

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
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NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
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RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
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SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 225—The Public Health Amendment Act (Regulating Use of Tanning Equipment)

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady), that Bill 225, The Public Health Amendment Act (Regulating Use of Tanning Equipment); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé publique (réglementation de l'utilisation des appareils de bronzage), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Brick: Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes that no tanning operators will be permitted to allow minors to tan without parental consent. A consent form that includes appropriate health risks will be developed and improved by the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, and operators must post warning signs so that adults will be aware of the risks of using tanning equipment. Thank you.

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

PETITIONS

Ophthalmology Services—Swan River

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Swan Valley region has a high population of seniors and a very high incidence of diabetes. Every year, hundreds of patients from the Swan Valley region must travel to distant communities for cataract surgery and additional pre-operative and post-operative appointments.

These patients, many of whom are sent as far away as Saskatchewan, need to travel with an escort who must take time off work to drive the patient to his or her appointment without any compensation. Patients who cannot endure this expense and hardship are unable to have the necessary treatment.

The community has located an ophthalmologist who would like to practise in Swan River. The local Lions Club has provided funds for the necessary equipment, and the Swan River Valley hospital has space to accommodate this service.

The Minister of Health has told the Town of Swan River that it has insufficient infrastructure and patient volumes to support a cataract surgery program; however, residents of the region strongly disagree.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health to consider rethinking her refusal to allow an ophthalmologist to practise in Swan River and to consider working with the community to provide this service without further delay.

This is signed by D. Sauder, M. Wenstob, J. Boychuk and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

Waste-Water Ejector Systems

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans are deeply committed to protecting the environment, and they want to be assured that the provincial environmental policies are based on sound science.

In early 2009 the provincial government announced that it was reviewing the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation under The Environment Act.

Affected Manitobans, including property owners and municipal governments, provided considerable feedback to the provincial government on the impact of the proposed changes, only to have their input ignored.

The updated regulation includes a prohibition on the installation of new waste-water ejectors and the

elimination of existing waste-water ejectors at the time of any property transfer.

Questions have been raised about the lack of scientific basis and these changes—to these—for these changes, as a Manitoba Conservation official stated on October 8th, 2009 edition of the *Manitoba Co-operator*, "Have we done a specific study? No."

These regulatory changes will have a significant financial impact on all affected Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider immediately placing the recent changes on the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation under The Environment Act on hold until such time that a review can take place to ensure that they are based on sound science.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider implementing the prohibition of waste-water ejector systems on a case-by-case basis as determined by the environmental need in ecologically sensitive areas.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider offering financial incentives to help affected Manitoba property owners adapt to these regulatory changes.

And this petition is signed, Mr. Speaker, by H. Snitynsky, W. Brown, D. Douglas and many, many other Manitobans.

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Community-based medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

The closure of the Westbrook Medical Clinic has left both Weston and Brooklands without a community-based medical clinic.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider how important it is to have a medical clinic located in the Weston-Brooklands area.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by J. Caron, S. Marcus and M. Daly and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

For several decades, the Mount Agassiz ski area, home to the highest vertical between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, was a popular skiing and snowboarding destination for Manitobans and visitors alike.

The operations of Mount Agassiz ski area were very important to the local economy, not only creating jobs, but also generating sales of goods and service at area businesses.

In addition, a thriving rural economy generates tax revenues that help pay for core provincial government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

Although the ski facility closed in 2000, there remains strong interest in seeing it reopened, and Parks Canada has committed to conducting a feasibility study with respect to the Agassiz site and future opportunities in the area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government to consider outlining to Parks Canada the importance that a viable recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area would play in local and provincial economies.

And to request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider working with all stakeholders, including Parks Canada, to help develop a plan for a viable, multiseason recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area.

This petition is signed by D. Rink, M. Radford-Ferguson, H. Sigurdson and many other fine Manitobans.

PTH 15—Twinning

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation stated that preliminary analysis of the current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and therefore does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by N. Campbell, M. Lafortune, C. Bohn and many, many other Manitobans.

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare and progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment and must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to

patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by A. Klann, G. Klann, B. Cuttore and many, many others.

*(13:40)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, we have Lieutenant Commander Paul Stiff from HMCS Chippawa; and we have retired Colonel Gary Solar, Special Advisor for the Envoy; and we have Scott Allingham, who is a Petty Officer First Class, who are the guest of the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski)

And also in the public gallery, we have from Rosenort School, we have 20 grade 11 and 12 students under the direction of Mr. Arlin Scharfenberg. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

And also in the public gallery, we have from École Van Walleghem School, we have 52 grade 4 students under the direction of Ms. Alison Palmer. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: When you're finished, we'll have oral questions. Are youse completed?

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economy

Government Fiscal Strategy

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, throughout Canada today provincial leaders, premiers, are pursuing new strategies to attract investment and create jobs within their own provinces. They're taking bold new steps, such as the New West Partnership, to bring investment from places like Asia, India and other places around the world to ensure the economic progress and job security of their own citizens.

By contrast, Mr. Speaker, here in Manitoba, the NDP government has introduced Bill 31, which

introduces a series of new tax increases, and instead of protecting and creating jobs for Manitobans, it protects the salaries of NDP ministers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier why it is that he's more preoccupied with raising taxes, increasing debt and protecting the salaries of NDP Cabinet ministers than he is for laying out a plan for the future of Manitoba and job creation here in our province.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We do have a very clear plan in front of Manitobans, which is part of this budget, and priority No. 1 in this plan, Mr. Speaker, is to protect essential services, which is why 90 percent of all the additional spending in this budget goes to health care, education, family services, justice and infrastructure. That's very clear, it's very focussed, and it will help move Manitoba forward on all those fronts.

The second part of the plan was to continue with all the other governments in Canada, federal and provincial, with the stimulus program, which will generate an additional 29,000 person-years of employment this year and build assets like new schools, new hospitals, new roads, clean water, proper sewage. All of those will become permanent assets in Manitoba as we stimulate the economy and generate employment.

Thirdly, we have a rebalancing program in this budget that will bring us back into balance within the next four years. It will also pay down debt \$600 million and it will keep Manitoba one of the most affordable places in the country to live—at least in the top three, but according to Saskatchewan, No. 1.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the problem with all of that is that the biggest increase in spending in this year's budget is servicing the debt, which has grown to record levels under this government. A 10 percent increase in debt servicing costs more than double the increase that went to health care. And so when they are cutting programs for addictions, when they are cutting adult education in Portage la Prairie, when they're cutting programs for children with hearing disabilities, when they're cancelling high schools and other projects in the province, it doesn't convince Manitobans that the province is on the right track.

Instead, debt is growing. The cost of servicing that debt is increasing, and what we see in Bill 31 is nothing but a series of short-term measures to protect

ministers' salaries, raise taxes across the board in Manitoba and further discourage people from making investments.

Where is the plan for private investment in Manitoba? He's talked a lot about government spending. Where is the plan to bring investment from Asia, from India and from other places to create an economic foundation that will allow us to ensure prosperity and strong social programs into the future?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when the members were in office, they spent 13 and a half cents on the dollar to service the debt. We're spending 6 cents on the dollar—6 cents on the dollar—as the result of 10 years of prudent fiscal management which paid down debt, which allowed us to address the pension liability ignored by this Legislature for over 40 years. We now have, every year, fully funded employers' contributions to teachers' and public servants' pension plans, which avoids an enormous liability going forward. We have financed infrastructure investments which have grown the economy in Manitoba.

All of these things we've done while, at the same time, this year Manitoba will be the first province in Canada to have no taxes on small business up to \$400,000. We will be the first province with a tax-free zone for small business.

Secondly, we will eliminate the capital tax, the first time in history that's been done in Manitoba. No capital tax, so businesses can invest in new technology and new equipment.

And those are just some of the things we'll do, Mr. Speaker. I hope to be back very shortly to tell you the rest of the story.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're being cut out of trade agreements that are being entered into to the west of us. They've been cut out of trade agreements to the east of us. There are ongoing challenges that are matters in the federal domain to the south, in terms of access to the American market, and we simply don't have a market in Manitoba large enough to support the sort of growth that's required to sustain the level of spending that this government is intent on pursuing.

And so, Mr. Speaker, he can talk about pensions, but we saw from the story last week that many pensions in Manitoba are in serious trouble. He was the minister who oversaw the demise of Crocus, which damaged pension income security for

Manitoba seniors, and now we see a similar Crocus approach being taken to the entire economy of the province of Manitoba in the way he's mismanaging our finances. He's moved Crown corporation debt off the books so that doesn't need to be counted even as he moves revenue in.

Mr. Speaker, we don't need accounting tricks. We need an economic strategy. When are we going to see one?

Mr. Selinger: This is the only government that has ever complied with generally accepted accounting principles. The members opposite kept the pension liability off the books. The members opposite used backdoor mechanisms and Hydro to finance their obligations for northern communities. This government has put everything on the books, and that has been acknowledged by the Auditor General of Manitoba.

The member asks what we're doing to expand the economy. Manitoba has one of the best new media tax credits in the country. Manitoba has the best film tax credit in the country. Manitoba, as I said earlier, has eliminated the capital tax. It's eliminated the education support levy, which is \$110 million-plus of benefits to Manitobans.

And just this weekend, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba signed a memorandum of understanding with the state of Queensland in Australia, which will see our biotech sector collaborating together, our scientists collaborating together to develop new products. We reinforced our relationship with Minnesota and Wisconsin. We are doing things every single day to expand the footprint of this economy—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Bill 31 Government Intent

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, here we have it. Gary Doer has left the building, and along with him he took the moderate side of the NDP party with him.

Now the old tax-and-spend NDP are back, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government under the current Premier takes us back not to—wait for it—not to the 1990s but to the 1980s, where we are reminded of the tax-and-spend days of Howard Pawley and his government.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government introduced a so-called five-year plan that does nothing to move our province forward. The only thing it will do is

increase the debt, run further deficits and protect the salaries of the 19 members of Cabinet in opposite.

Mr. Speaker, will they just admit, now that Gary Doer is gone, the old days of the NDP are alive and well in Manitoba?

* (13:50)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the member opposite didn't want us to look back at the '90s. Today, she's looking back at the '80s.

You know, Mr. Speaker—you—Manitobans have to look back at the '90s and what the Conservatives did. And if they look back at the '90s, you—we all know that under their plan, we would have this balanced in one year and that would mean cuts to everything. It would mean nurses would be fired. It would mean teachers would be laid off. There would not be nurses at the bedside. There wouldn't be police officers on the street, because the members opposite have said that they would balance in one year.

Mr. Speaker, we have taken a more reasonable approach and we have put in place a five-year plan.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the only person in this Manitoba Legislature are—that has taken us back to the 1980s is this Minister of Finance with the introduction of Bill 31. Shame on her.

Gone is the moderate wing, Mr. Speaker, of the NDP party. What we have now is the old Howard Pawley government attempting to dress themselves in sheep's clothing, but it's not working. Manitobans know that the old NDP is back, with the current Premier (Mr. Selinger) at the helm.

Why are they insisting on taking our province back to the 1980s? Why are they forcing future generations of Manitobans to clean up their mess, just like Howard Pawley did?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that would be their plan. Our plan is to move Manitoba forward. We have listened to Manitobans and we are reflecting in this budget what Manitobans told us. Manitobans told us the most important thing they could have is a job. Manitobans told us that we should be investing in the stimulus package to keep our economy going. Manitobans told us that we should have a plan on how we would ride out this recession and come into balance in a few years.

Mr. Speaker, that's what we've done. We are moving Manitoba forward. We are making investments. And the members opposite have moved—voted against every one of those initiatives.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the only plan this government has is to increase our debt, run further deficits and protect their own Cabinet ministers' salaries.

Mr. Speaker, why won't they come clean with Manitobans and tell them the truth, that the real reason that they are gutting the balanced budget legislation in our province is because they never believed in it in the first place. And now that Gary Doer is gone, and gone—they've gone back to the old style of NDP politics.

Will they just admit it and come clean with Manitobans?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, we have listened to Manitobans and we've recognized that Manitobans think it's important that we protect our front-line services, that we keep nurses in hospitals, teachers in schools, police officers on the streets, providing Manitobans with services and protecting those services. Manitobans also want us to invest in stimulus, and we are doing that. We are moving Manitoba forward, and we have a plan whereby we will ride out this recession that the members opposite don't even think exists or won't acknowledge that it exists, and we will come back into balance, and Manitobans will have the education and the training and the skills they need to move us forward into that new economy as we, as this government, move Manitoba forward.

Provincial Debt Increase

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about protecting front-line services and, yet, they're cutting schools, they're cutting programs for addictions, they're cutting adult education in Portage la Prairie, they're freezing salaries of public-sector workers, and they have failed to enter into an agreement that was signed on Friday that enhances the mobility of teachers and nurses and other public-sector professionals to the west of us, making those provinces a more attractive place for them to go and work.

Mr. Speaker, their policies are threatening front-line services as debt increases. I want to ask the Premier: Why is he putting at risk the future of

front-line services by allowing Manitoba's debt to grow at an unsustainable rate?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about labour mobility. It was this government that led a Canada-wide initiative to increase labour mobility all across the country. The members opposite said it would never get done. They were wrong again.

The members opposite thought it was fine to have 13 and a half cents on the dollar in their budget to pay for the debt, but they have a problem when our debt payments are 6 cents on the dollar, more than 50 percent better than theirs, Mr. Speaker. On every single count, on every single metric, our performance is better than their performance during the recessionary period.

And our plan to move Manitoba forward involves protecting front-line services, investing in key assets that will build the future of this province, including schools, including universities, including infrastructure like roads, water and sewer, and public schools as well, and creating better opportunities for training within this province, which is why we've given 2.95 percent to public schools and over 4.3 percent to post-secondary institutions.

And every one of those resources will be voted against by members opposite, which shows their true colours.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we're voting against is the largest debt increase in Manitoba's history. That's what we're voting against.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the debt that he's referring to from the late 1980s was debt that was run up under his ideological cousin's government. The debt was built up, interest rates went up, and they're failing today to learn the lessons of history, that when debt gets too high and rates start to rise, as they appear to be, this poses a threat to front-line services.

So they're—all they're interested in today, Mr. Speaker, is what is in their short-term interests, protecting salaries, increasing spending at an unsustainable rate, no concern about the future and where this is going to leave the next generation of Manitobans.

I want to ask the Premier today: Will he admit that he's failed the next generation of Manitobans and will he withdraw this terrible budget?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, Moody's, in December 24th, indicated that in Manitoba they—we have a strong track record of fiscal prudence. This fiscal prudence, combined with a strong provincial economic performance relative to the rest of the country, ensures strong debt-servicing ability, supporting the province's high investment grade rating.

Mr. Speaker, Conservative governments at the federal level and at the provincial level are following similar plans to what we're following in Manitoba. They're taking a progressive approach to rebalancing, coming out of the recession, while investing in key assets, both hard assets and people assets, which is exactly what we're doing in Manitoba.

Only the members opposite want to return to the 1930s and to the 1990s, where their solution to every problem was to slash, cut and burn, and then blame those people when they were unhappy.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable he would say that when we consider the number of public-sector employees who are coming to support our party and sharing advice on how we move forward with an innovative and progressive public sector. The reality is that what we have with this NDP government is a command-and-control, bureaucratic, wasteful spending NDP government just like the NDP governments of old.

And I want to ask the Premier why it is that he is increasing the debt over such an extended period of time to unsustainable levels when the federal government is bringing their stimulus program to a close within the next 10 months, Mr. Speaker. This government plans to go another four years, even as the GDP is at 2.5 percent or 3 percent.

The recession ended last year. The feds are bringing their stimulus program to a close and returning to a policy of fiscal responsibility. Why are they carrying on with a policy of fiscal recklessness?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I think the member completely missed the federal budget. Their plan is to return to balance over six years. Our plan is to return to balance over five years. Their debt-to-GDP ratio at the federal level is higher than ours.

And yes, we have partnered on stimulus programs. That has been one of the great success stories in Canada. Governments of all political stripes, provincial and federal, have joined together for a stimulus program.

Only the members opposite have been opposed to that, and they have been consistently opposed to that. They wanted to return to the draconian days of the '90s, the Bennett buggy days of the 1930s when they solved all problems by reducing and laying people off, by cutting services and then blaming those people when they complained about it. That's their approach. It's draconian. It's right-wing. And it doesn't work; that's the most important thing. It didn't work in the '90s and it didn't work in the '30s. Everybody across the country, regardless of political stripe, knows that except the members opposite.

*(14:00)

Cochlear Implant Program Funding

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): In Estimates the Minister of Health confirmed that, despite a 1999 election promise by Gary Doer to cut senior bureaucrats in the Department of Health, the number of assistant deputy ministers under this government has actually increased from three to six. They have enough money to double the size of the senior bureaucracy, but they won't fund a cochlear implant program in Manitoba so that patients who are deaf would be able to hear.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: Why has she got the money to double the bureaucracy in her department, but she has no money for the cochlear implant program here?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can confirm for the House that in 1998-99, in Manitoba Health, there were 1,416 staff. Today it's sitting at 1,191, which is 224 fewer positions. So let's just put those facts on the record at the beginning of this discussion.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Oswald: I seem to have hit a nerve regarding the member's arithmetic.

I would say further, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of programs, excellent programs like, for example, the cochlear implant program that the member raises, that would be significantly important to a number of Manitobans. That particular program is under active review.

We know that during the recessionary times in the past, the members opposite froze their spending. We're looking forward at making strategic

investments, and the cochlear implant program is under review.

Mrs. Driedger: The Minister of Health has doubled the ADMs in her department from three to six. She also confirmed in Estimates that she has six political staff in her office. Past ministers have had far less than that. So she really has politicized her office, Mr. Speaker, yet she can't find money for deaf people. All provinces except Saskatchewan have cochlear implant programs. So Manitobans are forced to fly to other provinces for this implant.

So, can the Minister of Health tell us why she can find money to hire six political staff in her office, but she can't find money to help deaf people?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, and again to make it very clear that Manitoba does not yet have its own cochlear implant program, but Manitoba Health funds individuals to go and get the surgeries. So to suggest that we're not assisting people is just factually inaccurate.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we had a lengthy discussion about a variety of viewpoints on how to serve the public, how to respond to calls to our office, how to respond to letters, to e-mails, how to respond to requests from political staffers, from members opposite. It has been my choice to be more responsive to the public and to have more staff doing intake and on the front line. That was not their choice. That was painfully obvious. Certainly, we have worked to bring down the number of people in the Department of Health, transition services to the front line, and we're going to continue to work to be responsive for Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: This Minister of Health has absolutely no credibility after what she did after Brian Sinclair died.

Mr. Speaker, specialists have been trying to get a surgical cochlear implant program here for years. Dr. Brian Blakely, an otolaryngologist, tells us that it is very hard for deaf adults and children to fly to other provinces, that tests are repeated, care is fragmented and follow-up is poor. The wait list for implantation is now two and a half years. There are 29 patients waiting for implantation and 50 people waiting to be seen. These numbers would drop significantly if we had a surgical implant program in Manitoba.

So why does she have enough money to double the number of ADMs in her office, to hire six

political staff, but there's no money for deaf patients here?

Ms. Oswald: It is for the reasons that the member cited, that that program is under active review.

Let's be very clear, Mr. Speaker, that during difficult economic times, it is about making choices. We know that when the members opposite faced difficult economic times, they made three very distinctly clear choices: they fired a thousand nurses; they cut the spaces in medical school; and they froze health capital.

Mr. Speaker, we saw a record-breaking increase in nurses in Manitoba last year, according to the colleges, at 498. We've increased the spaces to medical school to 110 from when they slashed them down to 70, and we're moving forward on health capital projects. It is about choices. It is about investments. We believe health care to be our No. 1 priority.

The member from Carman and his leader dismiss health care out of hand and say they're going to focus on other things. They think Manitobans will forget those dark days of the '90s, they won't.

On-Line Gaming Government Support

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know that the NDP government has a spending addiction. Now to finance their spending problem, the NDP are starting an on-line gambling Web site.

Can the Minister responsible for Lotteries tell the House why his government is so desperate for revenue that they need to start taking more money out of Manitoba's pockets through on-line gambling to feed their own addiction to spending?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is misinformed. We've stated publicly it's under consideration, that no decision has been made. There are more than 2,000 on-line gaming sites across the world. Other jurisdictions, Atlantic Canada, British Columbia, already have on-line gaming. Québec is moving in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, we're always looking for the appropriate balance in terms of gaming, and I do want to note, by the way, that the last year the Tories were in office, they had 3.7 percent of their revenues coming from gaming. It's currently 3 percent, so they

should not lecture anyone in terms of the balance. We're looking for the balance and we'll find it—we'll find it in terms of on-line gaming.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government wouldn't need to launch an on-line gambling Web site if they could manage their own spending addiction. But they need more money for west-side bipole, more money for enhanced ID cards, more money for football stadiums, the list goes on and on. I'd like to remind the minister of his own comments on gambling. The member for Thompson said, and I quote: In this House, once again, we are seeing revenue come before the social problems that can occur from gambling. I do not believe you promote alcohol and I do not believe you promote gambling. I believe there are enough people out there who are going to gamble without your making it a subject at these marketing events. End of quote.

