employees through order-in-council, so they work for the minister. They don't work for the ministry, as such, but they work for the minister, and they are order-in-council positions.

And then I have—just like the member has, I have constituency staff. And that would be—you have a constituency assistant and individuals who help you in your constituency. And they are not order-in-council; they are hired through Legislative Assembly, so they are Leg. Assembly staff.

And each one of them is a different category. Each one of them is governed differently in their category. And each one of them has different roles and responsibilities. And it's very important for ministers, and the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) will probably be able to point out to this House, like, how that is supposed to be—each one of them is supposed to be treated differently, and I certainly respect the process. It's been a very good learning process for myself. I went to university and studied politics, and never was this ever raised or brought to my attention. It's good to know that there are different staffs who are hired differently and then do their jobs and do their work accordingly,

depending on where they were hired and how they are hired.

So I hope that helps the individual—my critic.

Mr. Marcelino: So, of the five who have been categorized as—the five who are members of the administrative support for the honourable minister, which ones are political staff?

Mr. Schuler: None.

Mr. Marcelino: So Cameron Bell, a special assistant, is not political staff?

Mr. Schuler: First of all, I want to make it very clear that we have to be careful with our definitions in this Chamber, because what we say does go on the record, and it can be misunderstood if somebody were to take that out of the Chamber.

First of all, none of our staff is actually political, because political people are hired in our political parties. So let's be very clear that, within the department, are three individuals who are public civil servants, and they're hired through the Civil Service Commission.

* (15:10)

The next two individuals are hired by order-in-council. They are not political. They are not to do political work in the minister's office. They're not to do political work during their regular business hours. So we have to be very careful. They are technical appointments is the way they're categorized. So I just don't want to use terms, and I know what the member's asking.

The three individuals are hired in each of the ministers' offices, and I would point out to the member that the three individuals, who are public Civil Service Commission individuals, they were actually hired, and they—before my time, and they worked for the honourable Eric Robinson; they worked in his office. And they are Barbara Robson, Cheyenne Halcrow and Marilyn Ringland—are the three individuals who worked in Minister Robinson's office. And they are professional public civil servants. Cameron Bell and Marian Jaworski are what are called technical appointments. They are order-in-council.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer, and I will leave it that.

The 17 per cent that was mentioned, is that something that was a computation or a mathematical computation of how much money is being spent on

the ministry for Crown Services, or is that something that's within a law or rule or regulation within the Minister of Finance's office?

Mr. Schuler: I thank the critic for his questions, and I would point out to him that all the questions that he's asked are good questions. These are kinds of questions I asked for many years on department and how does the minister set up his office, and those kinds of questions are good questions, and I would encourage him to keep, you know, if there's anything further he wanted to ask about the office, again, we want to be very open and transparent, and absolutely would want to give him whatever information he's looking for.

These are important Estimates. It's a way to keep government accountable, and so if he has any other questions there we can always go back to those.

The allocation is based on a similar-sized department. It is how we came up with that number. I'd like to point out to the member that I'm actually the first minister in Crown Services, so we weren't too sure what was going to be the need of the department, so this is the amount that was attributed.

Should there be a need to upscale that in the next budget year or downsize the budget somewhat, I would suggest to the member I'm a fairly low-maintenance individual. I believe that you should always be a good steward of the public purse; you should respect people's tax dollars, and within my department, we run pretty frugal office. I think we will try to live within our means and certainly appreciate the individuals that were signed. We have a very heavy workload in our department.

We understand that even the two individuals who are sitting in the table right in front of me and others within the department are working a lot of long hours trying to get stuff done because at the Cabinet level and at the government level, we are trying to get a lot accomplished. And when we're trying to get, you know, a Throne Speech and a budget and legislation and everything else done, it means there are individuals in the background, or in this case, in the forefront, because they're sitting in front of me, who are doing a lot of work. And we certainly appreciate all of those, whether it's the SA and the EA within my office and the—all the other administrative support that we have or those individuals who are working within the department who are working long and hard.

So, you know, we try to keep our budgets very slim, and we believe that the calculation that came up at this point in time seems to be reasonable.

Mr. Marcelino: So I take it that there's no specific amount of dollars assigned to the work of the Minister of Crown Services?

My next question is regarding Bipole III. And—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, one second. I will let the minister answer the question first.

Mr. Schuler: And, again, I know this is a really unique process to be part of, and I always want to make sure that, you know—the member—his answers. So staff and salary and benefits is \$314,000 for Crown Services. Operating is \$54,000. And we will review all requirements in the 2017-2018 budget.

I hope that helps to clarify the budget of Crown Services.

Mr. Marcelino: I was looking over the framework letter that was given by the honourable minister to the chair of Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board. And I asked a question regarding Bipole III, whether it was part of the framework letter. And no matter how many times I read it, it does not show any mention of Bipole III or the review thereof.

Was there any specific letter that was sent to the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board regarding the review, and what are the parameters and criteria that were used in that letter, if there was any?

Mr. Schuler: I just wanted to go back, very quickly, to the answer that I gave the member just previously. The amounts that I gave him excludes my salary. So it would be those numbers plus the ministerial salary. So I wanted to give him a fullness of that number.

Insofar as the mandate letters, and I know the member is just ecstatic to know that as critic, never before has a critic ever received framework letters, never mind a mandate letter, ever. And the last 17 years, it was the biggest locked vault you could ever imagine. There was very little that came from government. If you tried to pry something out of the government, it was predominantly redacted.

* (15:20)

And what we have done is—on a very, I think a very progressive and open way—just voluntarily released stuff that before was never done. And I would like to point out to members that those letters are very telling in that, you know, we set out a framework for where we'd like to see things go, and I

would point out to the member that the framework letters lay out, very clearly, that the boards are supposed to look at the Crown corporations, and they're supposed to see to it that they're managed and run in the best interest of all Manitobans. And that's what the framework letters do, and it's very clear in those letters.

I can't think of why we would be any more specific than that. I mean, in the framework letters, we do not go in and say, you know, we'd really like you to buy, you know, 0.75 thickness of lead in pencils. We do not say all pens must be blue ink. We don't get into the micromanaging of the corporations. The boards are supposed to go into the Crown corporations, do their due diligence, ensure that the corporation is being run appropriately.