So I'd like to ask the minister: When did he change his mind? Was it because he realized he and his government are fast running out of finances and they need to—a new revenue stream, and fast?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly quote back what the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) said when she was minister and brought in the two casinos, but some of us don't live in the 1990s. Well, we know, on this side, members opposite live in the 1890s anyway.

So the member opposite is clearly misinformed. We've said we're looking at all of the specific aspects. There are 2,000 sites currently. We're—we've looked for the balance, Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made, we certainly welcome feedback from Manitobans, and we'll be looking at a decision later on this year. As I said, there are 2,000 sites that are out there already which are in terms of on-line gaming. The real question here is whether we are part of a Canadian regulated approach. Some on the addiction side, by the way, have already indicated that they support that. We will listen to all views in the committee. We have not made a decision on this yet.

Riverdale Health Centre Project Status

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): And the Minister of Health said earlier that it's all about making choices. Well, Mr. Speaker, the residents of the town of Rivers have grown tired of this government's broken promises. Since I was first elected, the Rivers Health Action Committee has

been waiting for the Health Minister of the day to show some leadership and to provide supports to the phase 2 renovations to the Riverdale Health Centre hospital can begin and a medical clinic can be opened in the community. Seven years later, absolutely no commitment from this minister.

Was this a project that was cut from this government's budget this year? After seven years of waiting, can the minister indicate when the community of Rivers can expect these renovations to begin? When will she take the initiative to ensure that Rivers' residents can have access to health care services that they deserve, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, it occurs to me that in the first few questions today we were being chided for spending money but, you know, now there's a request to invest.

* (14:10)

I can tell the member that we have met with the people from Rivers. We are working with the regional health authority. We know that we've had very good success in working with the community of Rivers and the facility on the rehab program. It's been very successful, and there's a view to see what more that we can do in that area.

We do know that, regarding capital spending, we have to prioritize, and we're working on that. That's what I've told the people from Rivers, and we're going to continue to work with them.

Mrs. Rowat: And again she wants to talk about priorities—cut three ADMs, three cut—cut three political staff, and we have a health centre.

Mr. Speaker, the community has raised over \$500,000 to put towards this project, more than the 10 percent required from most capital projects. People who have committed dollars have passed away waiting for this project to happen.

Is this how the minister treats hardworking community members who have taken the initiative, raised the money and are asking for some leadership from this NDP government, or again, is this a project that this government has cut?

Ms. Oswald: No, it is not.

Mr. Speaker: I recognized the honourable Minister for Health. She gave a quick answer. Now I have to recognize you to make sure that the *Hansard* records everything.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, during a meeting with the minister on January 11th, the community leaders were told to wait for the budget to see where this capital project may fit in.

I'd like to ask the minister: Was she talking about the budget for her government that was just tabled, next year's budget, the budget after that, or again, is this one of the projects the NDP government has cut? And again, I recommend her cut three ADMs, cut three political staff, and the community can have their clinic, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Oswald: And again I'll say to the members opposite that as we work our way through a difficult economic time we're not going to make the choices that they made. We're not going to issue a press release that says we have no choice, we have to freeze health capital. We're not going to do that. We're going to continue to work and move forward with communities.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that while the member for Minnedosa is calling out for a capital investment, the Health critic, the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), stood up in this House not long ago and said, why are you wasting all this money on bricks and mortar? She herself said—*[interjection]* I seem to have struck another nerve. I don't think they want us to be reminded that the member for Charleswood said that we were wasting money spending on bricks and mortar and that we shouldn't be doing that. I wonder if maybe they could caucus and work this out.

On-Line Gaming Government Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of on-line gaming, the government is looking at a piece of the on-line gambling pie, and I venture that the government's current financial state, the potential 30 to 40 million dollars that might come in, that they could grab from Manitobans using the service, might seem appealing.

In this Legislature the Minister responsible for Lotteries once stood up to chastise the then-Conservative government for taking a fast-forward approach driven by revenue, forgetting that there's a direct link between gambling and increased crime.

I ask the minister: Does he have the support of the rest of the government and the Cabinet in his taking a fast-forward approach to on-line gambling?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, I don't know if perhaps the member was not listening earlier, but we have made no decision. Other jurisdictions have moved in this direction, and I mentioned them: the Atlantic provinces, British Columbia, also Québec has made the announcement they're proceeding in that direction.

We will indeed look at all sides, and the evolution in terms of gaming is responsible gaming, Mr. Speaker. We had a period in—of time in Canadian history where gambling was a criminal offence equivalent to a time when drinking was covered by prohibition. We have seen some significant changes over the time. And I want to indicate that one of things we've indicated as a government is we're looking also the advice of the addictions community. And there are some in the addictions community who've already said that they feel it's better to have a regulated site than the 2,000 unregulated sites.

But I want to make it very clear to the member opposite, we have not made a decision in terms of on-line gaming, and we will listen to Manitobans and their input.

Mr. Gerrard: Given that the government is once again looking at selling Manitobans out in order to get some new revenue to help buffer their disastrous financial circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister if he'll give Manitobans a direct say in whether they want on-line gambling in Manitoba, or will he push it through without giving Manitobans a direct say?

I'd like to remind the minister that, in 1996, he was the one calling for local referendums to be held around Manitoba.

Will the minister take his lead foot off the accelerator and allow Manitobans a direct say in the issue of on-line gambling by having a referendum before jumping into a situation which, as he pointed out some time ago, will increase social problems and increase crime?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit concerned that the member doesn't understand what the Internet is all about—the World Wide Web. There are 2,000 sites that operate internationally. Clearly, the member does not understand that there is on-line gaming right now. It is beyond the jurisdiction of Manitoba or, indeed, of Canada. So the real issue

here is whether Manitoba should be part of the regulated Canadian alternative.

So I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious the member himself is not aware of the fact that you cannot have a referendum on a local initiative. This is the World Wide Web. It's the year 2010, and I want to mention again, this is an issue that we're dealing with in terms of the current reality, looking to the balance in terms of social gaming.

**Brian Sinclair Death
WRHA Release of Information**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the Brian Sinclair tragedy actually sent shock waves across Canada, as many wondered how it was possible that someone could literally die in emergency after waiting for 34 hours and not receive any attention.

There's been a great deal of concern from members of the family in terms of to what degree the WRHA has been stonewalling and not providing the information that's necessary in order for them to be full participants in any sort of inquest the government is actually calling for, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Minister of Health, who has taken great strides at trying to confuse and cover up the incident, Mr. Speaker, and has been dragged into the need to have the inquest in the first place—I'm going to ask the Minister of Health if she would, in fact, do the honourable thing here by instructing the WHRA to, in fact, release the information that it has that's pertaining to the incident in question, and ensure that all the stakeholders are provided that information immediately, including the family members of the Sinclair family.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, and I can inform the member that immediately following the tragedy—and it was a tragedy, regardless of what kinds of political games have gone on since then. We need to remember that this was a tragedy, no matter how many times people say things that aren't true. It doesn't matter. We need to focus on making sure that we never have such an incident ever happen again.

But I can inform the member that, days after the tragedy, and when reviews were under way, the WRHA committed to release everything to the inquest, and that's exactly what they're going to do.

**AgriRecovery Program
Funding**

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the past two years have been very trying times for farmers in the Interlake. From a political perspective, this crisis was of interest to members opposite in the past weeks, but they seem to have fallen strangely silent this week—in fact, no questions on agriculture.

Rural members have got up to talk about gambling and firing of health-care workers, but getting a crop in the ground seems to have—*[interjection]* There you go. Pathetic. Shame on you. Shame on all of you.

On behalf of the farmers who want to get a crop in the ground, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member—or the Minister of Agriculture to explain the details of the AgriRecovery program that was announced last week.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Finally, a question from somebody interested in rural Manitoba.

* (14:20)

Mr. Speaker, I was really pleased—I was really pleased a few weeks ago to join with a number of our caucus members, including the Premier (Mr. Selinger), to meet with farmers in the Arborg area to talk about the fact that they lost a couple of crop years in a row and then approached the federal government to ask if they could co-operate with us in an AgriRecovery announcement, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm really pleased that Minister Gerry Ritz joined with us to announce \$2.5 million in support for northern Interlake assistance—that's \$15 unseeded acres—for farmers who lost two crop years in a row.

This is in addition, Mr. Speaker, to provincial support to the tune of \$5 million through the Forage Assistance Program; \$10 million through the Forage Restoration Assistance Program; \$12 million through the Livestock Feed Assistance Program; Excess Moisture, \$21 million; Disaster Financial Assistance, \$3 million; and together with the federal government, AgriStability advance payments. Finally—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

AgriRecovery Program Compensation Eligibility

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Well, here's another question from someone that's interested in rural Manitoba.

On Friday, that very funding announcement you announced in the Interlake, I just want to ask: Why was the West Lake region of the province ignored in the funding announcement?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it's quite the day when a Tory has to stand up and blow his own horn when nobody else will.

Mr. Speaker, we looked with the—along with the federal government, on the advice of people, farmers in the Interlake area and other parts of the province, we looked very, very specifically at the numbers, the numbers of farmers who lost two successive crop years in a row. We determined that the R.M.s in the northern part of the Interlake had suffered an extraordinary loss two years in a row. We believed, along with our federal partners in this program, that those numbers indicated that that's where we need to target our money, where it could do the most good, so that those farmers wouldn't miss out on yet a third year of seeding.

We want to make sure that we went to where the money would make the greatest difference, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jan and Tracy Bassa

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): It gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize the achievements of two young farmers, Jan and Tracy Bassa.

Jan and Tracy Bassa, along with Jan's brother, came to La Broquerie from Holland nearly 20 years ago. Together they bought a 480-acre farm with 70 cows. This year, all of their hard work and innovation was recognized. Jan and Tracy were named this year's Outstanding Young Farmers.

Since arriving and settling in La Broquerie, the Bassas have expanded their operation to include a 100,000-square-foot addition, a 50-cow rotary milking parlour—the first of its kind in North America—barn space for 600 milk cows, sick and dry cow pens, a 50-stall calf barn and a 3.8-million gallon slurry storage unit. Additionally, the farm

employs six full-time and four part-time employees who, according to the Bassas, are treated like family.

The Outstanding Young Farmers program aims to discover, celebrate and recognize progress and excellence in Canadian agriculture. Jan and Tracy now move to the national competition as Manitoba's representatives.

Nominees are judged on the progress made over the course of their farming career in all aspects of farming from soil, water and energy conservation to crop and livestock production to financial and management practices and community contributions.

In addition to farming, Mr. Speaker, the couple is involved in community sports and Tracy is a member of a parent advisory council at their children's school and works part-time at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach. Tracy and Jan have four young children, ages two to 11.

I invite all members of this House to join me in congratulating Jan and Tracy for their contributions to our community and wish them all the best in representing Manitoba at the national competition in the fall. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS Awareness Month

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, multiple sclerosis affects the lives of thousands of Manitobans every day. Whether it is a beloved friend or family member or even oneself who is diagnosed with MS, the effects of this complex disease is felt throughout many households in our province.

Yet much about this condition remains uncertain. MS is a chronic, often disabling disease affecting an estimated 2,700 Manitobans. It is the most common neurological disease among young adults in Canada. Its symptoms vary widely and they lead to problems with numbness, co-ordination, vision and speech, as well as extreme fatigue and even paralysis. It remains—its causes remain unknown, and at this time there is no known cure for MS.

To increase public understanding of this debilitating condition, Manitoba will be observing MS Awareness Month during the month of May. This is a time when we can do our small part to help find a cure for this condition, whether it is learning more about this illness, donating to MS research or volunteering in any of the activities put on by the MS Society of Canada.

The fight against MS is no losing battle. While many Manitobans continue to live with the disease, thousands of others are putting their efforts towards finding a cure or easing the lives of those diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

The MS Society of Canada, founded in 1948, is the only voluntary organization in Canada that supports both MS research and services for people with MS and for their families. It has provided more than \$80 million for MS research during the past 50 years, as well as helped deliver a wide range of programs, services and social action for people with MS.

The dedicated and committed staff, supporters and volunteers at the MS Society of Canada, Manitoba Division, are the ones who make this all possible. Support for their efforts is necessary if we would like to one day find a cure for MS.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ione Thorkelsson

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Each year the Canada Council and the Governor General of Canada collaborate to honour excellence in visual and media arts. The Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts are Canada's leading distinctions of excellence in these artistic disciplines. This year Roseisle-based glass sculptor, Ione Thorkelsson, received a prestigious Saidye Bronfman Award for fine crafts. Ms. Thorkelsson was nominated by Dr. Stephen Borys, director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Ione Thorkelsson hails from Roseisle, Manitoba, just west of Carman. She is a pioneer in glass artistry in Manitoba, operating her own studio on the edge of a prairie escarpment since 1973. Ione works primarily off-hand blowing techniques, and has created her own signature cast glass technique, which she produced since 1983.

Ms. Thorkelsson studied architecture at the University of Manitoba and continued on to study glass at Sheridan College School of Design in Mississauga, Ontario.

Ione Thorkelsson's works of art are repeatedly shown at many Canadian venues, as well as the United States, Europe and Hong Kong. Her visual creations are derived from current notions of the past and current speculation of the future. Everyday discoveries outside her door, such as wings, skulls,

spines and roots, are recast into objects of inspiration.

Ione was inducted into the Royal Academy of Arts in 2007 and designed the Blizzard Awards for the Manitoba Motion Picture Industry Association.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Ms. Thorkelsson on her creative achievements and receiving the Saidye Bronfman award. I wish her success as she continues to create visual art that is beautiful and innovative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canadian Navy 100th Anniversary

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have been an integral part of Canadian Navy operations for most of the last century, yet few are aware of this illustrious history. Today, the 4th of May, 2010, Canada celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Navy. I am proud to rise and congratulate our devoted men—Navy men and women for their years of service.

When the Canadian Navy was officially inaugurated in 1910, many young volunteers from communities like Winnipeg, Carman, Portage, The Pas and Dauphin set out to join the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve. Manitoba welcomed its own Naval Reserve unit in 1923, and it was later renamed Her Majesty's Canadian Ship Chippawa.

The connection between the flat prairies and the call to the sea may not be immediately obvious, yet Winnipeg's Naval Reserve was Canada's most successful Navy recruitment centre during World War II, drawing almost 300 officers and nearly 8,000 men.

In the following decades, HMCS Chippawa has continued to distinguish herself in times of war and crisis, both at home and abroad. Its troops have provided domestic assistance during floods, and it was always one of the first units to provide support during naval missions defending the interests of Canada.

* (14:30)

The bravery, spirit and dedication of the men and women of HMCS Chippawa continue a proud tradition of Navy service in Canada. "Service" is the motto of HMCS Chippawa, and it accurately reflects the proud history and continued efforts of HMCS Chippawa reservists in Canadian naval operations. The Canadian Navy's motto "Ready Aye Ready,"

remains fitting today as our Navy continues to contribute to global peace, security and the protection of Canadian sovereignty in our home waters and around the globe.

Mr. Speaker, many Manitobans are among the countless Canadians who have served our country in naval operations around the world over the last century. All Manitobans recognize and honour the significant contributions made by all of our veterans. It gives me great pleasure on this day to thank the Canadian Navy troops for their 100 years of dedicated service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bill Clement

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, and it is with great sorrow that I stand in the House today to mark the passing of a constituent of mine, Bill Clement. A dedicated public servant, Mr. Clement was a long-time Winnipeg city councillor, serving the people of Charleswood-Tuxedo since 1983.

Affectionately known as the "Mayor of Charleswood," Mr. Clement was someone who served his constituents with both honour and passion. His long tenure on city council is a testament to his commitment to the issues and the people of Charleswood-Tuxedo.

Mr. Clement was effective as a city councillor for his ability to work so well with his colleagues, crossing ideological boundaries in order to do what is right for his constituents and for the people of Winnipeg.

He occupied key roles in not only the current municipal administration, but also the administrations of Glen Murray and Susan Thompson, where he has sat on the mayor's executive policy committee and as chairman of both the finance and public works committees. He was known for his encyclopedic knowledge of civic affairs and was committed to ensuring government remained responsible, efficient and effective for the people it served.

While an accomplished politician and civic leader, Mr. Clement was also a successful businessman as a partner in his family's business, Aqua Pleasure Pools.

On behalf of my husband Jason, myself and the constituents of Tuxedo, I want to express my deepest sympathy and condolences to his wife Debbie, his

children and grandchildren, and the many friends and supporters who will miss him very much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, before announcing government business for today, I would like to announce that pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick). The title of the resolution is Manitoba Arts and Cultural Organizations.

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to rule 31(8), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one put forward by the honourable member for St. Norbert. The title of the resolution is Manitoba Arts and Cultural Organizations.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Mr. Blaikie: At this time, then, the House will resolve itself into the consideration of Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Orders of the day, government business, we will be going into Estimates, and in the appropriate rooms: in the Chamber will be Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, followed by Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade; room 255 will be Infrastructure and Transportation; and room 254 will be Conservation.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

CONSERVATION

*(14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Conservation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman. I would like to begin with a few words of introduction prior to our review of the departmental Estimates for Manitoba Conservation. In Manitoba, we believe that the twin goals of protecting the environment and growing a sustainable economy can and must be achieved simultaneously, and we will work to find the optimum relationship between growth and sustainability.

I will start with a brief overview of the wide variety of programs and services the department provides to Manitobans, first of all, considering parks. During these challenging economic times, families may be looking for recreation opportunities closer to home. To provide more opportunities for Manitobans to take advantage of the province's great outdoors, we continue to waive the entrance fees to provincial parks. This was a successful initiative we put in place last year, and we decided to continue to offer it for this year.

Campers have again responded enthusiastically by setting a new record on the opening day of reservation bookings. Our successful made-in-Manitoba parks reservation system is again receiving record volumes of contacts. Our system is receiving bookings which are 20 percent higher than last year's record-breaking opening day.

Mr. Chairperson, 2010 is a special year, as it marks the 50th anniversary of the first parks act and celebrates the millions of people who have enjoyed Manitoba parks over the years. In honour of the 50th anniversary of the parks system in Manitoba, the Department of Conservation continues to support Manitobans' enjoyment of their summers by making upwards of \$50 million in improvements for the 210-2011 season.

Capital improvements will soon be on the way in Birds Hill Park, Grand Beach, Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park, Winnipeg Beach, West Hawk, Nutimik Lake, Wellman Lake and Asessippi Provincial Park. And, as you know, we have introduced legislation that would secure the future of the historic and culturally important Upper Fort Garry site. The Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park Act will ensure that the restorative and interpretive work of the Friends of Upper Fort Garry can continue.

In terms of protected areas, our government continues to protect important natural areas in the province. In addition to the three new protected areas announced last year, we have recently announced two new protected areas in the boreal tundra transition area in northern Manitoba. These are the Kastatamagan Wildlife Management Area, which houses important polar bears and caribou habitat, and the Kastatamagan Sipi Wildlife Management Area, home to a globally significant bird area.

These new protected areas will have the Province meet its commitments to increase the number of ecological reserves and designate new wildlife management areas in support of a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Both areas fall within the boreal forest and also contribute to Manitoba's wetland protection and related climate change commitments. It is estimated that these two protected areas alone store approximately 179 million tonnes of carbon in their peat lands and soil. This is the equivalent to 650 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. Together with Water Stewardship, we continue to invest in the protection and restoration of wetlands, including the restoration of Manitoba's largest marshes; Netley and Delta Marsh.

In terms of Manitoba forests, as you know, we previously announced the phasing out of commercial logging in 79 of 80 of Manitoba's provincial parks as an important step towards the conservation of our province's biodiversity. In partnership with industry, we have moved to end long-term contracts for logging companies in provincial parks and have moved logging activity outside of parks.

Building on the 1.1 million trees planted by our Trees for Tomorrow program, since 2008, over 2 million additional seedlings are to be planted this summer as part of the 2010 program. Trees for Tomorrow supports many school projects and initiatives in smaller communities, including several First Nations communities. Trees for Tomorrow projects include completion of SMART Park at the University of Manitoba, the Red River Floodway, Fort Whyte Alive, Graymont Mines and the Brady Road Landfill planting projects.

To protect our valuable forest resource and to increase our firefighting efficiency, Manitoba's fire program will see a major upgrade of its equipment with the arrival this fall of the first of our four new Bombardier 415 turboprop water-bomber aircraft. This major fleet upgrade will enhance our capacity to

ensure the safety of the fire crews and to protect communities that may be affected by a fire hazard.

In terms of strength and enforcement for on-site waste-water systems, the department continues with an enhanced inspection program to identify failing on-site waste-water management systems and take appropriate enforcement and compliance action. This initiative is intended to identify problematic areas and minimize failing on-site waste-water systems as a source of nutrients that negatively affect the water quality of Lake Winnipeg.

After extensive consultations, new on-site waste-water management systems came into effect last October. The amendments restrict the use of a disposal field for new systems and sensitive areas, Crown land cottage developments, provincial parks and portions of the Red River corridor. The amendments were also designed to eliminate existing sewage ejectors at the time of property transfer or subdivision development.

On April 1—in April, rather, I proposed a number of further amendments to the on-site system, aimed at addressing concerns that had been raised. These amendments allow for sewage ejectors to be retained at the time of property transfer, under a specific set of limited circumstances. We remain committed to providing technical support for municipalities on water and waste-water projects.

In terms of Environment Act amendments, important updates were made to The Environment Act last year. Environment officers gained expanded powers of intervention; environmental licensing was improved, and protection measures were strengthened with these new amendments. In order to fulfil these new obligations and added responsibilities, my department has hired new environment officers this year and over the past three years. These officers are front-line positions in priority areas to protect the environment for all Manitobans.

We will be providing for stronger environmental protection, improving the environmental licensing process, and better addressing climate change by ensuring that greenhouse gas emissions from a proposed project would be considered before a licence is issued.

In terms of the World Heritage Site and East Side Planning Initiative, last year we passed The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act so that First Nations on the east

side of Lake Winnipeg could play a major role in ensuring better protection, management and development in their traditional areas. It is the first legislation of its kind in Canada, enabling First Nations to develop land-use plans in conjunction with government to develop and provide interim and permanent legal protection of traditional areas on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

By supporting east-side First Nations communities to create and implement their own land use plans for their traditional areas, the legislation also enables the effort to establish a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a designation that would be based on both the cultural and ecological significance of the area. To support the bid to designate part of the Manitoba-Ontario boreal forest as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we have increased Manitoba's annual funding to the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation through grants for development of the nomination document, a video, and efforts to promote the site and contributions to the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Fund.

The corporation will also receive income from investment of Manitoba's \$10-million contribution to the fund and from other contributions starting in 2012. In our bid for a World Heritage Site, we must describe how the site will be managed, including sources of funding. This will enable the corporation to make a stronger case for Manitoba's boreal forest to stand alongside the pyramids of Egypt, the Amazon, and other renowned UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The boreal forest plays a vital role—two minutes; oh, they didn't tell me there was a time limit—the boreal forest plays a vital role in reducing the impact of climate change—pardon?

An Honourable Member: You can always ask for leave.

Mr. Blaikie: —and is also home to a diversity of species and some of the world's largest remaining herds of woodland caribou. Manitoba launched its woodland caribou strategy in 2006 in co-operation with First Nations communities in northern and eastern regions. These animals are an important part of the east side forest and are being recognized in efforts to plan and commemorate the area.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I had other things to say; I'm not going to get it all in, in two minutes, so I'll just end, then, with expressing my appreciation for the staff of the Department of Conservation, and

particularly for the service of the now-retired Deputy Minister Don Cook, who has served the government of Manitoba and the people of Manitoba for 35 years. I had the pleasure of working with him only briefly, but I could tell even from that brief exposure to Mr. Cook that he had been an exceptional public servant.

* (14:50)

And, having said that, with the last Cabinet and departmental reorganization that occurred in 2009, Manitoba Conservation welcomed to our ranks the addition of the Climate Change branch and also Green Manitoba. And so I welcome the staff of these two groups and look forward to working with them. So I've—Mr. Chairman, thank you for letting me briefly introduce only a very few of the programs, in fact, fewer than I had intended, which the Conservation Department undertakes on behalf of Manitoba.

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

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Arthur Virden, have any opening comments?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Yes, I do, Mr. Chairman. Well I just want to open up by welcoming the minister to his new portfolio as well and for congratulating staff, both present and past, for the work that they do on a regular basis in this whole area.

This is one of the most important parts of Manitoba as far as I'm concerned. And I think it's an honour to be asked by my leader to be the critic for this area as well and I look forward to continuing to work on a number of projects together with the minister. I know that—would have to reiterate what he said in his opening statement, that we need to look at growth opportunities and a balance of sustainability in this portfolio. I believe, throughout Manitoba, that's what we can do. We have to be very cognizant and aware of the natural surroundings that we have and make sure that we do everything we can to encourage their continued existence in their natural state wherever possible. And I feel that after having 50 years in the parks system as well, I know we had a—and honoured that day in the House with statements by both the minister and myself in regards to the celebration of the 50 years of the parks in Manitoba.

I appreciate the on-site waste-water management systems review, and we'll have some questions on that as well. And also the caribou program that was brought in in 2006 and, obviously, this minister would have perhaps added to it, if he'd have been there at that time to bring it in and been able to get on to this portfolio earlier, have a better opportunity to deal with it than was—what was being done today.

I know that there are whole hosts of areas here that I could get into and making comments, but I think that with the questions that I have, it will become aware of where those concerns are. There will be others, because I don't know if we can get to them all today or tomorrow, if we have a couple of days of questions there.

And I do want to say, though, that I do appreciate the minister's new-found zealous for listening to groups like AMM, Keystone Ag Producers, in regards to the changes that he's made on on-site waste-water management systems. I do understand that there was a large lobby in that area. He knows that I've asked questions in question period. He knows that people across the province were very concerned about his predecessor's stance on that area. And I want to thank him for making some changes that will be at least amenable to many people who presently have ejectors. And there will still be some concerns that we'll get into, and I just want to close by saying, again, thanks for that consideration and look forward to working with the rest of—with the minister and the rest of the staff in areas of Conservation. And of course we've already done the—which the—Water Stewardship part of my Estimates with Minister Melnick as well. So thank you very much and we'll—I look forward to the questions.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for the department and the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1.(a) referenced in resolution 12.1.

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

Mr. Blaikie: I would like to introduce the Conservation staff that I have with me, beginning first with Fred Meier, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Conservation; Serge Scrafield, the

assistant deputy and assistant deputy minister in Environmental and Stewardship Division; Lynn Zapshala-Kelln, assistant deputy minister in the Corporate and Services Division; Bruce Bremner, assistant deputy minister on the Regional Operations Division side; and Dan McInnis, a—one of the newest members of the staff who's come over from IEM with the reorganization that took place recently.

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

Mr. Maguire: If I could, Mr. Chairperson, I would suggest that we go on a global basis.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed to the question of how the department will follow in a global manner with all the resolutions to be passed once the questioning has been completed? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maguire: I wanted to just start today as well. I wanted to note that there have been cutbacks in some departments, and I know that the minister has inherited this department. He's had it six months, but he's been there long enough to have influence certainly in the budget of his department. And I noticed that it was trimmed by 5 percent.

Others—some others have been trimmed by perhaps a bit more than that overall. To take \$7 million, roughly, out of the department is a concern, I think. And, of course, we're always looking at, as he said earlier, that I think it was a balance of fiscal responsibility and environmental sustainability in those areas. So I look forward to just having some discussions with him about that.

I think that the—you know, there's been a 21 percent reduction in funding for Environmental Stewardship, and I wondered if he can outline to me what are the primary sources of that cut.

Mr. Blaikie: The reductions in terms of environmental stewardship go something like this, I might say to the honourable member. We—there was a reduction of \$250,000 which was as a result of a deferral of a \$250,000 payment to the WNO. It was a grant that was deferred to a subsequent year, which accounted for a \$250,000 reduction.

There was a \$500,000 reduction on the pollution prevention side. This reduction was due to non-recurring funding to support the Flin Flon soils improvement project. The city of Flin Flon will be completing the soil improvement project itself in

2010 with the funding provided to them last year. So, if I understand correctly, this is funding that was, in some sense, coming to an end in any event.

The next—there was a \$70,000 reduction to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the IISD. This reduction applied to the annual work plan of government projects undertaken by the IISD because they do quite a bit of work for us. So this wasn't to their core operating grant. This was just—it had to do with that they work for—the work they do for us beyond the core operating grant. The reduction will be spread proportionately across existing projects so as to limit the implication to each of the projects.

* (15:00)

So, in total, IISD receives \$1,195,900 annually from the provincial government, of which 30 percent has been dedicated towards services provided back to government on items of priority through the development of an annual work plan, and that's where we found that \$70,000 reduction.

Then there was a—this was a larger reduction, \$1,186,000 reduction in the SDIF, the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund. Funding for the IISD grant is provided through the SDIF, for instance. This grant funding is consistent with the intent of the SDIF, which is to provide support to innovative projects, activities, in areas of the economy, the environment, human health and social well-being.

There was a \$115,000 reduction in climate change, reductions in operating due to less travel being required for the regional greenhouse gas initiatives. So we're looking at ways to reduce our travel back and forth to meetings having to do with this particular topic and efficiencies gained through co-locating the offices of Green Manitoba, climate change and Innovation, Energy and Mines staff—so, again, some reorganizing of office space to achieve reductions in that regard.

With respect to Green Manitoba, there was a \$610,000 reduction, and this reduction is attributable to the special operating agency being able to realize other revenue opportunities to offset program delivery costs and thereby reduce the funding required from Conservation.

And then there were general operating reductions of about 58,000 and salary and benefit adjustments that amounted to an \$85,000 reduction, all of which came to the total of \$2,874,000.

Mr. Maguire: I noted with interest that the Administration's cut about three-quarters of a million in that package didn't see much change in staffing. I wonder if the minister can elaborate on just where those changes were made. I think the Estimates book shows a 9 percent reduction in Administration.

Mr. Blaikie: Is the honourable member asking about the whole department or just that particular division?

Mr. Maguire: No, just that particular—the Administration and Finance division, three-quarters of a million, as I understand.

Mr. Blaikie: On the—in the budget summary, under appropriation No. 12, there is an explanation of those cuts. So I'm not sure if the member wants more than that, but what it does say in the explanation is that there's a \$250,000 decrease, which is attributable to a reduction to the departmental legal budget, 2010-11 cost to be managed from within the remaining \$151,000 budget and other program operating resources.

So, you know, we looked at the—at that budget and felt that we could do more with less, so to speak. And then there was—the rest of it is vacancy management having to do with staff turnover and library services, information technology services, workplace safety and health and risk management.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know one of my colleagues has some questions tomorrow that will be getting back into staffing issues more and some questions in that regard. Today, though, I just wanted to say as well, congratulations to everyone in the department for the work you do at your ADM levels and those areas as well, deputy minister, welcome to this portfolio as well.

The one question I have on admin there is in the assistant deputy minister's Corporate Services here, your role in—because we only did this last week and you were, well, there in Water Stewardship as well. You're working for both departments. I'm just wondering if the minister can explain to me where the salaries are. Are they determined half-and-half out of each department or how are they—how is that area financed?

Mr. Blaikie: The ADM position is funded by Conservation, and then the group that works under the ADM, it's a group that works for both departments and the funding for that, for everything underneath the ADM, is split between the two departments.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, and I see there's a vacancy in one assistant deputy minister's position in the Conservation program in the book at least anyway on page 5 in the flowchart, and I just wondered if you can indicate to me if that's being filled, and, if so, by whom?

Mr. Blaikie: That position is vacant as a result of the promotion of the person who formally held that position to the position of deputy minister. So, in the course of completing the reorganization that was triggered not only by the resignation of the deputy minister—not resignation, retirement rather—and the moving over of people from IEM, that position will ultimately be filled.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, okay. I just want to move on and I'm looking at page 29, I believe. Oh, before I do that, there was one other issue and it was congratulating the minister on being in a little more co-operative mood in regards to on-site waste water management systems than his predecessor, and I don't mean that as anything more than a compliment to you.

But I wanted to talk about, you know, a statement that came out of the University of Manitoba today on another area that the previous minister had and that was in regards to moratoriums on hog facilities in Manitoba, in the eastern half of the province. And there's an indication today from one of the scientists at the University of Manitoba here, a senior agribusiness and economics instructor in the Faculty of Agriculture, Charles Grant, was quoted today, I think, in the papers as saying that really the reason that they haven't heard much about the moratorium was because the hog cycle, as the minister's well aware for the publicity on it, has been on a downturn here for about three years.

In regards to that, it looks like it's picking up a little bit again now, and there are regulations that have been brought down on manure management, that sort of thing, through his department, which will put extra cost on some of these facilities to manage. They may need to be able to expand to be able to bear the increased costs of these expanded lagoons and holding tanks to be able—so that they aren't, you know, spreading manure in the wintertime and those kinds of things.

* (15:10)

And I wonder if the minister can just answer for me or just provide me with his estimate of whether he can be as congenial, I guess, with this area of the

hog moratorium as he certainly has been in listening to the on-site waste-water management systems.

An Honourable Member: Well, you know, when I'm persuaded that—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Blaikie: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I've got to get used to that. It's not like I'm trying to ignore you, you know.

I say to the honourable member, well, I'm only, you know, agreeable when I think there's something to agree with. And, you know, I was persuaded that—along with many others in the government, obviously I didn't do it all by myself—that there was a need for an amendment to the regulations with respect to on-site waste-water management.

But I have met with groups that have raised this—similar concerns. You know, I met with the Manitoba Pork Council and others who were—raised concerns about the—and with the cap, you know. And at this time, we are not planning any changes in the regulations that we've announced or the time lines for their coming into effect.

Mr. Maguire: I had a call from the other day—and I'm not going to pursue—some of these I'd like to discuss with the minister longer, but I've got a number a topics I want to cover. If I get time, I'll come back to some of them.

I had a call as well from some folks in western Manitoba that were concerned about cougars in their backyards, that sort of thing, and indicated that there might be an—that perhaps, through Conservation, there might have been a planned effort to return cougars back into the wild. Can the minister tell me if there's been any kind of a plan to do that or if there's been any process done in that area over the last year and a half?

Mr. Blaikie: There hasn't—there's never been an attempt by Manitoba Conservation to reintroduce cougars into the Manitoba environment, but, you know, we're—and—you know, but we get these reports, too. And whenever we get them, people go out and investigate the situation and try to determine whether it was a cougar and, if it was, you know, to monitor the situation and to, you know, do the appropriate sort of investigation into the circumstances.

Mr. Maguire: I don't want to lead the minister to think that I was encouraging him to do that, because I wasn't. But the couple was concerned about the fact

that there's kids waiting at the end of their lanes for school buses and stuff like this. I couldn't imagine it, but I had to ask.

I wanted to touch base in another area, too, and that's in regards to predators and hunting and that sort of thing in regards to wolves and the cattle industry and a number of other areas.

And I wonder if the minister has any plans in allowing some greater culling of the wolf situation in the province of Manitoba. I know the cattle producers have been making a number of calls in regards to that area. They've had some suggestions. Saskatchewan's had a program in place for a while, and I'm not fully aware of what all of the provinces have done. But I know that concern has been raised with me by individuals in regards to having shot wolves within two miles of Beausejour. Some of them they've seen take deer down inside the Perimeter Highway of the city of Winnipeg. And so there's a concern there, I think, in the number of wolves.

Now, I know that there's the other side of that coin as well, those who want to make sure that there is no hunting allowed of them. But I wonder if the minister can just inform me as to what concerns he has heard or if his department is considering anything in regards to, particularly, alleviating the situation in regards to livestock predation in—from wolves.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, the member has raised the question of wolves, but I imagine that he might—I don't want to anticipate, but he might also be concerned about, in terms of predators, coyotes, as well, but—because we're concerned about them as well, and in this—and we have the same arrangement, basically, for coyotes as we do for wolves. And that is that we have an agreement with the Manitoba Trappers Association to deliver problem predator removal for us. And we have a \$50,000 annual budget to address the problem predator management.

And I did have a discussion with this—with I think—with the Keystone Agricultural Producers or maybe it was the Manitoba cattle producers and, you know, if I recall correctly, they weren't, you know, advocating a kind of an indiscriminate cull or kill—that they were, you know, they might've liked to have seen more resources go into the way that we're doing things but they weren't quarrelling with the way that we're doing it. That is to say, to identify the problem predator and to go after that particular animal, rather than trying to, you know, have a kind

of a—not sure what the right metaphor is—but I know that they've had, with respect to coyotes, for instance, they had, you know, a bounty and that sort of thing in Saskatchewan.

But I think the difference we need to keep in mind, at least between Manitoba and Saskatchewan, for example, is that we actually have a program for compensating farmers for loss of livestock as a result of predators, and I don't believe that was the case in Saskatchewan, unless they've changed it very, very recently.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Chair, I have a quick question in regard to a provincial drain in the R.M. of Morris. I—of course, this letter is from a while back so the issue has been resolved now—because water has flowed away—but it appears that it—according to the writer of the letter, there's an ongoing problem with the maintenance of the Krongart drain—that's K-r-o-n-s-g-a-r-t—in that it's just lack of maintenance, I think, to keeping that drain flowing. And, of course, in the spring when there's thawing and it's not draining properly it causes some concern to the local farmers in the area.

So I'm wondering if this particular drain is on a maintenance schedule for any scheduled maintenance.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for her question. She's obviously concerned about something happening in her own constituency, as she should be.

I don't have the details on that at the moment but—and I'm not even positive that it—for sure that it would come under Manitoba Conservation. It might come under MIT or it might come out of Water Stewardship but, regardless of that, I undertake to find out—either find out from my own department or through the appropriate department what the information that the honourable member is looking for, and get back to her as soon as we possibly can.

Mrs. Taillieu: I did take it to Water Stewardship. It's not that department. I'm here now and I'm going to MIT, so thanks.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, as well, just a—one off here, I think, in regards to this whole issue of ice-fishing shacks as a last resort on the lake. And I wonder if the minister can tell me what his intentions are there in regards to—there was some concern this spring about debris left on the ice—fishing shacks on the Red River—and I wonder if the minister can just outline for us whether he's got a plan in place or

thinking about what they'll do for another year to deal with the debris that might be left behind in these kinds of circumstances.

*(15:20)

Mr. Blaikie: I think the first thing—we want to have this problem solved, hopefully, long before the season begins next year. We don't want to be dealing with this when it's already happening again on the ground or on the ice, so to speak, and so we are looking for longer term solutions, but, for sure, we'll be looking for, you know, additional public communication and enforcement efforts on the Red River for the next season.

But I think—I'll just wait until I have the honourable member's attention—one of the things we need to do is to get the right people around the table from the municipalities that have expressed concern about this, some of the stakeholders in terms of if there are people that actually represent the, you know, the people who are using the ice for recreational purposes in that way, get everybody around the table—Conservation, Water Stewardship.

I mean, technically we only have responsibility for enforcing the fishing end of it, but I think we're all concerned about the way this has developed over the years, and so we want to get the right people around the table and come up with a way of preventing the kind of situation that the municipalities were concerned about this year.

Mr. Maguire: Does the minister think that they could do that through a series of fines or licensings, or can he expand on that at all?

Mr. Blaikie: I don't want to prejudge how we might do it. I think I want to be, you know, open to the suggestions that get made around that table that I'm trying to create to see—you know, sometimes enforcement is the way to go and sometimes it's not. If you can create the kind of consensus about how things ought to operate and get some buy-in by the people who actually use the ice for that purpose, and if there are people that don't necessarily agree, I mean, then we'll deal with that.

I would think that, hopefully, we might be able to get the municipalities and the appropriate departments around the table and say—and come up with a consensus as to how we can deal with this. That would be my first preference, shall we say, and, you know, start talking about fines and things like that later if we don't get that kind of co-operation.

Mr. Maguire: I want to move on and through the book as much as I said I wanted to go globally. I appreciate the minister's work on that.

I wanted to move into the Clean Environment Commission area. I know the City has—or the Province has indicated to the City a standard that they must meet in regards to waste-water treatment with the nitrogen and phosphorus, that sort of thing, coming out of the city, you know, the one part phosphorus, 15 parts nitrogen I believe is the standard that they're looking at in that area.

I wonder if the minister can tell me where—how they came about reaching that balance.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, Mr. Chairperson, the member asks a question about nitrogen and phosphorus, and the fact of the matter is is that the provincial government's position, based on recommendations of the Clean Environment Commission, who did the kind of technical work that the member is asking me for at the moment—recommended that the city be required to remove not just phosphorus, but nitrogen from waste water and sewage before it's discharged ultimately into the Red River.

And that is the position that we support. We think that the—this is, sort of, in our view, state-of-the-art treatment, BNR, biological nutrient removal. We'd like to see the City move towards that at the north-end site. I believe I'm correct in saying it already happens at the South End Treatment Plant.

And, I think that there's a misunderstanding in the public domain about the alleged extra cost of removing nitrogen. There is an extra cost to removing nitrogen but the figures sometimes associated with the removal of nitrogen are actually the figures more properly associated with the removal of nitrogen and ammonia. So the debate gets cast in terms of nitrogen and phosphorus but it's actually nitrogen, ammonia and phosphorus. And, I think, if you look at the figures, you'll see that the biggest piece of what—of the added expense is, through BNR, is the removal of ammonia, which has to be removed in any event.