Now, I would point out to the member, if he goes to the mandate letter that was given to the minister, each one of the Crown corporations would have seen those. I point out to all members of this House they were made public. The media got them. The members opposite got them. Everybody got them.

So, within the mandate letter, lays out an awful lot. I'm sure the boards can read the mandate letter and can see what some of the direction is of government. But the framework letter, basically, sets out for the boards what we'd like to see, and one of those is the most improved province, and, again, by today's tabling, after—15—15-plus long years we finally got a fourth-quarter report from Manitoba Hydro, something that we didn't see under the member's watch ever. And it just shows the kind of openness and transparency this government is achieving.

Mr. Marcelino: On page one of the June 13, 2016, letter, which has been labelled as a framework letter, paragraph two, it says: The Manitoba Hydro Board of Directors is responsible for carrying out the duties, powers, and functions of the corporation, including those outlined in The Manitoba Hydro Act. These responsibilities include ensuring a safe, reliable, economical and environmentally responsible supply of energy for Manitoba, while keeping rates low for Manitobans.

My question remains the same: Which portion—there are six paragraphs in this June 13th, 2016, letter—and I still haven't heard an answer to my question about where was the direction to review Bipole III. Where was it put in writing, or was it just verbal?

Mr. Schuler: Well, the member basically read the second paragraph, in which—again, here's a quote, these responsibilities include ensuring a safe, reliable, economically, environmentally responsible supply of energy for Manitoba while keeping rates low for Manitobans, which means that we'd like the board to assess, as every board should. Go through, do an assessment, do a re-evaluation.

They would have gotten the letter, the mandate letter given from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to the minister. And, in there it says very clearly, and I would point the member to page 2 under your mandate. If he goes to: as Minister of Crown Services, you are the lead in fulfilling the following platform; commitments—above all else keep Manitoba's largest Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, publicly owned.

And, then, if you drop down to the last bullet, it says: work with the new board of Manitoba Hydro in respect to our commitment to review the Bipole III construction project.

The board would have seen this letter. We're very clear in the letter—in the framework letter. I don't know how much clearer one could be. I mean, I guess we could have gone and gotten a big chisel and a hammer and some stone tablets and we could have chiselled, you would—must look at this, look at this.

I mean, it's all public, what we are asking Manitoba Hydro to do. It's in the letter from the Premier to the minister: the Bipole III construction project is to be reviewed. In the letter to the Crown corporation, it's clear what—that they're supposed to ensure that we have low rates, solid company and that would 'encapture' doing a review of the big projects, and they should do that as normal business practice would do.

I suspect the member does that on his budget—family budget at home. You go through and you review the budget from time to time. And, not that it's anybody's business, but I've decided to cancel cable in the house. We just don't need it anymore, nobody's watching it. Finally, I sat down with the kids and I said, well, if nobody's watching TV, why am I paying \$70 a month or over \$800 a year for something nobody's watching?

So that's what you do. You go through, you review your budget. And the member from Fort Garry-Riverview says, absolutely right. That wasn't relevant, but it is, because all of us go through our budgets from time to time, go through our operations

and do a review. And that's what we would like the Crown corporations to do.

And if there's something that they feel they want to change, or that needs to be changed, that's in the best interest of the ratepayers, that's in the best interest of taxpayers, well, then they should work on that, because that's their framework that they're supposed to work within. And we are very confident of the men and women who have been appointed to these boards, and we're confident that they're going to do a very good job.

Mr. Marcelino: I get it.

There's no written instruction from the minister, the honourable Minister for Crown Services.

There's no written instruction to the board of directors of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board regarding Bipole III.

Was it done by email?

* (15:30)

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Chair, I think we've been in Estimates, now, for almost 10 per cent of the entire Estimates time, and it feels more like 50 per cent, but that's probably just me.

We've made it really clear to the opposition. We've made it really clear to the Crown corporations. We've made it clear to the media. We keep saying it over and over again, that there is a new model in which our Crown corporations are supposed to conduct their business. And it's not supposed to be political organizers who help the political party get elected, like under the NDP, who then got played—paid political jobs paid for by the Crown corporations to work in the minister's office, and then run all kinds of interference in the Crown corporation.

We're going with a proper, accepted business practice. You put in a board of directors that you have confidence in, that you trust, that you know is going to do what's best for the ratepayers and the taxpayers. They ensure that within their corporation, and we believe this firmly, that the corporations have the best individuals, the best advice and, if they're lacking anywhere, they're allowed to go outside the corporation and bring in individuals to give them advice so that the boards are getting the best advice possible and that they're doing what's in the best interest of the shareholders, the ratepayers, the people of Manitoba.

That's the way corporate governance is supposed to work. It's not supposed to be government using, in the case—and I see the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) looking at me right now. It wasn't meant for the Crown corporations to be an instant teller machine for the NDP government. It wasn't supposed to be that they went and helped themselves to whatever they wished and whatever they wanted out of the Crown corporations.

If the Crown corporation, in their due diligence—the board of directors and the Crown corporation do their due diligence and they feel that there is something that they would like to do, by most cases, they have the right to do that. If they feel that it's something that's bigger than what they want to tackle, they can send it to the minister, and it would go to Cabinet, and it would be discussed there. But this is not about a minister or political people telling the Crown corporations what they should or shouldn't be doing. That's how we got into this mess with Bipole III—supposed to cost \$1.2 billion and now costing over \$4 billion. And we're not going to undo that mess by using the same model. The only way that we're going to make this work is we've got to reject the clearly—clearly—broken, the clearly wrong NDP model of politicization of the Crowns and running interference in the Crown corporations the way that was done under the member opposite.

So we've gone with a different model, and I know he can't understand it: Oh, there's got to be something; they must be somehow interfering in the Crown corporation; we've got to have, like, an email has got to be somewhere or a—there's got to be a secret letter. And the member goes insofar as that we're withholding stuff from him. We have been the most open and transparent government, the last 17 years, the dark days of the last 17 years where we got nothing—nothing—out of the member opposite. You've got a mandate letter that was given from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to the minister. You've got framework letters given. It goes on and on and on. It's so open and transparent that the member can't believe it. He can't accept it—but there's got to be something.

I would say he should go back to the 500 pages of redacted stuff we got from the member for St. Boniface and go through that and try to find out where hidden stuff is. We've been open and transparent.

Mr. Marcelino: I'll simplify the question. Maybe it will help the honourable minister.

How did he, as Minister for Crown Services, communicate to the board of directors of Manitoba Hydro that there needs to be a review of Bipole III? How was it done?

It's so simple.

Mr. Schuler: The member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) says, it's so simple. He's right. It is so simple.

It's in the mandate letter given by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to the minister—page 2. If the member would look, page 2, in the first set of bullets, fourth bullet: Work with the new board of Manitoba Hydro in respect to our commitment to review the Bipole III construction project.

He's absolutely right. It is so simple. It's in black and white, in a mandate letter given to the Premier to the Minister of Crown Services in a document that was made public in a public venue.

And if the committee would indulge me for a minute, I'm going to ask the Minister of Education, I understand it's found on each one of our websites? It's found in multiple locations.

An Honourable Member: Yes, it's on a website from communications, but they're all there.

Mr. Schuler: They are all public. We have tabled it in this House.

And if the member would send a note to the Clerk, the Clerk could probably tell the member what date that was tabled and the Legislative Library would now have a copy of that letter and could produce it for the member. Or, we could produce it for the member. I have a copy in front of me. It is so simple. It is so public.

In fact, it is in—under—if you—if one were to go into the government website, it is under the Proactive Disclosure, under the heading Ministerial Mandate Letters. In fact, under there is Legislative Assistant Mandate Letters, under which falls Crown Services Framework Letters. It is all on the government website.

And there's no—a new thing Al Gore invented, it's called, like, an iPhone or a Samsung device, or BlackBerry, and he can probably even look it up right on his device. It is all right there.

We have been open, above board, transparent with all of it. It's so simple.

Mr. Marcelino: I'm getting flustered now.

And just to shift a little bit, I'll call the attention of the honourable minister to the framework letter dated June 13, 2016, addressed to the chair of the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation, Ms. Polly Craik.

And I have gone over the same framework letter, and it does not say anything about the review of the purchase of the downtown location for the headquarters of the Manitoba lotteries—or Liquor & Lotteries Corporation. The purchase was closed some time in November. And that was 2015, well before the election.

And I was trying to read where in this two-page letter that's labelled framework letter, where does it say that the board of directors of the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation will review that purchase? Where is it?

*(15:40)

Mr. Schuler: You know, I understand why the member is frustrated because he—flustered, he said flustered; I apologize—is because he's looking for the grassy knoll. He's a conspiracy theorist. There's got to be a conspiracy somewhere. And, you know, often, you find that the more open and transparent, the more paranoid people can become on what's going on because they can't accept that after 17 dark, dark NDP days, that a government would actually come in and be open, transparent. You know, they—okay, well, I bet you they're not going to release the mandate letters. Oh, done. You know, big check. Check. Oh, I bet you they won't release the framework letters. Oh, no, done already, check. You know. I bet you you're not going to release this. And I—we do—we've released all kinds of documents. The member has asked me all kinds of questions. We've answered them all.

I would suggest to the member opposite that our job is not to command the Crown corporations and tell them what they should be doing. We made it clear they're supposed to ensure that the corporations are run in the best interest of the ratepayers and the people of Manitoba.

Now, if the member wants, I'll endeavour to go look on best business practices of—[interjection] If the member wants, we could always get best business practices—[interjection] I don't know if this should belong on Hansard, but this Chamber is freezing. There are normal business practices that are adhered to in the running of a corporation, and regular reviews of the corporation should be done.

And I can't imagine that there would be any university or business college or business institution that wouldn't see a facilities review would be one of those. I'd point out to the member, when I was a school trustee, in that time was called the River East School Division, we did regular facility reviews. It's common practice. It's done all over the place.

Now, I understand under the terribly dark days of the NDP's last 17 years that the reasonable things were not done, that normal business practices were not undertaken and—unfortunately. Now, the Crown corporations, I suspect, will do a proper facilities review. That's their mandate. What they decide to do is their mandate.

Now, unless the member wants to tell us that the decisions made—and he mentions one project—unless he's going to tell us that those were politically motivated decisions, and maybe he wants to declare for us. Maybe that's what it was. What the decision of the Crown corporation is and what they are undertaking and what they're looking at, they don't inform me on a day-to-day basis. We expect them to manage the Crown corporations efficiently and effectively. That's what we would like them to do. And there isn't an email, there's no grassy knoll, there's no conspiracy. The Crown corporations and their boards are reviewing the operations of the Crown corporations.

Mr. Marcelino: There was mentioned by the honourable minister about him being inoculated and vaccinated from politically interfering with the Crown corporations, which is good; I like that.

But the question is this: Is the honourable minister—is the honourable minister issuing his instructions by press release?

Mr. Schuler: I thank the member for the question because it allows me, for the third or fourth hour of Estimates, to put the same message on the record. But I would like to read for the member the first paragraph of the framework letter sent to Polly Craik, Chair of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation: Manitobans have elected a government that is committed to improving the province of Manitoba, it says. Our priorities include restoring prudent fiscal management—I'd like to repeat that again for the committee: restoring prudent fiscal management, creating jobs, improving health care and education, improving our partnerships and relationships with business and communities, and increasing openness and transparency of our

government. We are focused on achieving results on behalf of Manitobans.

Well, the last sentence, we've already—begin that process of achieving results; the openness and transparency of our government, clearly we're on a road to achieving that, and then some. And it's very clear: restoring prudent fiscal management, and that means the Crowns will go through and will review all operations of their corporation, and that is something that should be done on a regular basis.

In fact, I would like to point out to the committee and to the critic, not unsimilar but in a different way like what we're doing here today. A budget is presented; it goes to the Estimates process; people ask questions; people do reviews; there's a proper vetting process.

Why wouldn't the Crown corporations do the same thing from time from time? They do, and they're going to do, and we support them in their work and what they're doing, and how they do it is their business. The member asked me about time frames. It's important for any healthy organization, and I used to work for non-profit organizations, and it's important for all organizations.