But my understanding of the critics of that position is that they would rather see it done through an alternative way of doing that, through the use of chemicals, et cetera. And we're—we take the view that (a) that we should use the BNR method, and, secondly, that once you've spent the money to eliminate ammonia in the—through the BNR method,

there's actually only about—some of the figures that I've heard, I'm not sure if I'm recalling correctly, but, you know, it's 7 or 8 or 9 percent of the cost left over that's attributable to the actual removal of nitrogen.

Mr. Maguire: The minister's indicated the—you know, his view of the removal of the nitrogen from the waste-water treatment facilities, and I respect his view on that. I just may not agree with it all the time. And, I guess, I'm wondering how he can—and I know the Clean Environment Commission has made these recommendations to the government. I know that, but, you know, with 63 scientists making presentations to the government or to the Clean Environment Commission that this wasn't necessary to meet that, and, indicated that it may even be detrimental to the balance of nutrients in Lake Winnipeg anyway, I just wonder if he can have any comment on why they're moving forward in such a direction, when this number of scientists, acclaimed scientists, have indicated that they don't need to?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, two things on that score, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, there are reputable scientists who argue a position contrary to the position that the member has attributed to these 60 scientists. So there's—you know, there's reputable scientific opinion on both sides, and this is not the first time this has happened in the history of science, that people have, you know, that people can come to different conclusions.

We are not—we're not seeking to be arrogant about this, and I think the evidence for that is that we've asked the CEC to look at it one more time. And, you know—so that's, I think, evidence of the fact that, you know, if there's a good argument out there to the contrary, you know, we trust the CEC to come up with it or to note it or to take it into account. But there are people who are very, very knowledgeable in this area who disagree with Dr. Schindler and others who've criticized the position of the Clean Environment Commission.

And the argument, as I understand it—I'm not a scientist, it was never my speciality in high school, but—is that it's not just the question of the blue algae in the lake itself. It's also larger environmental questions about the watershed, in general, extending all the way to Hudson Bay. So there may indeed be arguments that need to be taken into account that aren't being taken into account, when people look only at this narrow argument about Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know that—I believe this will be the third look at the review, the report the Clean Environment Commission will come with. Has the minister any indication when that report will be in?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I'm hoping that that will be soon, but we don't control when the commission finishes its work.

* (15:30)

But I might just say, also, in regard to this, that—and this is something that doesn't always come up in the debate either. You know, if we're in a position and we're, in Lake Winnipeg, where a lot of the nutrients that are coming into Lake Winnipeg are coming in from—either coming in from the south, you know, from beyond our borders to the south, from beyond our provincial borders to the west, and if we want to be—if we want to have the high ground, if you like, in terms of arguing with others about acting in a way that respects the ultimate sustainability of Lake Winnipeg, then we should—it seems to me—that we want to be arguing from strength. We want to be arguing from a place where we're doing the absolute best. We're doing this state of the art. We're not trying to cut any corners. We're not trying to do anything on the cheap. We are doing things the way it's absolutely best to do it.

And I—you know, I recall having this—being in this kind of a position years and years ago, not as a government, but in the debate about acid rain, for instance, when Canada—when it wanted to get Ronald Reagan, the Reagan administration to act on acid rain. Well, one of the first things that we wanted to do was to have the sort of moral high ground to be able to say that we are doing everything that we can to deal with acid rain and, therefore, we felt in a better position to exhort others to do what they thought they should be doing.

Now, as it turns out, some cities upstream of us are actually removing nitrogen through BNR. Calgary and Brandon and Regina will be. So here we are, and Winnipeg will be the—Winnipeg, who you would think would be full of citizens who are even more concerned about Lake Winnipeg, and I think it is full of citizens who are more concerned about Lake Winnipeg, but they want a government that's just as concerned as they are, and we are. And that's why, until we are persuaded otherwise, we think that Winnipeg should do what other cities are already doing, and that is implementing this state-of-the-art way of dealing with sewage.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, can the minister indicate to me, I guess, just when that—this latest report started?

I know he's—he won't have the influence on when the Clean Environment Commission reports back to him, but I just forget when the government asked the Clean Environment Commission to do this third report, and I just wondered if he could inform me of that.

Mr. Blaikie: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, I don't have the exact date, but it was either very late in the fall of last year, or perhaps very early this year. The only thing I know for sure is it was some time after the new Premier (Mr. Selinger) took office. But I can get the exact date if that's critical in some way.

Mr. Maguire: No. So it was the minister himself that made the order?

Mr. Blaikie: It was after I became the minister here.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thank you. Can you indicate how much money Conservation's flowing to the City of Winnipeg, if any, in—you know—in regards to the upgrades that they're seeking in waste-water treatment facilities?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes. I mean, no money flows directly from the Department of Conservation to the City of Winnipeg in this respect. But there have been monies transferred to the City of Winnipeg under various fiscal arrangements in the past, and in the recent past, which have had, as their object, I believe, but I'd have to—I'll double check on this for the member—and have had as their object helping with the funding of the—of what we're asking the City to do.

Now, it may be that there are other transfers, fiscal transfers, pending with respect to this particular issue. I'd have to check and get back to the honourable member. I could walk over and talk to the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) there, but I—you know.

Mr. Maguire: I asked him. He says he's done his Estimates.

I want to move on to the forest fire programming—program and the minister's announcements—or the government's announcement of the four new planes that they've just purchased that will be here sometime after the next election, all but the one, I believe. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think there's one available this fall and another one—is it in the fall of '11, with the other two in 2012?

Mr. Blaikie: I think I have an answer for the honourable member now. There'll be one this year, this coming fall, and then two the next year and then one the year after that.

Mr. Maguire: Yeah, just for clarity—one this fall. Will there be two the next fall, or will there be one in the spring, one in the fall and then another one in 2012?

Mr. Blaikie: Two different delivery dates in 2011. Two will be delivered in 2011, you know, providing the production lines don't run into any troubles.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, and these are the 415 turboprop water bombers that Bombardier makes, I believe, as I read the reports, that they're purchasing.

Can the minister indicate to me what input Conservation had in this decision, or was it your department that made the decision to purchase these, or just where did the decision come from?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, I mean, it was a decision made between the two departments, between Conservation and MIT, and, you know, we shared the concern that the existing fleet of CL-215s was getting a bit long in the tooth and that more and more time is being spent in the shop for maintenance purposes and that it was time to move on ordering these particular new aircraft.

Which I might add—sorry, Mr. Chairman—which I might add are not just—won't just replace but actually are—they'll be able to do things that the aircraft that are being replaced can't do. I mean, they move faster, they carry more water. They're going to be better at fighting fires, and you know, it's a—I think they carry 200 gallons more than—per drop, I guess, I think, is the language—and they're going to be an asset to the province for sure.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, just while you're on that, what's the capacity of the—I believe it's the CL-215s that are there now? And your minister's indicating 200 more gallons at a drop.

Mr. Blaikie: The old ones had 1,200 gallons and these ones have 1,400.

* (15:40)

Mr. Maguire: Did they look at other types of planes, or does the minister believe that this is the most cost-effective plane that they could have purchased?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, my understanding is that Bombardier is the only company that makes these kind of water bombers and, of course, you know, in

other places where they don't have a lot of water accessible in the way that we do as a result of our lakes, they often have to resort to other forms of aircraft that are able to deliver fire retardant chemicals or whatever. But we are, I think happily you might say, dependent and able to use water to fight fires, and these are the people that make them.

Mr. Maguire: So can the minister just confirm for me that there were no other types of planes that they looked at?

Mr. Blaikie: As far as I understand, there were no other—if we're looking at water bombers and we were. To my knowledge, there are no other aircraft of this nature on the market, so to speak.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, it was water bombers I was enquiring about. It wasn't the minister's department's jet, nor anything like that—planes that I was looking at. These are water bombers that I'm talking about. I'll continue to talk about water bombers, and so I just wondered if you had mentioned maneuverability. And can you just tell me the difference in horsepower, or is there any details that the department can provide me with the flexibility and the maneuverability of these particular aircraft.

Mr. Blaikie: I have the details here. There's increased air speed, 190 knots for the CL-415s versus 145 knots for the CL-215s, which provides significantly greater effectiveness in fire suppression. You know, it just, it flies faster to the fires. It picks up on smaller lakes so it has more choice of where it drops down to pick up water. And it drops more gallons per hour on a fire than the old planes would, because they can go back and forth quicker. And so that's, you know, that's the advantage of them and just going back to your earlier question about, you know, why these particular planes? Well, these were the, you know, these planes have to meet a national and international fire suppression standards, and these were the planes that do that.

Mr. Maguire: Was there any kind of a restriction just to look at Canadian-made planes?

Mr. Blaikie: There was no, as far as I—there was no rule to have to buy Canadian. We bought Canadian because they were the best planes. And they met the national and international standards, and they were also the kind of planes that were, I believe, have been purchased by other provinces.

There is a kind of a Canadian fire suppression association or something to that effect, and these are

the planes that are generally recognized as being state of the art in this regard.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Mr. Minister, for that answer. Can they—can these land on a gravel strip at all? Can they land on a gravel strip? I wonder about maneuverability. The minister's indicated that they land—that they can pick water up in a shorter distance. Can they also land on shorter runways or particularly, at some of the gravel runways that we have in the north without damage to the planes or do they require a paved strip, I guess, is what I'm getting at?

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, I—they can, but, you know, the fire suppression strategy is that they operate from a base and then they—they're going down into the lakes and coming up again. So they normally don't have to.

Mr. Maguire: So I guess we had, I believe, and maybe the minister—the best way for me to ask this is just what did we have in the fleet before? I know there was the 215s that I spoke of. One of the articles I saw indicated that the government was going to be selling five of seven of those. I'm assuming that won't be all at once. But can he indicate if that was our fleet, the seven planes before, and if we have other planes that are in more remote areas, perhaps, on-site and—to fight fires on a more local basis?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, just to put on the record, Mr. Chairman, we have seven CL-215 water bombers, as the member has mentioned, and three Cessna 310 Bird Dog aircraft, which are also operated by Government Air Services. And once we are in receipt of the four new CL-415s we propose to have four CL-15s and two CL-215s. In other words, we hope to be—you know, keep the best two of the existing fleet of the older aircraft. And, of course, you know, we do have seasonal helicopter contracts during the wildfire season, as well, but in terms of aircraft that's the answer to your question.

Mr. Maguire: The minister mentioned the helicopters and being on standby and if—for times of peak fires. Can he indicate if they have a contract with other private individuals around the province that may own planes that they can have on standby to fight fires as well?

Mr. Blaikie: We do have something, Mr. Chairman, called the SEAT program, which is actually an acronym for single-engine air tanker, and which are some—best described as large crop-dusting planes that have been modified so that they can be used to apply water and/or retardant to fires. So, in our view,

the SEAT program has—is a successful, an effective and an efficient option for supplementing the fire program's wildfire suppression resources. And it's important to have available when fire hazards are high in the early spring and water bodies are still ice covered, limiting the use of the water bombers, obviously.

Mr. Maguire: It'd be on a standby basis, I assume?

Mr. Blaikie: We hire them, I think, on an as-required basis. So I'm not sure is there—where there's a sort of an average or is—just let me follow-up on that.

So, for instance, I'm told that—sorry, Mr. Chairman; oh, I still got the floor—that SEATs or single-engine air tanker aircraft have been hired for 10 days already this season.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister elaborate on what kind of a contract they would have with them—covers their insurance, staff, equipment required—can you just supply me with any pertinent information around the type of contract that they would have with them?

Mr. Blaikie: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, I don't have the details of the contract available at the moment, but we can get that to the honourable member—

Mr. Maguire: Yeah, thanks—appreciate it if you can just provide me with that. Maybe bring it tomorrow or something, and whatever—provide it to me.

When they aren't being used, what type of reciprocal agreement have we got with other provinces? I know we've sent planes to B.C. and other provinces and states to fight fires in the past when ours aren't needed here, and to make the best use of the equipment. I'm wondering if he can elaborate for me just what they do in that area.

* (15:50)

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, we do have an arrangement with—I think it's called the Canadian interagency fire-fighting association, or something to that effect, whereby, you know, provinces come to each other's aid in certain circumstances. And one of the advantages of the new water bombers is that we will be able to participate more fully in that kind of exchange, or that kind of mutual help arrangement because, sometimes, you know, our neighbours aren't as eager to have the old planes as they would be to have the new planes come to their assistance.

And I think, if I'm not mistaken, even at one point, you know, we were asked to contribute to planes to a fire-fighting effort in California and, you know, when they found out that it—that they were the older planes—yeah.

Mr. Maguire: Yeah, can the minister indicate what the 215—oh, the 215 size, I believe, was the 1,200 gallons that he was talking about and the 310 Cessnas?

Mr. Blaikie: I guess they're not called Bird Dog aircraft for nothing. They—they're just—they just scout out the situation. I don't know if they actually do any—they don't actually carry any water. They're kind of, you know, they're sort of a Snoopy in the—

Mr. Maguire: I'm a bit familiar with the Cessna aircraft, and so I wondered—I didn't realize that they were making a water-type program.

The SEAT planes, can the minister indicate to me if any of those are ever hired out to other provinces or do those individuals have to get their own contracts with those provinces? Or other jurisdictions, I should say.

Mr. Blaikie: I would think that they're private people who are contracting with us, so if they contract with others, that's their business.

Mr. Maguire: What type of a contract is it that you'd have with them, then? Is it one that's pretty flexible? If they're working someplace else, they just—you have to hire somebody else or are they to be on standby at least for a certain period of time?

Mr. Blaikie: That's part of the contract that you asked us about just a little while ago, so maybe we can get you all that at the same time.

Mr. Maguire: When they looked at the purchase of the 415s, the new planes—and I understand what the minister's indicated to me, and I'm not familiar enough with what other companies make these type of aircraft—but were these planes, then, tendered over a period of time, or can the minister supply me with the parameters of any tender that they had, or was this done by tender?

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, the tendering and procurement of planes is done through air services at MIT. Again, I reiterate that our understanding is that Bombardier was—you're talking about the new water bombers—is that these water bombers were—they weren't available anywhere else.

Mr. Maguire: My understanding that the government's looking at \$126,000 capital program to purchase the four of these planes—*[interjection]*—or \$126 million. Yeah, certainly not thousand. Thank you for that correction.

And I guess I'm wondering if the minister thinks this was the most cost-efficient way that they could have used that \$126 million, or whether purchases of—like, just as an example, could they have looked at smaller planes and more of them? Is that efficient in his mind? I know you need more staff, and, you know, there's insurance and everything else around that type of thing. From a fuel efficiency—I don't know whether they're more fuel efficient or not—from that end of it as well, costs of operations. But I just wondered if he'd—if they'd considered, say, planes of 400 or 600 gallons as opposed to the 1,400 that they're looking at.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I think, I understand that there are smaller planes but, certainly, the customary accepted way of fighting fires, particularly in the boreal forest, is to have—get as much water as you can, the soon as you can, and drop it, hopefully, you know, on the fire before it's—before it really digs in, so to speak. And that having this kind of payload and being able to deliver it repeatedly early on, and given our access to water, that they use—to have these bombers is, indeed, the most effective way to proceed. And, you know, I'm confident that the—that this was the right decision. And it's—it makes the most of our—of the situation we find ourselves in, in terms of the nature of our forest and our accessibility to water.

Mr. Maguire: I'd better move on, Mr. Chairman; I've ended up page 1 of the questions that I had down here yet.

But I just wanted to—just to check in for clarification. I asked earlier whether these 415's could land on—do they absolutely require paved strips then, or can they land on gravel strips?

Mr. Blaikie: They—I think, as I said before, they can land on gravel. I'm sure it's not optimum conditions and probably not good for the aircraft, but they could land on gravel if they had to. But they're—you know, the idea is that they would be landing on, presumably, asphalt or concrete services at the base where they—from which they operate, and then moving in and, you know, in and off the lake. So the gravel would be a rare event.

Mr. Maguire: Back just for a moment to the Clean Environment Commission, I see three staff persons on that area. Can you indicate to me who the chairman of that still is—the individual who is the chairman of the Clean Environment Commission? Yes, still.

An Honourable Member: The chair of the Clean Environment Commission is Terry Sargeant.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, can you—Honourable Minister.

Mr. Blaikie: The chair of the Clean Environment Commission is Terry Sargeant, and I'm not sure who the other two staff people are, but I could find that out for you.

Mr. Maguire: I could have went to the Web site, I think, and got that, but I just—that was my feeling, thanks for confirming that.

The Regional Support Services, I know, just a quick question on that before I leave it. And it's—there's a line in page 36, it says it operates a 24/7 toll-free line for reporting forest fires and resource-law violators. It's 24/7, but is that year-round? Certainly, I don't suppose the forest fire part of it is, but the resource-law violators, maybe he can provide me with more detail on that.

Mr. Blaikie: The line is open all year round, so it's not just for fires. I would agree that you probably don't get too many forest fire reports in the winter, but there's also—it's also for, you know, to report poaching and other things that people might call in about.

Mr. Maguire: With the snow and the rain that we've had over the last few days, I think the minister indicated once there was 50 fires burning in Manitoba, or had burnt this spring already. Is that a number still that's valid or what is the number today? And do we actually have any burning as we speak?

* (16:00)

Mr. Blaikie: I don't know the precise number of fires that are burning at the moment, but certainly the situation is better than it was before the rain and before the green-up that's taking place now as we look out the window. So the situation is much improved, and we should be—I never like to say anything for sure, but good for a few weeks and hopefully we'll get the kind of rain that we need, not too much, just as much as we need to keep the fire risk low and—

Mr. Maguire: Sounds like farming. I want to move on to the parks and operations, page 47, discuss leaking lagoons for a moment with the minister in provincial parks. He brought to my attention, here, a notice that he put out on the 23rd of April in regards to the—I believe it's Dorothy Lake and the region there, but I just wonder what's being done to address, not that particular one at this point—if he wants to we'll get to that—but in regards to other lagoon facilities in the province that might be leaking as well, can he give me a number of how many there might be, or what they're doing to repair those at this time.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, the honourable member mentions the leak that I spoke to him about just after it happened at Dorothy Lake, and that particular leak was as a result of a failure of a valve, so I just wanted to report to the member that that valve has been replaced, and that we put—and that I ordered a review of all similar valves on lagoons in the Whiteshell in particular, and that that kind of inspection is taking place. And I've also asked, you know, that we have a look at our inspection protocol to make sure that we're on—that we find leaks, if there are any, in this case, of a mechanical nature as soon as possible. Other inspections would have to do with making sure that the lagoons themselves are actually structurally sound and, you know, that the berms haven't collapsed, as was once the case with one particular lagoon which caused a spill. So that kind of, you know, testing and inspection is going on. And, of course, we have a larger plan within the Whiteshell for building new lagoons that will take some—that will take the pressure off some of the lagoons that have been a problem in the past. And we're looking at a whole new truck-haul lagoon in the north Whiteshell that will, once that's completed, I think, will be a big improvement in the situation there.

Just, again, just going back to Dorothy Lake, one of the things that we did at the time on the Friday was to circulate to the cottagers there what had happened. And the good news is that we're—we'll be able to circulate them again this week and report that the testing that we've done in Dorothy Lake has basically found nothing to be concerned about whatsoever.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know, the notice that the minister put on the people's home or sites there and that sort of thing indicated that a faulty valve on the Dorothy Lake lagoon led to approximately 420,000 litres of waste water being released over that

period of at least a month, according to the information from Manitoba Conservation. And I saw that the minister is indicating that it's a fairly large volume, but he's saying that because it was over about a month-long period, that it has been dissipated into the—yes, the Gulf of Mexico could be so lucky—but, anyway, I just wondered if the minister finds this as—you know, that, I mean, I know he finds it unacceptable that there's a leaky valve like that, but I just wondered how often inspections of valves do take place and how often are the parts inspected.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I think they were being inspected, you know, on a regular basis, but one of the things that I've asked for is that they be inspected more often and that we actually develop some—develop, you know, a protocol for inspection. I think people were—there was no dereliction of duty here or anything like that, but it was—what I've asked for is, you know, a more regularized inspection, if you like, something that we can—that way we can be assured that in the future that any kind of leak like this is something that's discovered as early as possible. Every two weeks, I think, is what we're looking at.

Mr. Maguire: Thank you. Just to move on, the—I wrote the minister a letter awhile back and it was about the sewage tipping fees, lagoon tipping fees, that sort of thing, and the \$10 that they're going to charge on each truckload of—from commercial sewage haulers to use their waste-water facilities in the provincial park. And I wonder if he can just explain what the new fee is for or why it was put on.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, the sewage lagoon tipping fee of \$10 per truckload for commercial haulers dumping in waste-water facilities in provincial parks will be implemented when we are also able to introduce control gates on pass guard systems at the provincial park sewage lagoons, which are expected to be operating at most locations within three years. That is to say, the gates. Control gates will allow the department to accurately monitor waste-water volumes and treatment requirements. And the tipping fee is intended to encourage increased consideration of individual water conservation measures.