* (15:50)

I was part of folk arts council, and they would continuously do reviews of their operations. I worked for other organizations, whether sitting as a member on a volunteer board or as a paid staffer, and you always go through and you do a review. It's healthy and it's important.

And that's what these boards are going to do. They're outstanding individuals. I think the other day we discussed Polly Craik and her long, long resume, and the kinds of stuff that she's achieved. And I know that there are young girls going to grade school, and young women who are in universities, and women who are trying to get into business who look at Polly Craik as their hero. And I, unabashedly, would say to this committee, she is one of my heroes, because of the kinds of work and effort in what she's done. She's an outstanding business person, and I think we should be so proud of the work that she's done, and what she's doing in the Crown corporation. The kind of civic leadership that she's taken. For instant, 2007, she chaired the IIHF world women's hockey championships tournament in Winnipeg. I mean, did an amazing job.

And, if the member would like, we could discuss her and the kinds of work she's done, and what she

does on a go-forward basis. But the point is that it would be her and the board that would be doing the review, and it's important for the boards. And we encourage the boards, through this committee, to make sure that they go through the Crown corporations and do a review that's important. And what their outcome will be, I don't know. You'd have to go ask the boards. And the member can call up and ask to have the meeting if she—if he wants. He can do that. I do not micromanage the boards, I don't micromanage what they do, but they've been given a mandate to do what's best for the rate payers and the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Mr. Marcelino: In relation to the previous question, I quote a Winnipeg Free Press article by—I'll find the date later. It says here: Crown Services Minister Ron Schuler said he has spoken informally—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, excuse me. We refer to the members as constituency—or, the ministers by their title.

Mr. Marcelino: I will withdraw the name of the honourable minister and just read this.

Crown Services Minister blank blank said he has spoken informally to directors about the review. His request for a facilities assessment will be included in a mandate letter to the board in the coming days. Blank said in an interview this week he's not prejudging the project, but said it's just good policy for MLL and other Crown corporations to carry out such reviews.

My question, now, to the honourable Minister for Crown Services is: How informal was the instruction given to the Crown corporations involved?

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to say to the member opposite, the getting caught on reading a newspaper article and reciting a name—I'm sure that our pre-eminent Clerk, who is in the room right now—I think once or twice she might have called me on one of those, or three or four times, or five or six times, or eight or nine times. A few times. And it's one of those hard things, when you're reading from a document, and I appreciate the member—the article, and yes, it's a good article to bring to the record, and I have—I had it in front of me after I gave the member this big lecture about finding it on electronics; I seem to have found it again.

And, the important part of the article is that the Minister of Crown Services said in an interview this week, he is not prejudging the project, but said

it's just good policy for MLL and other Crown corporations to carry out such reviews, which is what we have spent at least an hour and a half discussing. We would like to see—and the article goes on, we would like to see a facility review of every Crown corporation. That should be done on a regular basis, the minister said. Look at your property. How much empty space have you got? Are you fully leased? Are you leasing expensive offices in other places?

I think that's all very reasonable advice. But that's not advice—I'd like to point out to the member, that's not advice that necessarily comes from the Minister of Crown Services, although I would suggest it's a very, very smart and intelligent and reasoned advice, sage, wise advice. But that is the advice given at any business course anywhere in the world at any level, that that is something that you should do on a regular basis.

And I pointed out to the member, I can remember when I was on the board of the River East School Division. We would talk about the fact that we had some programs that we had opened up and we were renting from a strip mall. And I know there's 29 new colleagues in this building, and they are shocked at how expensive space is to rent. It has gotten incredibly expensive, and a lot of members are struggling trying to get good space that's easily accessible, that it isn't going to break their budgets. So why wouldn't you, as a school board, look at where you're renting space. And we had a program that we were renting all kinds of space from in a strip mall, and I think the strip mall was trying to get us out of there, because they wanted it for a commercial property that they could make more money. So they kept jacking the price up for us, and we did a review and we found out we could place it in a school where we had empty classrooms, and it's still there. It was the adult education component of the River East School Division. I still think it's on McLeod in the McLeod school and education centre.

And that's what happens when you do a facilities review. You go through all your properties and you find out we are spending way too much on renting space for a program that we could have put into one of our schools. So we felt that that was a very, very good thing to do, because it saved the taxpayers of the school division money. That's the advice we are giving our Crown corporations. And if you go back to the mandate letters, and I can do a compare and contrast for him, because it is something I studied at university. We could spend—in fact, if the member would allow me—give me leave, give me

about 10, 15 minutes, I could give a really good compare and contrast.

But it says clearly in here, Manitobans expect a high-quality of service delivered by their public Crown corporations and wants to strengthen their accountability mechanisms, and it talks about the kinds of things we would like to see the Crown corporations do. Our priorities include restoring prudent fiscal management. That's what is encapsulated with that. I go back, second sentence in there: Our priorities include restoring prudent fiscal management. That would include a facilities review, and I believe that sentence is—runs through the letters. It also runs through what we've been saying publicly since we've been elected.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer.

* (16:00)

The honourable minister has mentioned something about the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board reviewing Bipole III. During the election season, the campaign, more precisely, during those 35 days prior to April the 19th, there was mention of the Public Utilities Board as the proper forum for such a review. Now, why is it being referred now to the board of directors of the Manitoba Hydro and not to the Public Utilities Board?

Is that something that would still be explained or is that something that he'd rather not answer?

Mr. Schuler: I'd like to thank the member for the question. It gets to the crux of what we're talking about here.

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

First of all, I believe we have to respect our Crown corporations far more than the respect—well, first of all, there was no respect shown in the last 17 years, so any kind of respect would be far more. But we are going to respect the Crown corporations and the professionals.

We know that when it came to Bipole III that the member opposite and his colleagues made that decision at the caucus table, at the Cabinet table, at the political operative table, maybe it was made at the NDP headquarters table. I don't know but it was a political decision.

The best thing we can do, and keeping in mind we've been government for eight weeks, to try and even attempt to unscramble the omelette is going to

take a long time. After 17 bitter, long years of NDP mismanagement, we're going to have to get the process right, and the first step in the process is to get the boards of the Crown corporations to do a facilities review, to do a review of substantive projects in the case of Bipole III.