Previously, commercial sewage haulers have not paid fees to dump waste water in provincial park sewage lagoons. However, a tipping fee is in effect in some rural municipalities like Gimli and Snow Lake, for instance, and other municipalities are considering a fee.

So it's all part of a—well, for us it's also our part of knowing who's dumping and how much. But it's

also, we hope, a conservation measure in the sense that anything that makes people more conscious, even if it's, you know, a few more dollars on their septic hauling fee, above, you know, particularly now that a lot of grey water is going into holding tanks, that you want people to be as conservation conscious as possible without, you know, being too harsh.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks. The—you know, I know that the park occupants already pay an annual park cost, I guess, or an annual service fee in those parks. Does the minister see it necessary—obviously he does—to put the \$10 on over and above that, or will—because—or is there—will there be an adjustment downwards of the park fees that occupants pay at all, then, to offset the \$10 that it's going to cost them to have their sewage hauled out?

I mean, each lot is probably different in regards to the amount of sewage that would be there or that sewage would be hauled away. Some live there all summer long and would need it maybe bi-weekly even, or even twice a week, as opposed to others who maybe only get an opportunity to come a few times a summer.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I think the fees themselves, which are under, you know, review, and I've—you know, that's a whole and other question, if you like. But the fees themselves up until now and still haven't—have—if they've taken sewage into account, that they've taken it in—they've taken the facilities into account, the cost of maintaining the lagoons, et cetera. They haven't been related to how often or how much is hauled from any particular cottage.

So you've got two separate sort of uses. You've got the general contribution as a cottage owner in this case, to maintaining the infrastructure of the park, which the fees, the cottage service fees have been related to, and now we're actually, if you like, introducing a new measurement or fee which is related to something that people weren't being charged for at all before.

* (16:10)

Mr. Maguire: And I think a lot of them looked at it, though, as if it may be part of their annual fees that they were paying and they were entitled to that kind of a service, and so I just raise that with the minister. I've heard his views on it. I know that now the government is looking at the fact that they've raised—you know, eliminated the park entrance fees to get into a park for the summer in many of these areas,

but they've put fees on in regards to showers in a number of other areas that will be there. And I'm assuming that that's going to take a few years to get fully implemented as well, or is it the minister's intention to try to do all of those this summer?

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, some of the fees that have—that were increased took effect right away. Others I'm not exactly sure what the honourable member has in mind. But, for instance, you know, the coin-operated showers, they'll be, you know, operational when they're operational, like when we can—when they're actually working, then that—and, again, that's related—you know, this is not a revenue-raising measure so much as a conservation measure that coin-operated showers tend to make for—I'll just share this figure that was just handed to me, Mr. Chairperson—average weekly pump outs have resulted in as much as 70 percent less waste water being generated. This is having to do with the introduction of coin-operated shower stalls. So it makes a big difference in terms of the stress on the lagoons, et cetera.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Arthur-Virden.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, somebody mentioned something about dirty kids running around, but I'm not sure that that's the result of the program. Does the minister see that this type of, you know, the shower costs and some of the other things that they're doing, will they be installing, as an example, dual-flush toilets in some of these areas as well? And my question earlier was just how quickly is the minister going to look at implementing the showers? And I'm assuming that they're looking at all parks across the province when they're looking at doing this, or is it—and how many of them are already installed, I guess, is a question that I'd like to ask as well?

Mr. Blaikie: I'm just going to actually quote from a letter I think I sent to the honourable member in which he asked some of these questions. But we intend to achieve this throughout this system over the next five to 10 years. It's going to be expensive, and so it's not something that, you know, not something that we can do all at once. So we are doing it where it seems appropriate to start and, you know, carry on in a way that, hopefully, this is something which, I think, will recommend itself to future Conservation ministers. You know, this kind of thing is—just seems to me to be the wave of the future. We want to put less stress on our lagoons and we want to conserve

water, and this is the way to go as far as the showers are concerned.

Mr. Maguire: So this is—I mean by appropriate places that the minister—

An Honourable Member:—and I am sorry, but dual-flush toilets will fit in better in some places and the long-term plan is to have them everywhere as well.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I understand the cost involved, and I'm wondering if, of course, the minister is indicating the relative use of it and appropriate placing, and I'm assuming he's looking at the higher volume areas first if it's a water conservation measure.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, we are—I mean, I can tell you where we're putting them in now, and that is a place where there is, you know, heavy use and where we've had, you know, stress on the lagoons. It doesn't always—it's not always an exact correspondence, but the fact of the matter is that we can reduce the number of—the amount of water going into the system.

At the moment, we're focussing on the north Whiteshell, which is where we've had some of the lagoon problems, and we're also focussing there to reduce the stress on them.

Mr. Maguire: In reply to the minister's earlier comment, I didn't bring him with me; he was here before I got here.

And I'm just wondering if he can indicate to me the time frame in reviewing the latest public input on the on-site waste-water management systems. I know the minister has brought—you know, had it heard, and I know and I commended him earlier for making the change, so I won't go there again. But I wanted to know—just because of the timing. I know that there's a municipal by-law there. I think it's two weeks you have to give notice. But it was brought in in the middle of February—or middle of April. You've known about this since last June. It was still implemented in September; nothing was done until April. Farmers are in the field and or they're calving calves, and so why only the two weeks notice, or the two-week time frame to make a reply to the minister's department on that? It's just a—it's a concern that's been raised by some people to me.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I appreciate that, although, I must say that I thought that, given the circumstances, that the quicker that we actually got this change to the amendments in place, the better it would be for the

many people who had raised concerns about the existing—about the amendment that came in—the regulation that came into effect at the end of October last year.

So the—frankly, I wasn't expecting that there would be criticism about the shortness of the period of time for reviewing the regulation, that most of the representations that I had received would be—were to the effect that if we were going to change this, we should change it soon and that—because, you know, the ground was thawing and people were having to make decisions. They were transferring their property, and they wanted to know whether they had to dig or not dig or leave their sewage ejector alone or not, or whatever.

So I kept that in mind when we were designing the time line, if you like, but, you know, it's—

Mr. Maguire: Yeah, the waste-water systems that the minister is referring to, I know—I mean, my only problem is he's had the portfolio since last October and it was April when he made the decision. We made a good presentation to the minister, or some of colleagues did, back—and my predecessor, as well—back at the end of January. And I appreciate that, you know, he was very well aware of the lobby that KAP and certainly AMM, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, made at the annual meeting in Brandon last fall.

And so it was only about timing, and I think that the minister's just assumed that everybody would be onside with the changes. And as I said earlier, we're appreciative of the changes that were made, but there are still those out there—and I'm getting calls from plumbers now—you mean—what do you mean I'm not going to be able to put an ejector system into this top five soil zones, or the one to five?

If it's okay to be grandfathered there, then why not be able to use it in the future? It's a much cheaper operation to install from a perspective of, you know—some people don't understand what a field is; it can have quite a size to it. And you've got permits and fees and everything else to that as opposed to—because you've got to put the holding tank in. You've still got to put a line in to either a field or an ejector.

It's just that putting a standpipe in for an ejector is a whole lot cheaper than a field. And in some cases, the soil types are a field six, seven feet in the ground is in the water table as opposed to—and I know that that's probably not going to be allowed on

a case-by-case basis. A permit probably wouldn't be issued for a field in those cases.

But there are areas where an ejector still makes sense, and I want to put on the record I have no problem with the areas of making sure that they're eliminated in parks and Crown lands, some of the Red River valley that they've looked at. But there are certain circumstances, and I guess I'm looking at the minister to see if he will consider—and I know, down the road, still making some inquiries on that, still listening to some people that are trying to permit for new homes and that sort of thing, and there's a number of them across the province. Obviously, we're seeing some good housing numbers, and I—so I'd ask him that. I'd also—if he could just then—if, you know, the two-week period's up, how much time will he need then before he actually implements the program that he suggested? In other words, how long will it take you to review what's come in?

* (16:20)

Mr. Blaikie: Well, the time for public review of the regulation—or public input has expired, as the honourable member indicated, and so, as, I think, foreshadowed in my earlier remarks, I believe that if this amendment to the regulation is to go through—and I think it should and I believe it will—then the sooner it goes through the better, and I'll be endeavouring to try and make that happen as quickly as possible.

But the member raises—sorry, Mr. Chairman—in his earlier comments raised—was really raising an argument about whether or not there should be a ban on new sewage ejectors, and that's not something that the amendment to the regulation invited comment about because it didn't deal with that. That's another debate, which I have a feeling is going to continue and that's fair enough, but that's—the amendment to the regulation that was up for the two-week review had to do with rules for either the phasing out or the retention of existing sewage ejectors at the time of property transfer.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know that's the case and I guess I just wondered—it would be good to implement what has been proposed so far as quickly as you can, I believe, but you know, and—it does not allow anything to be changed in the future, and I think, in that regard, I only ask that the minister look at that down the road again as well, because there's still locations in the province, as has been done by this, where they still make some sense in regards to being able to be used.

And so I'm just wondering if the minister can indicate to me what science he used to make the decisions that they made the decision on.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, we came to the conclusion that sewage ejectors, for a variety of reasons, were not what we wanted to see more of in the province, and we—the initial regulation in the fall of last year was to phase them all out over time, assuming that all properties eventually change hands, although I suppose, even given the nature of the rules at the time, there might be properties that never changed hands and there would never be sewage ejectors phased out unless, of course, they failed and then they wouldn't be able to be replaced. But—so, at this point, we are—we were persuaded that this was a, in some cases, not appropriate rule to impose on people in particular circumstances, but we still hold to the view that new sewage ejectors are not what we want to see happening in the province.

Mr. Maguire: Well, earlier I referred to the Clean Environment Commission in regards to the waste-water treatment facilities in the city of Winnipeg and the nitrate levels in the city of Winnipeg, and the government followed clearly the path of the CEC in regards to the recommendations around the nitrate removal. And so, are they acting here on a recommendation that came forward from the Clean Environment Commission to do away with the waste-water ejectors?

And I have to clarify that, you know, I take some homage with the words "sewage ejectors," because there is no solids coming out of these. A cherry pit would plug a sewage ejector. I've cleaned some of them out in the middle of winter when they're frozen in my own farm at different times and so, clarification: it is not grey water, totally, but it is waste water, and it doesn't take much to plug them, and so—and it is totally water that's coming out. It's not running continuously, and I've had people in the press and others indicate to me, oh, it doesn't? I mean, there might be five minutes of water come out twice a day in the normal course of a home and this sort of thing.

And I just wondered if the minister can indicate to me whether or not there was a recommendation from either the Clean Environment Commission or another organization that he acted on in this regard or that his predecessor acted on.

Mr. Blaikie: I don't think there was ever a CEC examination of this issue or recommendation on this, so that's not the basis for the government's action.

I understand what the honourable member's saying in the terms that it is—it's not greywater; it's not sewage; it's blackwater, or whatever the appropriate term is. And that it's, you know—and I made it my business to understand how these things worked when I became the minister and I know what the member's getting at.

Mr. Maguire: Well, as the critic trying to understand why it was implemented, I see no science coming forward. I've heard of no recommendations in that regard, and, I'm just wondering who then lobbied the government to have this put in.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, there was a collective concern that, in terms of human health and the dispersal of black water, which contains fecal coliform, E. coli, et cetera, on the surface of the earth, so to speak, was unacceptable, that this was—that there were concerns about that particular way of disposing of sewage. And, that's why not only in Manitoba, but many other provinces don't permit these sewage ejectors anymore.

So it's not as if we're acting in some sort of rogue way here. I think if the honourable member checks, he'll see that they're not very popular anywhere else either. And in this case, we decided, subsequent to the introduction of that first regulation having to do with the phasing out of sewage ejectors, that we were persuaded that they should be—existing sewage ejectors should be allowed to stay where the certain conditions were met, and that's what we did.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate to me why they didn't go on a case-by-case basis and look at this? And I may have missed it, but I didn't catch who he indicated did the lobbying to have his predecessor put the waste-water management system plan in place?

Mr. Blaikie: You know, I think it's a mistake to assume that things only happen because people lobby for them. Sometimes things happen because governments think they're the right thing to do, and then they do them.

Mr. Maguire: So nobody lobbied to have this put in place?

Mr. Blaikie: I'd say this was a—this was not something that was identified with any particular group asking for. This was a result of a debate, a consideration within the department, about on-site waste-water management. And I understand there were—there was a considerable consultation before the regulation that we ultimately amended was

brought forward. So I'm assuming that in the course of those consultations, that a number of people may have come forward and called for the banning of sewage ejectors, as well.

But, in terms of when you say lobbying, I associate that with some particular association or NGO or group like that, and I'm not aware of any particular group like that—I have, you know, who were after the government to ban sewage ejectors.

Mr. Maguire: The minister also, you know, looked at the petition that we had in the House on this, and they have provided or envisioned a low-interest loan program, a rolling out, to help some individuals in regards to the construction of sewage lagoons—or not lagoons, pardon me, field systems in their—in these private dwellings, in private areas. And, of course, you have to meet the 10 acre, land type size, as well

Two things there: Can he indicate to me, just how the low-interest loan program will roll out to people? Is it his department that will administer that, or some other entity, and how stringent will they be around the 10 acres? I know people with eight acres and if they were to sell their land, you know, would there be an opportunity for them to qualify for this program, as well?

* (16:30)

Mr. Blaikie: Well, they—the member's asking me two questions; one with respect to the loan, the low-interest loan, and the details of that have not been worked out finally, so I'm not in a position to report that. That is a—when we announce the amendment to the regulation, we said that we would be looking at developing a low-interest loan and that—and we are doing that. But I'm not in a position to say exactly how that will roll out or exactly how it will work at this point. The second question, having to do with, you know, well, eight-acre properties, you know, you have to draw the line somewhere, and we've drawn the line at 10 acres.

Mr. Maguire: Okay. I just—I know that some discussions were ongoing that perhaps led some to believe there might be some fine line of error around that, but I wanted to just ask as well, then, if the low-interest parameters haven't been determined yet, then can the minister just indicate to me whether that will be backed by funds from his department or will it come out of Finance or MIT or where would that loan program be established, in whose department?

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, that's part of what I'm not able to tell the member at this point, because it hasn't been

worked out. So, when it—when we are able to say what the answer to those questions are, we will.

Mr. Maguire: I had a call this morning from an acreage that sort of qualifies on the 10 acres, I believe, and so it's totally new to me as well this morning, and I—it just so happens we're in Conservation Estimates this afternoon, and I asked the minister, then, in this particular case, these people want to sell the particular home that they have and because the sewage ejector is there, will they be able to—is it grandfathered then, where—when they sell it and the quote transaction definition goes through, will there have to be a change made from the ejector to a field?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean the best—probably the best thing I could say would be to have, you know, someone from the department be in touch with that particular person. But speaking in more general terms, without, you know, sort of prejudice to the details of knowing more details about the case that you're raising, if they meet the conditions, you know, if they have 10 acres, and they're not in a sensitive area, and they, you know, then that's the idea. They would be able to keep their sewage area and not have to decommission.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, so, just so I'm clear, then, if they sell that property, they can sell it and keep the ejector as long as they qualify for the parameters the minister's outlined and the soil type and not in a sensitive area.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, as long as they, you know, *[inaudible]* to 10 acres, and it meets the other conditions. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Please don't eliminate the Chair.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, well, thanks for that clarification. I'm pleased to see that some of these will be able to change into other hands, non-family hands, and that sort of thing, from other generations without going forward as well. And I think that, perhaps, the biggest concern that I see from individuals that I'm getting calls on—and I know you'll have received some briefs on that and presentations—is about what we could do with non-sensitive areas, I guess, in new construction. And I appreciate the minister's answer on that.

I want to move on to the number of areas that I'd like to cover. And one of them is in the—regards to provincial parks and they don't have—you know, there's a number of parks that don't have current

management plans, and I wonder if the minister can tell me how many there are.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, there are some—there are plans in place for some parks. There are plans in development for others, and there are parks without plans. And so I think probably the best thing I could do at the moment is to undertake to give you a more detailed answer as to what, you know, what parks have plans and when those plans were implemented. Some plans are older than others. Some are, you know, currently being developed.

I think the Whiteshell, for instance, the last sort of park management plan was as, you know, in 1983, for instance. Whereas in Birds Hill Park I think we're in the process of putting together a new plan. So it—but the other thing to remember, I think is that we're not—it's not just—it's not that we're—we don't have a plan, that there is no guidelines. Because there are land-use management guidelines in the parks, even parks where there is no plan per se, in the sense that I think you mean it. So that would be just something that I would also want people to know if there—want people to be—to have the impression that there's no guidelines or no—in places where there are no plans.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know that municipalities across the province, because I was an Intergovernmental Affairs critic years ago when the government made the changes there, and you had to have land-use plans put in place by a certain date. And I'm just wondering if the minister's intention is to have all of the parks in Manitoba brought up to date by a certain period of time, and if so, what is that period of time? And that's probably the—I'll ask that one first.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, to the honourable member. I mean, there are 80 provincial parks, and, of course, the ideal situation would be to have a well-researched, well-thought-out plan for each one of them. But we—and that is something that we would like to do over time. But we have no—we have set no deadline by which time we aspire to meet a certain number of plans. It's an ongoing process, shall we say.

Mr. Maguire: Just a quick question thrown in the middle of this about safety in some of the provincial parks, Mr. Minister. It's come to my attention that there are a few parks that don't have cell phone service. It's not great service, and one of them's the south side of the Duck Mountain, in that area, Singush Lake. There's a nice little park in there. I'm told that they can't get cell service on. My colleague from Russell just said Asessippi as well, some areas.

But I know the one in the Duck Mountain particularly; it was brought to my attention this weekend by an individual who loves that particular part of Manitoba, doesn't really want publicity about it because he likes it the way it is. Wants fewer people to come to it, because they really enjoy it—great little fishing areas as well. But, just, it was brought to my attention that there's no cell service in there, and I just wanted to bring that to the minister's attention and see if he can persuade MTS or some other service provider to look at what would be needed for booster towers or that sort of thing in that area.

Mr. Blaikie: Did there used to be a hard-line service?

Mr. Maguire: Not that I know of. No, I don't believe there is in that particular location.

Mr. Blaikie: I just wonder whether sometimes, you know, hard-line service has been withdrawn from areas, particularly since the privatization of MTS. When you don't have, you know, one remote phone booth being subsidized by one that has more users, and so I just wonder whether there was previously a hard-line service that's been withdrawn, or whether you have hard-line service there now, and, obviously, cell phone services would be a, you know, would be a benefit over and above that, you know.

So I'll endeavour to look into that and get back to the honourable member.

* (16:40)

Mr. Maguire: I don't believe there was hard-line service there, Mr. Minister. I just don't—I don't think there was, so I'd appreciate it if you could look into that.

Mr. Blaikie: Excuse me for just a second.

Well, I'm told, Mr. Chairman, just as I was worried might be the case, that, for example, there was a telephone booth at East Blue Lake. Now, I don't know the Duck Mountain site, but there was a telephone booth at East Blue Lake that MTS indicated that they wanted to remove it, that we made representations to MTS as Manitoba Conservation not to remove it, and they did remove it anyway.

And I, you know, I was going to say I hesitate, but actually part of me is eager to have the debate about, you know, whether or not a Crown corporation would have removed that telephone booth, or whether that telephone booth might still be

there to this day—[interjection] But they didn't. And, you know, it is a problem.

Services in remote areas are—if they're being judged only on profitability, sometimes aren't—don't get kept in the way they should if the people who are delivering those services aren't using the public interest as a measure of why they do things and are simply using, you know, see every telephone booth as a kind of a centre of profitability, and remove it when it's not making money.

Mr. Maguire: I understand where the minister's coming from and what he's saying, and I understand that there's a question here of safety, and I know he wants—I know a particular individual had a heart attack once and it was a tough situation but they did survive, and I just wanted to bring it to the minister's attention.

You know, they're putting fees in showers and other areas, and if these are profitability centres, there are those who've indicated that maybe some of those funds could be used for the department to put a phone back into some of those areas, Parks department, and whatever, to do it, just for the safety of the individuals.

But I wanted to just check in regards to the park fee regulations that the government has updated and changed, and how were the fees arrived at and how much revenue is going to be collected from those this year and will any of that go back into some of these future infrastructure needs as well in parks, or does it just go into general revenue?

Mr. Blaikie: I'm assuming the honourable member is probably aware of what the actual fees were and what was increased. I can read those into the record if he likes, but I'm assuming that he probably is aware of that and just asking me questions about it. I mean, the fees, from the money collected, the revenue collected from the fees, goes into general revenue. It's not—and the parks are funded out of general revenue. So that's the answer to that particular question.

We felt there was a need for an increase in part to reflect the increased costs of maintaining things in the parks and, even though the money doesn't go directly, it does go into the general revenue which flows back to the parks, and we maintain we still have some of the lowest capping fees in the country, so it's not like it's exorbitant.