It would be most respectful if we would wait for a report from the Crown corporation. I don't think we want to run all over the place in a disorganized fashion, divided, having multiple positions on issues like we saw, certainly not the entire 17 past years but certainly the last two, three years. That does nobody any good.

What we need to do is go through a proper process. The first step is to go back to the Crown corporation and say to the board, do a facilities review, do proper business model—look at—and on those boards are individuals who have done high-level board decisions. Go and look at the corporations and come back with some kind of recommendations or in the case of some boards, if they feel that it's a decision they can make, then they should make the decision. I mean, there were all kinds of decisions made previously. It's—you know, the boards have to make these decisions and discussions at the board table.

But if we're going to do this the right way, we have to do it in an appropriate process. It can't be willy-nilly. The worst thing we can do is try and undo the mess of the last 17 years by using the same system that got us into that mess. So what we're going to do is to go through a process whereby we first go to the Crown corporations and have them do a proper business review. That is the responsible thing to do. It is the right thing to do. And it is what every business, university and college across the world would tell you you should do. You first of all go to the Crown corporation and get a facilities review, a business review, done by the board. And then we'll take the next step and the next step and the next step. But until that time, I think it's disrespectful. It would be the same kind of disrespect that was shown by the member opposite and his colleagues when they didn't respect the professionals in the Crown corporations and they didn't respect the boards of the Crown corporations, they didn't listen to professionals in the corporations and outside of corporations. They didn't listen to when people were trying to give them advice. They felt—the NDP felt at their NDP headquarters board table that political operatives knew better than the Crown corporations.

Mr. Marcelino: My question was not answered, but I'll see if I could rephrase it in a way that is more understandable.

The promise was to refer the matter of the Bipole III and its construction to the Public Utilities Board. The question is: What made the minister change his mind?

Mr. Schuler: It's great to see the member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski) being in the Chair. We appreciate that very much. And great to see him there.

*(16:10)

I would like to point the member—because I think what's very important is that we are going to have to point stuff out to him in writing—I believe the date is June the 20th, 2016.

An Honourable Member: June 15th.

Mr. Schuler: I'm sorry. June 15th—I misspoke myself. June 15th, and it was a question by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Ms. Marcelino), and she asked the same question that the member just asked.

And the Premier (Mr. Pallister) went on to say and I'll read his answer: Well, I understand that the members have for a long time supported their political position that the bipole transmission line should be stretched around the west half of the province to the tune of about 500 additional kilometres and a billion-plus additional ratepayers cost. But, that being said, the member uses the word surprised. I think most Manitobans who follow these issues were tremendously surprised, and I would add disappointed that the previous administration did not allow the Public Utilities Board, as a protector of Manitoba's best interests and of ratepayers' best interests, to have a look at their partisan proposal, the one that they had been pushing for years.

And the Premier goes on to say, and we are—that we're tremendously disappointed in the secrecy that they engaged in, in avoiding public scrutiny and full examination of the proposal. We ran on a commitment to have it looked at and will have it looked at because, unlike the previous administration, we keep our word to Manitobans.

So, again, to the member, if we're going to deal with this boondoggle that the member opposite left us, and it is a boondoggle, and the member should open up—when he gets the opportunity, should open up his mic with an apology to Manitobans for what

he did. And he was part of the government that was so irresponsible and supported a political decision, not a Crown corporation decision, not the board of Manitoba Hydro, a political decision made by him and other political operatives—not too sure where, if it was the NDP campaign office or the NDP headquarters, but it was made somewhere politically.

And, if we are going to get this right, it's not going to be by using the same failed model that the member opposite used. And shame on him for having used that model. Shame on him and his colleagues. So what we're going to do is try to go about this in a proper approach.

And the first thing we have to do is, Mr. Chair, is we're going to go to the Crown corporations and have them do a review of their organization and of their corporation; that is the responsible thing to do. We are going to go back to the professionals and we are going to listen to the men and women who are outstanding individuals, and if the member didn't meet some of them, I would suggest he should. They are outstanding, a lot of them Manitoba educated, some of the finest individuals.

In fact, I think one of the worries is that people keep coming into Manitoba and poaching our brightest and our best. We have amazing individuals who work in these Crown corporations. Then at least we should owe them the respect to ask them their advice, and ask them their opinion where we should go with this. And that's what we've tasked the boards to do; go and listen to the professionals in your Crown corporation and come back with recommendations.

Isn't that respectful? Isn't that what we should have done? And I'd say to the member opposite: Why doesn't he avail himself of the opportunity and apologize to all Manitobans for the mismanagement that they did?

Mr. Marcelino: The honourable minister could rant and keep on politicizing this Estimates process with his answers, but I'll refuse to apologize for something that he's doing. And I apologize for what he is doing now, which is to stonewall this process.

It's a very simple question. If the Public Utilities Board was good before when the minister was in opposition and asking that the Bipole III be reviewed by the Public Utilities Board, what has changed in the composition of the Public Utilities Board that the honourable minister might have some doubts in?

Mr. Schuler: Great to see the member in the chairs—the chair—and it's just on a sidebar here, it's wonderful to see new faces and new people in here and taking on leadership roles and, I know I've said this, but it's just great, great to see them there.

Back to the critic's question, a lot has changed. Huge amount of change has happened and that change is on the NDP benches where they used to run, flee from the Public Utilities Board. They had no use for it. They wouldn't go near. You'd shout public utility board, and you would see 37 New Democrats head for the doors. It was a stampede.

And now—now, all of a sudden they've become the public utility board champions, and we cheer them on for that change, for that reversal, flip-flop, on the conversion on the road to Damascus. We think that's fantastic because now, we actually have something that we all agree on. We think the Public Utilities Board is a great, great board, and it's an important step, it does a lot of good in protecting the rate payers and the taxpayers of Manitoba.

We believed that when we were in opposition. Unfortunately the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) did not. He did not view that the rate payers, the taxpayers should have a protection from the kinds of things that were being done in the dark, dark days of the NDP in the last 17 years. He didn't—the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), I apologize—the member for Tyndall Park, he's not the member for the Maples.

The member for Tyndall Park never stood up ever once in the last 17 years and argued for the Public Utilities Board. What's changed? Now he's become their champion, and we are so happy for that. We are—you know what, it's like red rover, red rover, come on over. We used to play that game on the playground. We finally got the member for Tyndall Park to come on over and join us in support of the Public Utilities Board.

Now unfortunately, it's a little late for him to be coming over, because the whole Bipole III line should have gone to the Public Utilities Board before the construction started. Now we are the government for seven weeks and the first thing we are doing is respecting—respecting the Crown corporations and asking them to do a review of their operations. That is respectful.

And I know that the member opposite—and he's learning, I think the committee—everybody's nodding their heads on committee here, they all recognize that

the member opposite is slowly coming our way. He's starting to see what we're saying is right. Already he's come over to our side on respecting the Public Utilities Board. I have a feeling by the time Estimates is done, he will also agree with the way we are handling the Crown corporations and respecting them.

And maybe—maybe in 15, 20 years, we'll get the member so far, that he'll actually respect the public, because that would be really good, because we know how over the last four years there has been a terrible disrespect. The member should apologize for that too. I'll make a memo and send it to him maybe with all the things that he should apologize for. And one of those would be the way they treated the public on the PST increase. They went, knocked on all the doors two elections ago, and said they wouldn't raise the PST. Nonsense. Read my lips. And it went on and on. Not a chance were they going to raise the PST, and then did.

* (16:20)

The member opposite and his political party disrespected the voters and the public, disrespected the Public Utilities Board, disrespected the Crown corporations, disrespected the professionals who work there, and now he sits here and he says, what's changed?

Well, you know what's changed? It's his attitude, at least towards the Public Utilities Board. And we are going to respect the professionals and Crown corporations as we have always respected the Public Utilities Board.

I ask him to join us.

Mr. Marcelino: The May 3rd, 2016, mandate letter to the honourable Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler), room 343, Legislative Building, Winnipeg, Manitoba, it says, and I quote: At the outset, I want—this is paragraph 2—at the outset, I want to remind you of the need to comport yourself at all times with personal and professional integrity as a representative of our new government. I insist we adhere to the highest possible standards of accountability and respect in the conduct of the Province's business. Accordingly, I expect you to be fully aware and compliant with all ethical rules and guidelines currently established, as well as those which will be part of our open government initiative.

With that in mind, having come from the honourable First Minister, to the Minister of Crown Services, can the Minister of Crown Services please

tell us why did he refer the matter of Bipole III to the board of directors instead of the Public Utilities Board, where he says it should have been in the first place?

Mr. Schuler: If the member would take the letter and let his fingers do the walking and turn the page over to page 2, if he would read down, there's two sets of bullets. The first set of bullets, there's four of them, the fourth bullet says, and I quote: Work with the new board of Manitoba Hydro in respect to our commitment to review the Bipole III construction project.

And that, Mr. Chair, is exactly what we're doing, what we said we would do, in the letter that we tabled, in this House, on that newfangled thing called the Internet, for everybody to see, for the whole world to access. It's all right there.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer.

And if, after a certain period of time, and the board of directors of Manitoba Hydro decides to scuttle Bipole III, is that something that the minister will order, if recommended by the board of directors of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Schuler: I would say to the member, if he wants to take the mandate letter and peruse first page, peruse second page and then peruse the third page and maybe he can find it, but I've read this letter over and over again, and one of the things that doesn't seem to be in this letter, least I can't find it, is that we should speculate on what people are going to do. I'm looking through the letter right now, and it does not suggest that the Minister of Crown Services should second-guess the boards of the Crowns. And I just don't see it in here. And I would suggest to the member opposite one of the most imprudent things we can do as legislators, all of us, is start second-guessing and start doing end runs around individuals who are working very hard.

And, in all seriousness, I would like to point out to committee—his name has been mentioned—Sandy Riley is an individual who doesn't really need this position. He's got a job. But he is working almost full time on this if not full time and probably more than full time, to do what we asked him to do, and that is to ensure that Manitoba Hydro is being run in the best interests of the ratepayers of Manitoba. And it would be so unbecoming, it would be so disrespectful, for the Minister of Crown Services to sit at a committee and start second-guessing the work

that's being done. It would be the height of irresponsibility.

Now, I know the member's allowed to ask questions, and we have agreed to a global questioning, and I support that. But I point out to him there would be nothing more disrespectful for myself to sit here as a minister and undermine the long hours that are being spent by board chairs and by boards trying to do what's best for the ratepayers and the people of Manitoba and the minister undermining that process. And I would say to the member I appreciate the fact he asked the question, but I will not engage in any speculation. I will not undermine the work of the boards.

And, when I met with the board chairs and we had a global discussion, I made it very clear we respect who they are, we respect the professionalism they bring to the boards, and we will respect the process and we will not second-guess what they're doing. We will wait to see what they come up with. And I know the member would expect nothing less than that.

Mr. Marcelino: Now, let's go to the downtown headquarters of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation. We know for a fact that the 15-storey Medical Arts Building on Kennedy has been bought and that the corporation has estimated that the development of that particular location and building will cost \$23.6 million less over the next 20 years than if it continued to own and lease spaces in five offices throughout the city.

Now, the purchase price was \$7.9 million, including the building and the adjoining surface parking lot as well as the parkade facing Edmonton Street.

The question is this: In this particular May 13th news item or—where the honourable minister was quoted, it says here the minister said that that remains his objective today. As a Cabinet minister, his mandate letter to the board, he said, will state that he wants the corporation to be run in the best interests of the ratepayers. The question, really, that begs itself is: Is he not substituting his judgment for the board of directors who have decided to transfer their location from their five locations throughout the city to one that's downtown, right at the Medical Arts Building on Kennedy?

Is he not substituting his decision against the members of the board that he now says he has a lot of respect?

Mr. Schuler: Perhaps I could ask my colleague across the way, could he, within that, define what the question is?