Mr. Maguire: Okay, Mr. Minister, there's a review of the park fee structure as well on provincial parks

and, you know, for cottagers and other stakeholders, and I just wondered if you can tell me where that's at. When can we expect to see any structure changes unveiled in that area and, I guess, will there be any additional cottage-user input into the consultation process on that?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, Mr. Chairman, just before I answer that question, I wanted to go back just for a second to—on the safety question, just to put on the record that we are moving in some areas, some provincial parks, and hopefully, eventually, working with the adjacent municipalities in as many places as we can to bring 9-11 service, or 9-1-1 service, to the parks. So that's one of the other things on our ongoing agenda, and we've had some success with that, for instance, in the Whiteshell.

As far as the park service fees are concerned, we did have a process in place. I should start out by saying that park service fees have remained mostly static since 2002, so the costs of maintaining the provincial parks for campers and for cottagers has not remained static since 2002. So we are hoping that, at some point, we will be able to come up with a new service fee model. There was a proposal that was made a year or so ago and there was much debate about that and it was also felt at one point that there hadn't been sufficient consultation. The Whiteshell Cottagers Association, for instance, took the government to task for what they felt was a lack of adequate consultation. So we have made the commitment to engage the cottage associations, and particularly the Whiteshell Cottagers Association, in a further consultation process prior to implementing any new service fee.

We had a consultant which brought forward a report. We're looking at that report right now, but I promised the Whiteshell Cottagers Association when I spoke at their annual meeting on March the 17th—easy date to remember because it's St. Patrick's Day—that we would work very closely with them when we got to the point that we were actually taking out of that consultant's report something that we wanted to put forward as a recommendation.

Mr. Maguire: I know my colleague from Russell has a written question he's left for the minister and there may be a few others. If he could just maybe get back to him at some time on that, and maybe other written ones come in here as well. Because of the shortage of time, I'd appreciate the minister—

An Honourable Member: Anything I can do to keep the honourable member for Russell happy.

Mr. Maguire: Yeah. Well, I appreciate that.

Just wanted to talk about the government's ecoTrust program for a while. The federal government put up a billion and a half dollars in '07 to look at the whole area of, you know, to co-fund major projects with the Province to promote clean energy and to combat climate change, air pollution, and greenhouse gases, I think were the words of the prime minister at the time.

The Province got about \$53.8 million of that in—at that time—and I'm wondering, you know, and it's to support provincial projects that'll help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and I'm wondering, you know, it was suggested the money could be used on projects like expanding the low-income energy efficiency program; supporting the creation of new biodiesel plants in rural Manitoba; increasing Manitoba's portfolio of renewable energy to include solar power and biogas; dedicating part of the fund to Manitoba's portion of an east-west power grid, and I'm wondering how much of this money has flowed into Manitoba since it was announced, and ask for a list of the specific projects and initiatives that the minister may have on the go.

* (16:50)

Mr. Blaikie: All I can say to the honourable member at this time is that we are—you know, our intent is to use that money to implement the recommendations that the member might find in the report called Beyond Kyoto, but, in terms of just exactly sort of an itemized list of what's been spent on what, I'll have to get back to the member on that, and we'll provide that to him.

Mr. Maguire: Can he indicate to me just how much of that 53.8 million has been flowed and how much has been used here since that first announcement?

Mr. Blaikie: I can't. I don't know that number at this point, so that's what I will endeavour to get back to you with.

Mr. Maguire: I guess another suggested area is the Community Adjustment Fund money flowing into Manitoba and what type of projects is it being used for. Receive funding for forestry related projects—and I just wonder if he can outline how much has been spent there and what projects are on the go.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, with respect to the community adjustment program, this is something that we work in conjunction with the federal government in respect of. And at this point, we hope that very soon we

might have something to announce which will amount to the spending of some of that money, but at this point, there is no—there are no projects that have reached that stage that I would be able to tell the honourable member about.

Mr. Maguire: I was flipping through the WNO, on page 116 of the report, and it indicates that there's a partial deferral of that grant to 2011-12. And I wonder if the minister can indicate why that's happening and how it'll impact the work being undertaken by WNO.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, this was a—well, the first thing that needs to be said is that this doesn't mean that the WNO will not be receiving money that is—that it's entitled to or that it expects. This was simply the—a way of timing the payments to the WNO and spreading it out over two fiscal years, what might have come in one fiscal year. And that's—that was the genesis of what the honourable member is observing and asking questions about.

Mr. Maguire: And so I just wondered why it was happening. So you're just spreading it out over a couple of years, and I have no—you know, that's fine. I—in the impact, they are getting more than the half a million dollars a year on the WNO, from what I understand, and so, you know, I just feel that there's a number of areas there that I—I wasn't saying that they were short of money, you know, just indicating that I wanted to know more about the impact.

Can you just give me an update on the staffing of WNO and how many staff they have?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, well, the money to—that flows to the WNO is a grant, and they then use that money to do their own hiring of people. So we're—and I just—I don't have the information about who the WNO has hired at the moment with their grant. What I do know is that we do have some staff that are seconded to WNO. So they would be people who are actually paid by the Minister of Conservation. And I'm just not sure—it's not a great number, but they're—I'll get the exact number for the honourable member.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I was just hoping to—you might be able to tell me how many staff they have, and whether Don Sullivan is one of them that's on staff with the WNO or is he seconded with them?

Mr. Blaikie: Don Sullivan does not work for WNO; he works for the Department of Conservation.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, okay, I mean, I understand Mr. Sullivan, being a member of the Manitoba

Conservation, he's also involved in the Boreal Forest Network as a director, I understand. And I wonder if the minister—in fact, I think he was president of it—of that organization at one time and has been interviewed fairly publicly by magazines such as the *Canadian Geographic* in regards to the World Heritage Site. And I'm just wondering, you know, with those interviews being posted on a Web site called Heart of the Boreal, run—basically, a Web site run by those that are opposed to the east-side bipole line, and I'm wondering if the minister sees any conflict of interest there.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, I'm not exactly sure what the member is referring to, but I'd certainly—my understanding is that, you know, that he's—was, but is no longer a member of the organization that you're referring to, but he certainly has a long-standing interest in the boreal forest and its preservation. And that's one of the reasons why we're glad to have him working for us, because of his knowledge of that particular issue and his commitment to it.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, just one last question here, I think, for the day, and that is that this Web site, Heart of the Boreal, was launched on the 17th of March this year, and, you know, some of the other groups listed on there were identified as starting it up were the Boreal Forest Network, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Wilderness Committee. Is the provincial government funding any of those groups?

Mr. Blaikie: Just—can you just say who the groups are again?

Mr. Maguire: The Boreal Forest Network, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Wilderness Committee. Is the provincial government funding any of those groups?

Mr. Blaikie: Could you just say who the groups are again?

Mr. Maguire: The Boreal Forest Network, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Wilderness Committee.

An Honourable Member: Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

Mr. Maguire: To name three, yeah.

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

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. As has been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Just on procedure in the interest of time, after discussion with the critic, what I'm going to attempt to do here is with a lot of issues that are being raised by the members of the committee, in some cases I will be essentially undertaking to follow up with, you know, a more detailed response, and I'll undertake to do that in writing, and, you know, if there's any detail involved or at the next sitting, if we can accommodate that.

And I certainly want to welcome the member for Lakeside back after a very difficult personal circumstance over the last few days. So, glad to see him back; and open for questions.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Yes, I just want to thank the minister for his understanding, and, of course, the—as we talked before—the portfolio is quite large, and, as we all know, everybody wants to talk about their roads and their priorities, and the best way to do that is a very efficient manner that the minister's suggested.

So I want to just thank him for that, and his staff, so we look forward to moving on.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Ste. Rose.

An Honourable Member: No, Emerson.

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, Emerson. I blame the chocolate bar.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Thank you for the elevation in the portfolio, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Minister, the—as you know, the wind farm has been given the green light and the go-ahead to build in the St. Joseph area. I met with the contractors the other night at the open house, and they have a concern that the first seven miles on 201 highway may not be RTAC'd and is restricted—a

part of it is restricted, and their question was: Could that possibly be—could they get a permit to bring their material and their equipment in so that they can facilitate the development of this project and keep it on time?

Mr. Ashton: Yeah, certainly, I think the member is aware of where we have restrictions on RTAC roads. The appropriate way would be through a permit. Certainly, we're—work in some cases to upgrade the roads to non-restricted RTAC access. We've seen that in a number of highways and it's going to continue to be the trend over the next few years, but I will undertake on the specifics to pass that on to the relevant part of the department.

Certainly, we recognize when there are new developments, there are also new traffic flows and new logistical challenges, so I appreciate the fact the member's raised this.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I'll be looking forward to that response and be able to pass it on to the appropriate people and the contractors. Thank you.

Then, since I've now been the designate, I—on another topic and in regards to upgrading highways, Mr. Minister, you'll have to understand that there has been significant lobbying for a bridge over the Red River in the Letellier district. You may have heard of that in the past, probably more than you'd like to have heard it, even as you weren't Minister of Transportation at the time.

However, what we're seeing is that the bridge is being built, but we would like to know if there is any movement in upgrading the highways on either side of the bridge to make full use of that bridge?

Mr. Ashton: Yeah, the key focus, obviously, is the bridge and, certainly, I am more than aware of the background with the bridge prior to being minister. And by having an RTAC bridge, it's the first step, and, obviously, we'll look at the highway connections afterwards in future capital budgets, but we are focussing very much on the particular needs of the bridge right now. And I know the member has certainly advocated for it, and it's certainly been recognized—the need in the area. So we will look at the status of the highway itself in future capital programs.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. I just have in my possession a resolution from the R.M. of Franklin that—dated April 29th—it indicates that the bridge being constructed near Letellier—and

the WHEREASes—that they would like the road upgraded to Provincial 200 south from the bridge on the east side and to 75 on the west side, just so that the minister can consider this in his capital budget. And understanding that the bridge will be completed by the end of the year, optimistically, but, certainly, by March 31st.

I would suggest that it would be to the benefit of the municipality of Franklin and all of the people in that area, the other businesses there, that if we could see something in a more concrete fashion, then, just looking forward, would the minister consider giving us a time frame on an upgrade?

Mr. Ashton: In terms of the bridge, obviously, our target for the bridge is no later than March 31st, 2011. That's certainly important, given the stimulus funding, which is dependent on the full completion project by that date. If it's finished earlier, obviously, that would be a positive development, but we are working very diligently.

And I do want to commend staff and—on the contracting side, because certainly this has been a priority. We do have a very significant capital program. So there's a lot of demands on resources, and we have clearly targeted this bridge and, as I said, March 31st, 2011, is our targeted completion date.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. We're certainly appreciative of the fact that the bridge is being built.

And I'd be remiss if I didn't point out, to the east side of the bridge, that there's seven miles of 60 percent restrictions on the road to the east side, and then it becomes 90 percent. When we talk about facilitating the wind farms and the construction of the wind farms, and trying to keep the cost in line and, then, I'm sure that that's a concern as well to you, Mr. Minister, as it is to everyone. Even though there is a contractor involved, I'm sure that there's always extenuating circumstances and cost is always a factor.

What we do know is that a lot of the material that's necessary for the wind farms' construction will come from the east side of the river and, apparently, from what I hear from the contractor, is that they can find an alternate route to get over there and be competitive. However, coming back becomes an issue. They can't drive empty down the 65 percent restricted road, and then they are not competitive, and the cost rises.

Is there some way that we can have your staff take a look at this particular seven miles from the Letellier Bridge to 200 south where it hits the 90 percent—considering that the road was built at the same time to the same standards and has had the same type of traffic over it for many, many years—I would suggest to the minister and to his staff that it's quite capable of carrying the trucks empty coming back. But at 65 percent they can't do that. So that, I would ask the minister to have his staff look into that as well, if he would. Thank you.

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly, as the member can appreciate, one of the key focuses of our 10-year capital plan has been turning around the increasing number of highways that were faced with restrictions or, in some cases, increased restrictions.

* (14:50)

We made an announcement a short time ago about the number of highways that were taken off RTAC restricted access. That's very much a function of the capital program, and there's been some significant work. The one that comes to mind is Highway 68 between 5 and 6, which, I know, certainly the member for Lakeside will be aware of, and I do want to indicate that we will continue to focus in on not only the enhancements to the system but also upgrades to the system, and one of the key elements of having that long-term capital plan is it does give us the ability over time to really focus in on both the existing RTAC network, which is important, but also potential future RTAC routes as well. So we'll certainly look at this specific section in that context.

And I do want to stress again that the department's more than aware of a lot of the significant economic development that's taken place in various different regions across rural Manitoba. I certainly mentioned it in terms of the petroleum industry in southwest Manitoba when the member for Arthur-Virden raised some issues earlier. But we're certainly aware of some of the developments in southeast Manitoba as well. The wind farm, again, is one aspect of it.

In other cases we're often looking at inland terminals or we're looking at agri-businesses that have developed throughout the member's area, and we do look at that very seriously and I know certain of our regional people, in preparing our capital project list for our capital, you know, 10-year plan, have been looking at that as well. So, in a general sense, certainly, we are looking at some

enhancements to the system, and I'll make sure that we undertake to look at the specific section the member is talking about.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I just have a few questions with respect to CentrePort. And just wanted to start off with, you know, the announcement was made roughly about a year ago, and I'm just wondering if the minister could update us with where the project is at.

Mr. Ashton: Perhaps, this—to start the response off, I would like to table a document that's conceptual alignments. The initial alignments may be useful for members; certainly we can provide those documents. Now, this deals with the—sort of the immediate periphery in terms of that.

And, first of all, I want to indicate that one of the key elements with CentrePort has been our upgrade to Highway 75. I did list the—some of the specific projects when we started Estimates. I can indicate that, since 2005, we've completed \$84.5 million and, coincidentally, we will be in Morris tonight. I will be there and look forward to the open house, which will also look at the flood protection related challenges with Highway 75 in the Morris area. We also have approvals for additional upgrades on Highway 75, and I can get into some of the specific details if members are interested. But we have over \$80 million—and the key element with Highway 75 is that we're moving to interstate standards and I think, really, that's, you know, one of the key elements on the highway system.

We've also identified, in terms of CentrePort, some of the specific logistical challenges in our highways in and around the city of Winnipeg, and I can get into some more details perhaps if the members are interested. It's important to note there, by the way, that we have, because of the—having a long-term capital project, we've been able to plan, over a three-year period, some very significant improvements that—in or around the city of Winnipeg that will play a key role in terms of the traffic flows into and out of the CentrePort itself.

We're also working on some of the key rail connections. I think it's important to note that we have three class 1 rail companies that serve Manitoba: CN, CP and Burlington Northern. We have been working with the rail companies as well because that's a key element. I would include, in turn, CentrePort, as well, by the way, the Port of Churchill, HudBay rail line, as being the key part of it, and also our other rail connections and road

connections to ports, whether it be Prince Rupert, whether it be Vancouver or whether it be Thunder Bay.

I think a lot of people aren't aware, by the way, that given the growth in the global economy that's going to be very much focussed on India and China and Russia, we are well positioned with all three projected growth countries over the next period of time. Geographically, we are in a good position in terms of sea, through either the west coast ports or through the Port of Churchill. We are the closest ports. We have access to those closest ports.

And I do want to stress, by the way, the airport itself is a huge part of that. We are working right now with both the airport authority and with CentrePort on an Arctic air link. We're well positioned geographically to have cargo connections by air to Krasnoyarsk in Russia. We're also looking at probably either Delhi or Mumbai in India.

And I think people aren't necessarily aware that we have a 24/7 unencumbered airport we—which is a huge asset. We currently have the largest tonnage in terms of any air cargo airport in Canada. We're in the top seven in terms of passengers, obviously, but there's more cargo, more tonnage, coming out of Winnipeg today, than there is out of any other airport. So we're well positioned in terms of that.

What I can stress, by the way, is I can get into, perhaps, some specifics that members are interested in, but I'm also the minister for the board, and I do want to stress that we have—a CO's been hired. There has been a draft, a business plan. There's a land-use plan that has been drafted and we have been working very actively with the two municipalities, Winnipeg and Rosser, on some of the land issues.

So, a lot has been happening but given the almost unlimited potential of CentrePort, I think the member could appreciate the degree to which there's going to be some very significant activity on this over the next period of time. So that's more of an opening, you know, comment. I know the member may have some specific questions on specific items that we're more than glad to share.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I will look forward to the meeting in Morris tonight to see what the proposals will be in regard to Highway 75. I'm just hoping that there will be some form of proposal to present to the public. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Well, what we're doing is we're going to be sharing all the basic proposals and, I mean, I

know the briefing the member's aware of. It's going to be an open house. It's going to look at—give the, you know, the people of Morris and surrounding area, but also Manitoba, in general, opportunity to see a lot of the latest work that's been there.

We've—we already started in the terms of the hydraulic work because the hydraulic planning is going to be critical to any of the various combinations. But we thought it was important, at this stage, to share all of the latest information that we have in terms of the work that's been done up to now.

One of the advantages of having the open house at this point in time is to give us the opportunity to get feedback from the public. I know, certainly, I've already had discussion to meet with the mayor and council and the member. We start with Morris. We've met with the R.M. as well and other surrounding municipalities. So there will be a full presentation tonight and I look forward to some fairly detailed feedback.

*(15:00)

One of the reasons we do this, by the way, is because experience has shown in the department that certainly there is, you know, very significant local knowledge within the department, you know, with our regional people and various elements of those involved with the engineering and hydraulic work. But there's also local knowledge and expertise and we respect that. So that's why we're going to be there, and I will be there personally tonight to kick off the open house.

Mrs. Taillieu: Other than the key portion of the whole development of CentrePort, and I mean Highway 75 and ensuring that that can remain open as much as possible during springtime flooding.

The other ports that I'm wanting to know time lines are, I guess, is the proposed bypass around St. Norbert and the proposed bypass past Headingley. My understanding is that the priority would be first on the St. Norbert bypass and then the Headingley bypass. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Well, there's a two-pronged approach both to Headingley and St. Norbert, and I appreciate the member's raised both of them. There's also the Morris, you know, bypass is often discussed and one of the key things that has been pointed out, by the way as it were, certainly they're working with the community and surrounding communities on any and all of the associated traffic issues related to any

upgrading of 75 in and around Morris. And I do want to indicate, too, by the way, that we're also working with Morris on the Main Street portion. In fact, the key element there right now is the upgrading of the utilities that Morris is undertaking this year. And we're committed to seeing the upgrade in Morris itself.

And both in Headingley and in St. Norbert, we're upgrading existing locations. I don't know if the member is aware some of the work we're doing in co-operation with the federal government under stimulus funding in Headingley and working on long-term bypass considerations—certainly both St. Norbert and Headingley, but particularly St. Norbert having been identified by the trucking industry as a significant bottleneck. You know, if you look coming off Highway 75, you know, there's an extended speed reduction with fairly limited capacity in terms of lanes as you enter into St. Norbert and into the city of Winnipeg. So we have identified that.

The current time frame that was our focus over the next three years is on a number of the immediate projects that have been announced. I'll give some of the details again. These are all priority projects. These all deal with the immediate enhancements in and around the CentrePort site and leading into it. So that's been our first approach. In terms of time frames for St. Norbert and Headingley, it's too early to determine that. Again, there's—these will be very significant undertakings given the settlement, given the existing highways. So what we're doing in the short term is upgrading the existing highways reflecting some of the traffic flows that are there today or are projected over the next few years.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thanks. And given the minister's answer, this is likely a fairly long-term project to develop all of these bypasses. Has there been any discussion then with the rural municipalities involved as to their land-use plans and whether they will be restricted in planning because of these long-range plans? And, obviously, they don't want to be restricted forever and would need to tell people whether they—what they can do with the uses of their land in the land-use plans. So they need to know future plans by the government. And I have some indication that, perhaps, some of the municipalities are a little concerned because they don't want to be held up in planning process for years and years and years, you know, which could take 10, 15, 20 years. The people that own the land need to be advised

whether there's going to be this project or not, and when.

So I'm just wondering if there's been discussions, then, with the municipalities in terms of land use.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I think, perhaps, the best way to respond is to stress the preliminary nature of anything that would involve a bypass in St. Norbert or Headingley. The municipalities are certainly very aware of that. The reason we're focussing in and around CentrePort itself is, obviously, that is, you know, without those connections, we wouldn't have the ability to set up the intermodal facility that is in place.

So we have, for a three-year period, emphasized on that level. The member raises good points in terms of the future planning horizon for the municipalities and, certainly, as we move from what is essentially a conceptual stage to the next step on the engineering process, which is really the scoping, where you scope out exactly what a bypass would entail, that's the point at which you would get into some of the greater specifics.

I want to stress, by the way, that under any and all circumstances, this is a long-term project. We don't see this as a three-year investment and we're done. If you look at some of the equivalents that are taking place across North America, you'll see very similar patterns, very focussed on land acquisition, land-based issues, service issues, combined with immediate access issues. But we're going to be dealing with some very significant realignments, I believe, over time, on rail and on road, and some very significant developments on the air side as well. So the key thing I want to stress is it has been mapped out conceptually, but it has not moved to the next stage, which is the scoping stage. And we will be working with the municipalities very closely on the—any further movement on either one of those bypasses or, for that matter, any of the other elements of CentrePort that involve a change in the current transportation infrastructure.