Mr. Marcelino: To accommodate the honourable minister, I'm just citing the news item of May 13th where the honourable minister was quoted as saying: The new member–new nine-member board would report back to him with recommendations–this, after the honourable minister said that he had specific concerns about the proposed new headquarters and that he wanted the project reviewed as part of an assessment of corporation facilities.

When a board of directors of a corporation is supposed to have made a decision and somebody who's new as a political master says that he needs the facility's assessment review, isn't that somewhat political interference on its face?

Mr. Schuler: No.

Mr. Marcelino: Let me rephrase the question, then: Was the honourable minister substituting his judgment for the judgment already made by the board of directors of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries when they bought that 15-storey Medical Arts Building on Kennedy and paid for it with Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries money and closed the transaction sometime in November when he said that he wants a facility's assessment review.

Isn't that political interference in the first degree?

Mr. Schuler: No.

Mr. Marcelino: I will take it as–can the honourable minister, then, try to explain his answer?

Mr. Schuler: Every business college and university around the world teaches their students that one of the things every business should do is a facilities review, or a business review, depending on what kind of a business they have. I can remember, when I was on the school board, we even did a technology review, you know, to see what kind of computers we had, how old are they, you know. Found out we had schools that were–had all this technology that they were storing that didn't work, so we had–we were chock full of computers, of which a lot of them didn't work.

Well we didn't know that. We just saw stats on a piece of paper and thought, wow, we almost have one computer for every kid in the school division, except a lot of them don't work. Or a lot of them were out of date, or they couldn't run the newest Windows, so they didn't work. And what we did with

that process is, then, when people wanted to donate computers, we ended up having a central intake where we had technologists who would go through, and they'd say, you know, there's not enough hard drive, there's not enough RAM, there's–it just isn't the standard which we can run programs on. And either we would dispose of it or we would upgrade them.

But what we did, when we did a business review, we found out that even though on paper things looked good, they weren't quite what we thought they were. It's called a business review. As we should be doing a facilities review, as–if you were on a municipal board, and I know there are colleagues here who are on municipal boards. There are people who have been on all kinds of boards. And you do a review, and you say, okay, in real terms we have a building. What shape is the building in? What renovations have to be done? What is the longevity of the building? Is it a good working environment? Is this a good place to be? What is this costing us? How would we save money if we did x? How would we save money if we did y?

That is what a facilities review is there for. And we recommended to each and every one of the Crown corporations, do a proper facilities review–as they would have done anyway, or they should have done. We were under the impression these things were being done on a continual basis but, sometimes, when you state the obvious, you'll find that people go, oh, you mean you want a facilities review. Yes, that's what we're asking the corporations to do.

And, without having our hand on the plow and constantly looking backwards, what we said was: we don't know what happened previous, we don't know everything that was going on previous, we know that whatever went on previous didn't work, we know that the model was dysfunctional, we know that it's costing taxpayers and rate payers a fortune, we know that the dark, dark last past 17 years were a disaster for the Crowns, we realize that looking backwards isn't the way to go. On a go-forward basis, do a business review. Do a facilities review. That's what you would normally do in a business. It's not telling a business what they should do, insofar as a piece of property or another piece of property, because I don't know what the Crown corporations do or don't own.

What's important is that they do a facilities review, and they get professionals, they get the corporation, and they sit down and they talk these things over. Because that's what every business does,

whether you're a car dealership, you would do an inventory review. It's called due diligence.

* (16:40)

There was an individual once telling me, the worst thing when he worked for Eaton's or any one of these stores, they would do an inventory, and they would shuffle all the managers around and then they realized that people were fudging the numbers on the inventory, and they didn't know if they should produce the real numbers or produce the fudged numbers and—because then—you know, that kind of thing. You've got to have real numbers, and you do due diligence, and that's what we'd like the Crowns to do.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer. The honourable minister has, I think, explained it a little bit longer than he should have taken, but is that something, that facilities assessment review, is that something that is also being done with the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation?

Mr. Schuler: Every organization, including government itself, should always, on a continual basis, be doing a business review, a facilities review. We are under the impression that all of our organizations, Crown corporations, all organizations within government, should on a regular basis be doing a facilities review. All of them should be doing it, and I understand that some don't have property as such, but whether it's a retail operation that does a—every year—every year—you do an inventory. It's called an inventory review. In fact, we had to have auditors come in, and they would spot-check, and there is a—it's called WIS, Western Inventory Service, and they will come in; they're an arm's-length organization, and they will spot-check the inventory counts of all the skews to make sure that they are legitimate, and that becomes part of your audit. It's important to do that.

So, whether it's an inventory review or properties review or a facilities review, you should always, as normal practice, be doing that.

Mr. Marcelino: I take that as a no, there's no facilities assessment review for the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation. There's no Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation facilities assessment review.

Let me go a little bit sideways and ask the honourable Minister for Crown Services if he is saying, today, that the previous board of directors of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation did not

exercise due diligence when they decided to buy the downtown location for the proposed new headquarters of the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation. Is he saying that today, that they did not exercise due diligence?

Mr. Schuler: Actually, I never said that, the member said that. And I would say to the member he shouldn't say that because, actually, we should not reflect on previous boards. And I have made it incredibly clear at this committee, at everywhere I've gone, whether it's been in question period or whether it's been into the media, I will never, never say anything about previous boards, other than we thank them for the work that they put into it, and I made it very clear to this committee in Estimates, that we sent them all a letter and we thanked them for the work and the effort that they put in. I also made it clear to this committee that we were not going to look backwards, that we wanted to ensure that facilities reviews were being done and that the boards be briefed on them. It's all very clear, and I would suggest to the member we should be very careful that we not disparage individuals who put a lot of time and effort in.

The only thing that I have been very, very critical of is the member opposite and the political operatives, campaign workers that he hired, to sit in ministers' offices and cause interference in the Crown corporations because that was wrong. That was untoward, and we're still waiting for the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) to apologize for his part of it because he should bear some of that responsibility. He was there and never once did he stand up for the Crown corporations, and he should apologize for that. The boards did their job. It was the political masters, the marionette string holders here in this building with the NDP who are running Crown corporations and causing interference and not respecting the professionals in the Crowns and not respecting their boards and not respecting due process.

What they were doing is exactly what we are now undoing, and that's the political interference in the Crowns. And we are not going to participate in that kind of behaviour in our Crown corporations. We respect previous and current boards. We respect the professionals who work in those Crown corporations. They work hard, and if they would've been listened to, if the member opposite would have listened to the Crown corporations and would've heard what they were saying, we wouldn't be in this mess we are in today, a \$1.2-billion project now

sitting at \$4 billion, and it's a joke for the member. It's all a joke. He thinks this is funny.

Instead, he should take and bear his share of the responsibility and apologize today on the record for what his government did and the fact that he never stood up for the ratepayers and the taxpayers of Manitoba. He didn't stand up for the boards. He didn't stand up for the professionals in the corporations. And we are going to do that, and I have never, never said a negative word about any board member, past or present, and I will not, and I have never said anything negative about any staff member, past or present, in any one of the corporations, and I will not—will not—do the kind of negative, dark politics of the last 17 years. We will not engage in that kind of stuff, certainly not on this side of the House, and the member opposite should apologize.

Mr. Marcelino: I don't understand why the honourable minister would be so hot under the collar about a question that's so innocent.

* (16:50)

The honourable minister, in a quote in the same news item, he said: It seems to me they have done their due diligence, referring to the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation board—the decision to buy the downtown location. And the honourable minister then was the Liquor & Lotteries critic. And when he said that, I will grant that he also said that as long as the ratepayer is protected, that's our interest. And I praise him for saying that.

But then, what has changed? Why is he trying to change the decision of the board of directors of the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation, who may have done their due diligence? What has changed? What has changed?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I thank the member for the question.

And what's amazing is, back from then, from when this—when the member for St. Paul, the minister, was the critic, he has stayed on message. Let's go back to that message.

I can't call myself the Minister for Crown Services because I wasn't back then, and I'm quoting from an article, so I will just refer to myself as the member for St. Paul said: It seems to me they've done their due diligence, said the PC Liquor & Lotteries critic, member for St. Paul at the time, as long as the ratepayer is protected, that's our interest.

Yes. We've stayed on message consistently over and over and over. And I would suggest to the member that that hasn't changed.

And a facilities review should be an ongoing project. As leases come due, you should look at the leases, because landlords might want to keep you, lower the rent, make it more lucrative.

Don't think I'm telling any stories out of school here, but in the facility that I rent as an MLA in Oak Bank, after every election, we ask our tenants—no, we ask our landlord, as the tenant, if we can have some improvements. And they usually oblige and they give us some improvements, and we want to make sure that the space is very friendly and—because it is a government office, so as things change, the corporation changes with it.

So we have stayed consistent. The only thing that's—the only change you can count on is the position of the member opposite.

And I am so pleased—I don't think the members of this committee understand how pleased I am that the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) now is on side with the Public Utilities Board. Like, we have made such great strides at committee. And, you know, maybe we should be here for another two days, and I'll get him on side with understanding that facility reviews are a good thing. And, you know, we'll slowly get him—slowly we're going to wear down his resistance to doing things the right way. And before you know it, by the time session is over, he's going to be the biggest advocate for turning his back on the dark, bitter, bad days of the NDP in the last 17 years. And he's going to go around his constituency, talking about how we can't have political interference in the Crowns and how we have to have a facility review and we've got to run the corporation like corporations should be run. You know, he's going to run around and just—he's going to be so free and unburdened from all the misconceptions and the wrongness. And, you know, part of that healing process is, if he would just apologize to Manitobans for his part in it.

I'd also like to go back to a question that was asked previously, and that is the Manitoba Centennial corporation and Winnipeg's culture district. They did a facilities review. The last one was done in October of 2011. So it's been a few years. It was done for the corporation.

If the member would like, I could probably get him a copy of it. If he would like, I could get

him a copy. It's public information. There's nothing confidential or private. And if there is, I have a feeling we're such an open government we'd be prepared to table a document that was done under his watch and might have been considered secret by his government. And we believe in an open and—

An Honourable Member: Send it to him blacked out.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, what we'll do is we'll just, so that he feels more comfortable with it, we'll just go and randomly redact words out of there, so then he feels like it's, you know, something that his government would have done.

But, anyway, a report—a facilities review was done October 2011 by the Centennial corporation.

Mr. Marcelino: So what has changed? Why is the minister now expressing a belief—almost a belief—that the members of the board of—or the former members of the board of the Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries made a mistake in buying the downtown location for the head offices of the corporation? Why is he insisting on a facilities review or facilities assessment review on something that has been decided by a board that has done its due diligence? Is this just a cover for privatization?

Mr. Schuler: When I listen to the member opposite, that's the same kind of logic, you buy a new car and you say, well, I take it they put new oil in the vehicle. Why, why would we ever do an oil change? Why? Well, probably because it needs an oil change. And why would we do a facilities review? Probably because you need to do facility reviews because things change. And it—that's the way things are done. In business, you always do a business review or a facilities review or a inventory review—it's called—you take stock or you take inventory. It's the way it's done.

And I'd like to point out to the member, I'm sure the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) could tell

us how these things are done. It's an important process, and I'd like to point out to the member that we are encouraging each of the Crown corporations, not limited to but including a facilities review.

We would like them to do a lot of things that were done differently. The way they—the Crowns do their business and every aspect, it's the board's responsibility to review, to question, to probe, to maybe have some doubts about, to challenge, to agree with. That's all part of being a board. And they should—should—be doing due diligence. That's how corporations are run.

And we've—we see that even under the NDP watch, there actually was one facilities review done. And I'm surprised the member didn't know that. It was actually under his government. And I'd like to, you know, tell him that there was one done for the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation; October 2011, there was one done.

But it's not just the facilities review. It is more than that. It is running a business and a corporation in the best interests of those you serve. And I—when I had the chance to speak to Sandy Riley, I said to him there were two individuals on Pipeline Road in my constituency—families, older couples—who called me and said, large part, because of the NDP, they were being taxed out of their homes. They'd been in their homes for over 60 years and, because of all the taxes, were now forced to put their homes up for sale. And these were very difficult phone calls because the individuals—in one case, the gentleman, he started to cry, and he said, why are the politicians doing—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 20, 2016

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