Mrs. Taillieu: Has there been any discussion with land owners in regard to land acquisition, then, in the Morris vicinity?

Mr. Ashton: No, because we're—I've said that I was talking to—about the flood protection element that we're going to be looking at tonight. Largely because it's now moving from conceptual, you know, to scoping stage. There's some very key issues that we have to look at, particularly on the hydraulic side. A

lot of the hydraulic planning that we've already committed to is going to be focussed on making sure that we can accomplish the goal, which is to bring 75 to the standards of the Interstate, which is a one-in-30-year flood.

So as we do that, that will give greater identification on specific land issues. At this point in time, until we complete the conceptual work, the hydraulic work and the engineering work, the alignment of any of the changes could vary, you know, fairly significantly.

But as soon as we're able to identify the preferred option—the feasible option, probably, is the better description of it—then we would, certainly, look at some of the land acquisition areas. I think the key element here, by the way, is because we're looking at, for example, the relocation of the Morris River, which I know is something that the community has also raised. Certainly, I know the mayor has raised this as a potential part of the solution. That will obviously have implications, if it turns out to be appropriate and if it works.

*(15:10)

Similarly, there are some other issues involving relocation of dikes and elements of the highways work itself, which could impact on land. So that'll really be something we'll have a much better indication of once we've done the work over the next year or so, because we're really at the point of some very significant design work on the various options that are out there.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I'm just wondering if the minister could indicate when he's looking at a completion—or when they're looking at a completion of the CentrePort project.

Mr. Ashton: CentrePort Canada Way, which I'm sure the member's aware of—you know, has a variety of components—is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2014.

Mrs. Stefanson: And can the minister just indicate where we're—how much money is from the Province is being put into the project?

Mr. Ashton: The—that specific amount of what we're investing in CentrePort—a total cost of 212 million, and it's cost-shared on a 50-50 basis on a project-by-project basis with the federal government.

Mrs. Stefanson: And is that coming out of your government department, or is it shared with other government departments?

Mr. Ashton: MIT is the department responsible for CentrePort and for the construction of the infrastructure which is part of CentrePort Canada Way.

Mrs. Stefanson: So how much money is being budgeted in this year's budget and where would we find that in the budget Estimates book?

Mr. Ashton: The cash flow this year is \$90 million, and of course, the line item the member would be looking at would be our capital, \$266 million capital. It's various capital projects that are identified in terms of our capital announcements and it comes from the capital appropriation, highway capital appropriation.

Mrs. Stefanson: So—sorry, just to be clear, that's 90 million from this budget?

Mr. Ashton: That's the—yes, the current cash flow.

Mrs. Stefanson: So how is—what is the breakdown for the 212 million? Is that—is the 212 just the provincial government portion and the federal government is matching that?

Mr. Ashton: It's—that's the total cost of CentrePort Canada Way. It does include the other elements which I referenced earlier because, really, CentrePort is about a whole series of improvements. But certainly, it—that's the total investment on the CentrePort Canada Way portion of it. Yes, it's 212 million, 50 percent shared by the federal and provincial governments.

Mrs. Stefanson: Are there any consultants currently being paid for by the provincial government on the CentrePort project?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the—we did engage MMM-MM group, pardon me—because of the tight time frames and the intent to move to a design build. We're—we've had some experience in major projects the last number of years where design build has proven to be a very effective way to ensure timely completion and ensure it's completed with a strong emphasis on fiscal controls. And we're now—we've now proceeded with SNC-Lavalin onto the actual design build stage.

Mrs. Stefanson: On the triple M contract, how much was the contract for, and is that—well, how much is the contract on that?

Mr. Ashton: Two point eight million.

Mrs. Stefanson: And is that 2.8 million, is that included in the 90-million capital financing for the project, or is that separate and apart?

Mr. Ashton: Yeah, in terms of accounting procedures, it's included because it's directly related to the design of the project.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, just to be clear, that is included in the 90-million capital for the project?

Mr. Ashton: It's included in the capital for the project, yeah. And the—any of the design elements are part of the cost. So whether it be this group or SNC-Lavalin, again, it's the same with any of our construction projects. The consulting work that's done, engineer work that's done, the hydraulic work is part of the design, and it's part of the cost of the project itself, yeah.

Mrs. Stefanson: You mentioned triple M, and, I believe, SNC-Lavalin. Are there—are those the only two, right now, contracts that the government, the provincial government, is paying for with respect to this project?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. There is a smaller contract with AECOM to deal with some of the sewer and other related issues to deal with CentrePort.

Mrs. Stefanson: And the 2.8 million that the minister mentioned about the triple M contract, is that the total number that the provincial government has put into this project? Are there other governments that have also paid for this, or does the provincial government pay entirely for that contract with triple M with respect to the CentrePort?

Mr. Ashton: Engineering costs are eligible under the federal cost sharing.

Mrs. Stefanson: So the minister was mentioning the total project is 212 million that is shared between—50/50 between the provincial and federal governments, and that 90 million is in the budget for this year in terms of the capital costs. How much has been expended so far on the project?

Mr. Ashton: Nothing construction. We're not really into the construction season yet. We will be shortly, hopefully, and what would have been cash flow currently would have been in terms of some of the preliminary engineering work. But it is proceeding to construction, so you'll see some very significant construction coming up.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there any provincial money going towards the operations of the ongoing—I mean, I guess, the—or are there any expenses, I guess? I know that there's a board set up. Are there—is there an annual budget for CentrePort right now that the—

in terms of operations that the provincial government is contributing to?

* (15:20)

Mr. Ashton: The board itself, and the actual corporate entity, if you like, is—has been funded or, pardon me, is being funded under the Economic Partnership Agreement. It's a five-year agreement with Canada. It's been established as a non-profit CentrePort Corporation legally. The specific cost sharing of the \$4.025 million is Manitoba's one point—well, actually, I'll restate this, it's \$1,932,500; Canada's \$1,575,000.

Mrs. Stefanson: So is that an annual expense for your government department then?

Mr. Ashton: That's the five-year agreement so, obviously, the portion from that, you know, on an annual—the annual amount will come out of that. There—I should indicate we have hired a CEO. The board is in place, so it has certainly started, and it's been very active on the—both the development side and the promotion side.

So, it is a long-term agreement. I do want to put on the record again, too, that it was very important to us that we did have the federal cost sharing. It's not only the financial side, but I think it's clear recognition that the federal government sees that CentrePort has huge potential and has significant viability from an economic development standpoint.

As the CentrePort in Canada, we actually are, I think, on the cusp of having the inland port, something that's growing internationally as a concept, but this is a—for us it's not just the cost sharing, it's also the—a clear partnership with the federal government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can the minister indicate whether or not—he mentioned that there is a contract with MMM with respect to CentrePort? Does MMM have any other contracts with your department or with the provincial government right now?

Mr. Ashton: They have been involved with land-use planning for CentrePort, the contract.

Mrs. Stefanson: With land-use planning in—what are the size of those contracts with MMM?

Mr. Ashton: We don't have that information currently available. I'll undertake to provide it to the member. In fact, perhaps I'll provide it to the committee at the next committee here.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the minister table the land-use plan for CentrePort today?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's not complete yet, but certainly once it is complete, we will be in a position to table it publicly.

Mrs. Stefanson: When is that expected to be completed?

Mr. Ashton: We're anticipating probably in a month or so to have it complete.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the minister endeavour to get me a copy of that when it is completed?

Mr. Ashton: Sure. I think we've certainly seen already in terms of the business plan, for example, there's been a significant outreach with stakeholders. You know, publicly, we're now moving to—I should mention an open house in Assiniboia Downs, you know, for some of the local issues. But certainly in terms of land-use planning, I'll undertake to make sure that information is available to the member and other members who might be interested.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that. Can the minister also indicate where the agreement at—is at between Rosser and the City of Winnipeg?

Mr. Ashton: I can say this, being the former minister of IGA, that the lead department on the issues related to municipalities is, as you know, the former IGA, the LGA, so there have been ongoing discussions. I would characterize them, not being involved directly but certainly from reports, as being productive.

I do want to put on the record, by the way, that I think both municipalities see the importance of CentrePort, and I think there's been some demonstrated willingness on the part of both municipalities to come up with a solution that meets the need of, obviously, their municipality but also reflects the huge strategic importance of this to the province, so I'm optimistic that we will see an agreement between the municipalities and CentrePort.

Are we there yet though? No, it's still under discussion.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that, and I'm sure some of my colleagues will want to follow up on some of those questions in that area.

But I do have a—just a couple of questions. The minister said earlier that we're well positioned in Manitoba and—with respect to CentrePort, and I think

certainly geographically we are, and this is a very important issue for Manitoba and for our economy.

Just wondering if the minister could indicate—recently British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have signed the New West Partnership Trade Agreement, which clearly we are left out of, and I wonder if the minister could indicate how being left out of that kind of an agreement, a trade agreement, will affect the CentrePort project in Manitoba.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I'm not the Minister of Trade, but I will state very clearly that there has been a significant issue over the last number of years in terms of internal trade barriers. It has taken place at the Council of the Federation level, and certainly our former premier was very involved with that. Manitoba's played a lead role. So we have been involved with some significant work there.

I can indicate that we're focussing particularly on transportation issues. I was just in Regina last week, and I met with both the Saskatchewan and the Alberta minister of transportation. We—coming out of the joint Saskatchewan-Manitoba Cabinet meeting, the first one of its kind, had a commitment to focus on a number of issues. But one of the priority issues, if not the priority, was transportation. We'll be having a follow-up meeting, you know, within the next month or two—we're finalizing a date as we speak—that will bring together not just the two governments and government officials, but also stakeholders.

We're working on a specific focus on some of the differential treatment of transportation issues, particularly on the trucking side, and I believe that we can achieve some common sense harmonization, if you want to use that term, between the two provinces. So we're proceeding. One of the things that is assisting us is the fact that we are able to invest the highway capital program with dollars that are now, you know—it's the second year in a row at record levels, \$366 million. And the reason I say that, by the way, is because it's given us the ability to turn around the increasing number of roads that were being restricted.

I'm talking about, you know, RTAC roads, and many of the regulations we're dealing with often are there to protect highways that are vulnerable because of the condition they're in. As you improve highways, you can certainly moving in that direction. I know the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) talked about some of the specific issues of the petroleum industry. Again, we've been working with

the industry, recognizing the differential approach in Saskatchewan, and we've actually targeted that.

And the key issue for us, quite frankly, I would say with CentrePort is—has been, this has been strongly supported by the federal government. That's critical. It is of national strategic significance. So I would say, in this particular case, that we hope that that support will continue, and I have every reason to believe it will.

* (15:30)

I've certainly been involved in discussions with various federal ministers including Minister Yelich, the western diversification minister, and, of course, the—our regional minister, Vic Toews. And we've received every indication they will be very supportive and, quite frankly, we see very few impediments to the expansion of CentrePort, largely because we have all the key elements, both geographically, but also in terms of our governance, our structure, our investment in the capital side and growing interest from stakeholders in the private sector.

So, you know, I was actually in Regina when they made the announcement. I can tell you it had no bearing on our discussions in terms of transportation. The trade file and internal trade [*inaudible*] are totally separate. We're working on an ongoing basis with our neighbours to the east and west on the transportation side, and you're going to see some very significant improvements in that over the next number of years as we bring CentrePort to fruition.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think the minister would agree that a major component of CentrePort is, in fact, the trade corridor and especially as global trade increases, particularly trade with China and the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor, inland ports in North America are going to become extremely important. And part of that is going to be ensuring that we've got the provinces to the west of us, in particular a big part of that who do a lot of trade over in the Asia-Pacific Gateway, and Manitoba is a significant—could be a significant hub for trade and for transportation, and what is concerning to me is that a—the New West Partnership trade agreement came up—came about, and Manitoba was missing from that agreement, and clearly that's going to have very significant impact on our ability as a trade corridor and on the inland port.

And I know the minister indicates that, you know, maybe it won't, that yes, of course, talks

continue, but when we are not part of the trading bloc that was—that is significantly impacted by this, it will significantly impact us. And I think the minister needs to accept the fact that, and at least admit to the fact that this is a significant loss for Manitoba, not being a part of this trade agreement.

Will he indicate and will he just admit that Manitoba not being a part of that will have a significant impact on our future with trading partners to the west of us?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think it's very important to stress the huge progress we've seen through our work on mid-continental trade corridor, with our commitment to NASCO, and I think it's important to note, by the way, that one of the key areas that we're well-positioned in is our geographic connection in one of the growing areas in North America, which is the mid-west in the United States. I don't think people realize the rate at which it's becoming one contiguous industrial and transportation area, and we have, again, the advantage of that connection to Russia, to China and to India.

In fact, there's increasing recognition—they're being described as the BRIC countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China. They are going to be in the top four or five economies within the next 20-30 years. It's really just a question of which ones grow as rapidly as the others. So rather than the more pessimistic view of the member opposite, I look at some of the huge trends that are taking place with international trade; China, for example. I don't think there's an area of Manitoba we're not trading significantly with China, with the agricultural. My own community of Thompson with nickel—about 40 percent of it goes to China. So this is all a huge part of the transportation networks. I wouldn't want to leave on the record any suggestion that someone perhaps leaked from another jurisdiction would see developments on internal trade and different visions of that would be any kind of barrier because, quite frankly, if anything, we're seeing huge progress. I'm right at the Churchill Gateway. Again, we've been very aggressive on that file. The border crossing file, we're significantly involved there in terms of upgrading our border crossings.

I mentioned this before, but if you compare us to 10 years ago, certainly we've seen some significant changes in this province and some—particularly the opening up of international markets. We've been very aggressive on that. So I know the member will participate in debates with the Trade Minister on the

specific mechanisms for internal trade. I just want to stress that we've seen, year over year, notwithstanding some of the more immediate challenges with the economic slowdown, although there's been some encouraging signs on the transportation side. Licensing information is certainly indicating that shipments are up, certainly at port, the various ports that serve Manitoba.

So, yeah, I just want to put on the record that CentrePort is well on its way to being open for business, and we see a huge potential to service not just domestic markets; I mean, it's not just about our 1.2 million population and growing. It's about global markets that are, quite frankly, in the tens of millions, in the billions, and I think what people are—should be aware of, as well, is the growth on every sector: air, marine, and trucking. So I just want to stress, and I realize the member may want more of a political discussion on other issues another time, but we're very bullish on the future of Manitoba in terms of transportation, and it's a vision that's shared by the federal government. I think it's a vision that's shared by all Manitobans. So prospects are very bright for CentrePort.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I have about three or four quick issues that I'm hoping the minister can provide some answers to or give some direction on. The first one is Highway 2 and the safety concerns that have been raised by the community of Souris and Glenwood with regard to that highway. There seems to be some very serious concerns with the lack of upgrades on this road. It's utilized by agriculture producers, commercial haulers, and motorists that travel through this region to access businesses and services either in the community or further on through the western part of the province, be it Brandon, Winnipeg.

And Highway 2 is also a regular bus, or school bus route, for the southwest Horizon School Division, and it has been raised by the school division officials that this is a concern for them. So I'm just wanting to know if the minister can provide me with an update on any upcoming road fixes for this piece of highway that travels through the community of Souris.

Mr. Ashton: I thank the member for raising the question. There is some paperwork being done on 2 and Rathwell, which I know is further east in the specific area she's mentioning but certainly I thank her for raising the issue.

Mrs. Rowat: Just to be clear, so the minister's indicating that there will be work done on Highway 2 to address the concerns that have been raised by the municipality, the school division, and individuals within the community?

Mr. Ashton: I'll undertake to look at the specific concern the member is raising in the specific area. I did reference some of the other work that's taking place on Highway 2 but we'll certainly undertake to look at it in the department.

Mrs. Rowat: I would expect that'll come through correspondence or discussion in the House.

Another issue, with regard to Highway 340, this is an issue that comes up quite regularly between myself and the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen).

* (15:40)

Can the minister indicate to me if there's been some serious discussion on addressing hard surfacing 340 for the remainder of the, I believe, it's around 10 kilometres? Safety has become a very serious and increasing issue with regard to that highway, and we really would like to see government implementing some upgrades to that highway. Can you give me an update on the status of that?

Mr. Ashton: I believe the member is talking about the middle section between 2 and 1, and that's certainly in the longer term capital plan. We're currently looking at our, you know, our specific longer term capital projects, so it's certainly under consideration.

Mrs. Rowat: So the five—is it a part of the five-year plan? Is it part of any ongoing discussion?

I think the community—we've—the community has done everything it could possibly do to raise the attention to this government on the safety issues concerned. They've done petitions. They've done letters. I know that the municipalities have raised this issue with the minister. Is there something further he can share that would bring some assurances to the community members that this is a priority?

Mr. Ashton: As we're looking at the current five-year plan, it's under consideration.

Mrs. Rowat: Could the minister give me anything further on that than being considered? This is something that I think the municipality would love to hear, if there is something further that he can provide with regard to that road?

Mr. Ashton: When I say it's under consideration, that's not meant to be facetious; it's, I think, in consideration of the fact that we are finalizing the current five-year plan and, certainly, appreciate the member's advocating on behalf of the community and other communities. I just want to let her know that there are many other highways that we have to look at, in fact, many of which are advocated by her own colleagues or my own colleagues.

So when I say it's under consideration, we're certainly aware of some of the issues that are there, and I know we've got increased capital budget, but just like anything else, there are limits. So that's where we have to look at all of the parties across the province and, as I said, it is under consideration for the current five-year plan. And, once we do complete that, then we'll be in a position to make specific announcements on specific projects.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm assuming that this one will fall right into that category as well. So I'll raise it, and then I'm wondering if you could then share with me when the five-year plan is expected to be complete and announced so that my municipalities or my communities can then have a sense of whether they made the cut or not.

The issue that I'm going to raise right here is within the R.M. of Whitehead and it's Road 117 west, also known as Pioneer Road, and that's just off of the Trans-Canada Highway. There's a high volume of truck traffic that travels that route, and I'm just wanting to know if the minister has given consideration for a turning lane at that intersection. It's—it turns off onto the service of a Pioneer elevator. A piece of the road is being designated by the low-bridge early-warning system on Highway 1A at Kemnay as their detour route and the establishment of a designated hazardous good route east of Brandon. This route has become a road of choice for truck traffic travelling west and the community—or the municipality is feeling that there seems to be more non-local traffic than local traffic on this road. So they're looking at this minister's interest in entertaining a turning lane at the intersection on Trans-Canada Highway and they would even like to take it one step further and have Infrastructure and Transportation assume responsibility of the road.

So if you could just provide me with your comment and status of that initiative, if you're familiar with it, and indicate to me if you have something further than just indicating it may be considered in the future in the five-year plan?

Mr. Ashton: In discussion with staff, we'll look at the specific circumstance of the member to provide more details—we'll undertake to respond. Perhaps it might be appropriate in writing. And I'm not trying to be evasive here, but I did make a commitment to the critic, in the interest of time here, to try and take some of these issues under advisement. So we'll take this one under advisement.

Mrs. Rowat: Okay, this one would be more current. The community of Rapid City—we've raised this issue before with regard to spring thaw highway restrictions, and that apparently—it's been brought to my attention, just in the last few days, that there are three families in Rapid City that are trying to build new homes and contractors can't get their materials into the community. So I'm hoping that the minister would advise staff to work with the community and see what can be done to ensure that the contractors can get their materials in as quickly as possible.

The restrictions on this community are ongoing. I think from the response that I've received before from Lemieux, the minister of—former minister of Infrastructure was, get a permit. So these community members are looking at building a home and need the support and guidance of your department.

Mr. Ashton: I think the member answered her own question. When you have a highway with the restrictions, it's there for good reason, in the sense of the vulnerability of the road surface during the spring to significant wear and tear, significant damage with any kind of heavy loads. So, certainly, the department looks on a case-by-case basis for—in terms of the specific circumstances with permits and does issue them where required. So certainly I would encourage the member to ensure that they are looking at the permit process.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, this community is unique in that it has actually no way of getting heavy truck traffic into the community. It's restricted all the way around, so it's a unique situation, and it really needs to be looked at at ways that can be creative in helping address such—issues such as was listed by my constituent.

One further and final issue is the issue with regard to Brian Aby [*phonetic*]. He's an individual who lives along the Trans-Canada Highway. I'm trying to get some answers for him with regard to an issue with permits and getting some information provided to him with regard to development of his property. And I know that there is issues with regard to his home being on—off his property and on a bit of

highway property, but that was a mistake done by the departments years ago, but this individual is looking at getting some answers. They've been looking since last July for some answers and some guidance from this government so he can move forward and get his property developed.

I asked for a meeting, or encouraged the minister to meet with Mr. Abby or Mr. Aby [*phonetic*] on March 17th and have received very little in response to this situation. I'm hoping that he can provide me with an update on this situation. I have spoken to staff within his office—I believe his special adviser—and I'm getting a little bit concerned that his special adviser has refused to talk to Mr. Aby [*phonetic*] and has used my staffperson to be the go between, and to me that really doesn't address the issue. We really do need department staff talking to the individual to resolve the issue.

So I'm raising it today asking for some feedback and some guidance and some assurance that Mr. Aby [*phonetic*] can work through the issues with the department and get his property—looking and access to it—looking and working the way he'd like it to.

*(15:50)

Mr. Ashton: First of all, in terms of the process in terms of any access—I'm presuming they would've contacted highways. That's the first place to start. I can indicate I wouldn't normally meet with individual Manitobans in terms of access. I'm not the—I'm not a traffic specialist and I don't presume to be. I'm an economist so—and what that says about my skill set, but I do respect our traffic engineers. [*interjection*] And his name's Steven as well, but we have a—except my—the only person calls me Steven is my mom, but that's another story. The member is distracting me here.

What I want to stress is—you know, first of all, I think that, in terms of my office's role in this, I think we do respect the role of individual MLAs. And when individual MLAs and their office bring forward issues, they probably have more detailed information that, in this particular case, would be very useful for us to learn from. So I don't think there was any disrespect indicated there. I think that's fairly standard. In fact, one of the first things I ask, in terms of staff, is if an issue is raised by the MLA that we try and get the full information. I think it's—just in terms of time management, rather than reinventing the wheel and getting information on additional basis.

And I always assume, too, that when MLAs bring forward issues, it's no different than what I do. I do my homework. I get some sense of what the issues are and, you know, in terms of any advocacy, it's based on that, that information. And I often find MLAs on either side of the House are—have a better sense, probably, than anyone.

So I don't know the degree of contact with the department on this, and certainly I will undertake—again, I know there has been contact here—to ensure that contact is there. I do want to stress that I know access issues are always difficult because the department does have to look at a lot of issues: obviously, the convenience of the access, but on the other hand, some of the traffic issues and traffic safety issues. So, I don't politically interfere in that. I don't think previous ministers have in this government or any government.

But certainly, you know, I am more than willing to ask the department, you know, to continue some of the discussions that have been ongoing, apparently, on this issue. And again, I'm not sure what the latest contact is with the department, but I know the department does have to look at a variety of things, and we certainly encourage ongoing dialogue on requests such as this.

But I do want to stress—and not on this case, but sort of the more general sense—that there are times the department has to say, for reasons of safety and traffic control, that some of the desired access that landowners have cannot be accommodated, and I think that's fairly standard. And I don't underestimate the difficulty for the department in dealing with any individual circumstance, but they do have to balance all factors.

Mrs. Rowat: This is—I guess I just want to put that on the record that it appears to be taking a bit of time.

I understand that there are certain facets of this that take some research and some investigation, but this individual is running into some financial challenges because of the delay in the processes that need to take place. And I guess, you know, my constituent has indicated some concern when he's been told that—by an individual that this can—I can make this drag out for as long as I want. So I'm just wanting to raise this as a concern. I understand that there's certain processes that take place. I understand that safety is of paramount issue, but I also do understand that processes can take a longer time if

there's a lack of interest in wanting to get this resolved for an individual.

So I'm just encouraging the minister to look at this file. As he had indicated earlier, he's welcoming written background on files and I will be providing that to him and—in the next few hours. So I do appreciate his interest and I do encourage him to have staff meet with this individual as soon as possible. Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): My first question to the minister comes from a young student from Springs Christian Academy by the name of Braydon Wall [*phonetic*]. And his question to the minister is: He feels that Highway 207, which is between Garvin Road—which is at PTH 13 and PTH 15, is far too bumpy. And he writes that one of the things wrong with Springfield are that on Highway 207 to Pine Ridge church it's bumpy. So I was wondering if the minister could respond to him and indicate to him, is there any plan on behalf of the department to do something about that stretch of highway?

As the minister will know, it's a major route for trucks with gravel. And the trucks come out of the gravel pits; they go west on PTH 213, which is Garvin Road; they then turn left on to 207; cut down to 15, turn right and continue heading west into the city. So that road is a major truck route for heavy trucks laden with gravel. Are there any plans to work on the bumpiness of that road?

Mr. Ashton: I just want to thank the member for the question, and I certainly see, by the quality of the question, that he—it's very well researched. I want to commend Braydon [*phonetic*], I believe, Braydon Wall [*phonetic*]. And that's not a comment on questions that are produced, on a daily basis, by the Tory caucus other than the fact that this one strikes me as particularly well researched. I don't know how old Braydon is but—how old is Braydon?

An Honourable Member: High school.

Mr. Ashton: High school, all right, so maybe a future researcher, for perhaps, our department or for your caucus.

It actually is—there's focus on the intersections in that area, 101, 207, 206, so we are doing some work. And, certainly, we will be looking at 207. The member is quite right; there are some significant traffic flows. And, if you could pass on to Braydon [*phonetic*], I think it's a good question, and we're

certainly looking at doing what we can to improve the road situation in that area.

Mr. Schuler: I had another question that was raised or brought to my attention, and this was at a function. And somebody was indicating, if the minister could, sort of, in his mind, picture a PTH 213 or Garvin Road, when it hits the Perimeter, there's a set of lights that have been put into that intersection. And the question was: Is it possible that you could have flashing amber slash red lights during off hours? For instance, the suggestion was perhaps between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Currently, it takes several minutes for the light to change. And I guess, for those that are working night shift, or those that are going to and from Springfield into the city, that the lights take a long time and there's really very little traffic. Is it possible that, during off-peak hours, that late at night, that those could then become the lights that would basically flash?

Mr. Ashton: I'll pass this concern on to our traffic control section. I know they certainly do look at a variety of factors, including traffic flow, and also some of the relative safety of full operation of lights versus what the member's talking about, which is, essentially, intermittent use of full traffic lights, you know, followed by the flashing red, flashing amber. So we'll certainly undertake to look at it and get back to the member.

Mr. Schuler: If I could get the minister now to travel a little bit further south on PTH 15, crossing over 206 in Dugald, the first two and a half kilometres east of Dugald received new asphalt surfacing or, as it's called by the department, continuous patching, last summer, and we thank the department for having worked on that. We raised it with them and they were very good and, through you, minister, to the department.

Although the citizens of Springfield are grateful for this much needed patching, they recognize that you have to start somewhere. They know that, as you travel east, there are sections that are even in worse condition.

* (16:00)

What are the plans to improve PTH 15 east of Dugald? I drive it and I can attest—and this is an issue that comes up a lot, minister—and I can attest that it is very rough. And we appreciate the fact that at least a section of it was done. And if it's going to be done on an incremental basis, is there a plan in the budget to

keep going further east in rehabilitating some of the very, very severe worn-out sections of that highway?

Mr. Ashton: I will certainly take the member's advocacy under advisement. I do want to stress in the general area that our key focus now is on the intersections at 101, 207, 206 to make sure that we have safe intersections. Certainly, we will look at the condition of the sections of highway the member referenced as well. But I do want to stress that our key focus here is on the safety side with—I'll repeat it—101, 207 and 206, and I think the member knows that those are needed areas. And I certainly appreciate his comments in terms of the department's activity in his area, the new asphalt that was put in place, and I certainly want to agree with him that we—we're working very hard as a department to respond to the main needs in terms of highways throughout the province, including the member's area.

Mr. Schuler: And, minister, what a great segue. Another question that came in—PTH 13 or Garvin Road and 207. Is there any intention, is there any plan to ever put lights in there—simply because of all of the truck traffic, and gravel trucks, and there's a church on the corner, a lot of school buses. Any plans in the future to put a set of lights in there?

Mr. Ashton: The process for putting lights in is based on the warrants, very much on traffic flow and combined traffic flow. I know, for example, I was recently in Steinbach, where because of the tremendous growth in Steinbach there are now significant traffic flows north of Steinbach, and the same process that was used there will be the same process we'd look at any intersection.

Currently, we're not at that point at this intersection. So this is something certainly perhaps down the line might be looked at, but the process for traffic lights is very much determined by specific traffic counts, traffic flows, and the warrants. And this particular intersection would be no different from any other of the intersections. We would not put lights in unless it met the warrants. And if the member is interested in some of the underlying detail—I won't get into that now, but I certainly would indicate the department would be more than happy to contact him directly on the specific criteria we do look at.

Mr. Schuler: As the minister probably knows, he having sat in the House for the last year and a half and heard maybe a few of my petitions, we are pushing for the twinning between the floodway,

basically, and Dugald to have that twinned. And I was wondering—that's PTH 15—I was wondering, is there any plan in the near future to twin that section of highway between, basically, 207 and 206 on Highway 15.

Mr. Ashton: What we've done in that area, as the members knows, is we've dealt with a lot of the safety issues at the intersection. So that is why—that's been our focus, rather than twinning. So the key element here is, I think, very positive for the travelling public in the sense that there were some ongoing safety issues involving intersections, and we have responded accordingly.

Mr. Schuler: When, in fact, the twinning does start, which side would the twinning go on? The north or the south side of PTH 15?

Mr. Ashton: Obviously, it's hypothetical at this point in time because we've taken an approach to deal with the intersections. We're not currently involved with four-laning. So I appreciate the member asking a hypothetical question. I know his interest in this particular area, but we did focus very significantly with some significant investments on the three intersections I mentioned earlier as being the most immediate traffic challenges in the area. And I thank the member for raising these issues.

Mr. Schuler: Sorry, I didn't mean to pose a hypothetical question. In the plan that's in place, is the twinning to go on the south side or the north side or are there no plans as of yet?

Mr. Ashton: There's no plans, and that's why I call it hypothetical. Basically, we've dealt with the intersections as a priority in that area and put a significant amount of time and investment into it.

Mr. Schuler: Could we ask the department is it possible that between—on Highway 15, between 207 and Ravenhurst, where the City of Winnipeg put in a set of lights, is it possible to get those lights synchronized? And the Perimeter lights, I should say. So 207 and 15 are going to get a set of lights. The Perimeter Highway has a set of lights and then, I think, it's Ravenhurst where the lights are. Is it possible to get those synchronized so you don't stop three times?

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Ashton: Once the 101 and 15 intersection is completed by the Floodway Authority we would be in a position to do that. That's the remaining link in the chain here.

Mr. Schuler: The intersections on PTH 15 and 207, 206, I take it they—construction is now under way? Is that fair to say?

Mr. Ashton: Not as of yet, but we're moving forward in terms of the final steps prior to that.

Mr. Schuler: I spent some time with the Premier talking about—and this is now going a bit further west—Highway 59 and the Perimeter. That intersection is a mess. I am getting a lot of complaints about that. It was started about five, six years ago. They started hauling dirt in; it then was stopped. And it's becoming a treacherous corner. A lot of lives are lost there unnecessarily. The trucks coming—and the worst is when the trucks are going west, they have to take a sharp turn right, go north and then take a sharp turn left. It was supposed to be part of a five-year plan. Is it back in the plan? What is the plan for putting a cloverleaf or a turnpike or whatever you call it into that intersection?

Mr. Ashton: We've identified this as a priority. We have an RFP out currently on the design side of it and that RFP will be fairly critical in terms of finalizing the scope and specific design elements that are part of the solution in that area. So the RFP has been put out.

Mr. Schuler: So is it possible to see the construction of it within a year time frame? Or—like, is there any projected time frame? Is it part of the year or two-year plan?

Mr. Ashton: There's various steps we have to go through. Obviously, the design which I referenced, there's the environmental approval side and the—obviously the—this project would be subject to, you know, fairly significant scrutiny as is any of the other significant projects.

So certainly, we are—we're moving ahead on this. But the member's quite right to ask the question. It does—and yes, it does take some time to go through design, environmental approval and then actual movement to construction stage. But the fact that's—the RFP has been issued, I think, is a clear indication of the significant priority we see for this project.

Mr. Schuler: And I thank the minister because Robert Smith from Shale Ridge Cove and George Creamer from Hillview Avenue have been advocating in a very strong way and are constantly lobbying their member of the Legislature to see what's being done on that, and certainly appreciate

the minister's comments, and we will send those on to them. I know that Councillor Jeff Browaty and Member of Parliament Joy Smith have also been spoken to about it.

* (16:10)

I have one other issue and it has to do with that intersection. I know the department's dealing with it. Brian and Monique [*phonetic*], who live close to that intersection—and what's happening, because of the temporary sidelining of traffic, their house is shaking, and this has become a very big issue for them. And if I can just put a little bit of this information on the record and then get the minister's comments on it.

We would like to raise our concerns with regards to the shifting, cracking of our home—that our home has experienced—and the connection to the relocation of the exit ramp that brings traffic from southbound Highway 59 onto the Perimeter Highway westbound.

We reside at 1923 Sperring Avenue. Sperring Avenue is a service road which runs along of Highway 59, the Perimeter. Our home is located on the inside curve of the exit ramp. Many years ago, when the exit ramp was relocated, it was the residents' understanding that this was a very temporary measure until a new overpass could be constructed. The relocation of the exit ramp resulted in it being moved much closer to our property line. More than 10 years later the residents are still living with this temporary situation. In fact, many, many years prior to the exit ramp relocation Sperring Avenue itself was moved closer to my property, and I actually believe it was moved onto my property. This was supposedly to help reduce the sharp turn that occurs at the corner of my property. In hindsight I believe that there would not have been enough room to relocate the exit ramp without Sperring Avenue being moved.

The residents there are very concerned, Minister. The shaking is damaging their homes. I know that the department is working on it. Could the minister give us some kind of an indication where he is on this. The residents—and there's a lot of them—are just beside themselves. They're very perturbed by what's going on. Is it possible we could get the department to try to address this some way? And, as the minister knows, everybody's home is their castle. And there's a lot of traffic, minister, a lot of trucks that are turning and driving and hitting their brakes and, you know, on and on, and it does shake the houses there.

So perhaps the minister could indicate that this will be moved on in some kind of a fashion that would, you know, be agreeable to all those involved.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Ashton: The department's retained the service of a professional engineer to see if we can't come up with a solution to this. So it is something that the department's not only aware of but does take seriously, and I thank the member for raising the issue.

Mr. Eichler: Before we get back into CentrePort, I was wondering if we could change things around again just a little bit in regards to Water Services coming at 4:30. I think we'd originally had planned for him to come today, anyway, and that way it'll keep him from having to be back tomorrow. So I've made arrangements for my colleagues to come back in at 4:30 in order for that to happen. So we'll have about 15 minutes here and then if it's okay with the minister then we'll do it—that—at that time. Okay?

Mr. Schuler: I thank the committee's indulgence. I have one other small issue and I overlooked it.

Minister, when you're coming from Lorette on Highway 207, coming to Highway No. 1, evidently there's a curve in the road and there are lights on the building. And at night the lights shine into your windshield, especially if it's raining and the windshields are going.

Could the department look into that and see if something could be done with that? The lights shine in such a way that it's actually a safety hazard and it's the way they shine off the building. So it would be night lights on, I guess, and if it's raining, it's a bit of a hazard. I thank the committee for their indulgence for letting me put—post this one issue. Appreciate it.

Mr. Ashton: We will look into it.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Chair, I think Ralph has already explained we would try and accommodate Water Services so that Dick doesn't have to come back from Brandon tomorrow.

There are—there was—the old agreements on rural waterlines were one third—one third—one third agreements. And I'm well aware that PFRA has pulled out of that process. Talking to PFRA—and I had these discussions with the previous minister—but talking with PFRA, they say that most of the funding rolled into the Building Manitoba Fund, and there was lots of discretion for the Province on how they spent that. That being said, what the Province is

saying to municipalities is that they are only going to fund one third of these projects and the other two thirds will have to be funded out of the municipalities. They're usually quite costly projects, and I know the minister has heard the argument from the municipalities that they only get 8 percent of the tax dollars. And it becomes—it gets to the point where they can't—they really can't even afford to do these projects.

I'm sure you'll have some comments on that, and then we'll move on a little bit with it, I think.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think it's concerning that PFRA has basically disappeared off the radar screen. I mean it does exist, but it's hard to really see where it's located in the federal budget anymore. And PFRA's had a tremendous history in western Canada. It was a key element of a lot of our major water projects. It, in fact, in the '60s and '70s, was probably the prime mechanism that the federal government used to put forward a whole series of very significant investments across western Canada.

We certainly have seen, in more recent years, the continuing presence in terms of rural water supply, and we have been part of that, as one—as the Ministry of Water Stewardship, we were part of the administration of that program. The difficulty for us, by the way, is, certainly, we're appreciative of the partnerships we have on stimulus funding and infrastructure funding; however, some of that is basically time-dated now, in terms—it's going to expire end of March next year.

One of the advantages of PFRA is it was an ongoing program, and we see ongoing elements in Manitoba where we could very much benefit from a partnership with the federal government. So I would certainly encourage the member to continue to advocate in terms of the significant role PFRA has played. I think municipalities have certainly been a key part of that, as well, and I think they have certainly recognized that. I think that we need PFRA in the same way we need ongoing investment infrastructure, particularly on the water supply side. So I think we're probably in agreement on some of the benefits of the PFRA program.

And I don't mean this as a shot at the federal government. I know there's been shifts in priorities, and they have any infrastructure programs. We've had some significant federal partnering with Manitoba, and with our municipalities; however, you look at the long term, whether it be in terms of rural water supply, whether it be sewer, you know,

waste-water issues, drinking water supply, there is a significant need out there to upgrade across the province, a lot of it driven by, obviously, environmental requirements and safety requirements—public safety requirements.

So, I think the clear message here is that the PFRA is an—has been an important part of our history of our water supply, and we would certainly encourage the federal government to look at continuing the PFRA, perhaps in a form that more reflects its previous scale and the resources that were provided to it.

Mr. Briese: Would the minister expand on how many of those rural water pipeline projects are in the chute? How many are out there that are—have applied for funding or indicating they're looking for funding, and how many are under way right now?

*(16:20)

Mr. Ashton: Yeah, we're currently involved with two regional water systems. I can provide some of the details if the member's interested as well. But again, I know we're a bit short on time, so if the member would like, I can perhaps provide a more detailed summary—perhaps, if it's available, by Estimates tomorrow.

Mr. Briese: I'm a little surprised at the number, but yes, I would appreciate that. I know that there's a group of something like 22 municipalities down in the southwest area of the province, that are kind of banding together looking for to put—looking to put a little more pressure on the Province, I expect, to do more funding into that. But in my own constituency, the R.M. of Rosedale, the R.M. of Lansdowne, the R.M. of McCreary and Ste. Rose, I believe, too, are all kind of sitting on possible rural waterline projects, which are much needed, by the way. It gives a reliance and a safety factor and reliance of water supply to those people.

And the R.M. of Langford has a fair-size rural water system in already, but there's a need for more expansion there, especially with the new line coming in from the south to supply the town. I'm wondering how the minister, through rural water services, is hoping to address the demands that are there.

Mr. Ashton: Certainly, what I'll do, again, I'll provide, you know, a bit more detail tomorrow at the beginning of Estimates, for some of the specific work that's taking place currently. I can indicate, certainly, we are benefiting by, you know, significant investment of infrastructure. We're part of that; so is

the federal government. The scale of it, really, is unprecedented and, you know, certainly in the last 20, 30 years, and the real challenge we see ahead is, I think, the member identified it in his previous question, but it applies generally speaking to water and waste-water issues, is the significant cost investment that we're looking at. And the issues that many municipalities are concerned about, obviously, comes down to the feasibility of some of the projects without significant cost sharing. I don't want to understate how much cost sharing has taken place on various infrastructure programs. I know the member is aware of that.

Is that going to continue, certainly, on the need side? Absolutely, and we're hoping that the—some of the kind of historic levels of support we've seen in the last period of time, will be up for consideration in terms of a long-term investment. You know, I realize it was the stimulus basis of some of the projects, and that's important. But we're going to need a significant investment on water and waste water over the next decade, quite frankly. And the member talks about some of the regional projects that are out there. What is encouraging, by the way, is, I'd say—you know, 15 years ago, if you were talking regional projects, there'd be very few that would be of the kind of scale that we're looking at today.

And what's interesting is the degree to which municipalities, many, you know, many of which I've met with both in my previous role and current role, are actually themselves aggressively seeking out regional solutions. That's encouraging; that's important because certainly the evidence is that regional solutions tend to be more cost effective. They may have a significant cost, but they are more cost effective. There are issues related to staff, operators, that, again, are, you know, can be dealt with more readily with regional facilities. And in many cases, we're starting to see regional facilities provide both water and waste-water services that are much better able to provide the kind of—the level of service that could not have been provided otherwise. So I will give the member an update tomorrow on some of the specific initiatives. As I said, there are a couple major projects, and there are others that are being proposed or considered.

Mr. Briese: I know that most of these projects that, I just want to remind the minister, most of these proposed projects probably won't go forward under the current funding that's being promoted. Basically, I think they're being told that one third will be provincial and they have to find some way to come

up with the other two thirds, and it's beyond their abilities to do that.

I do want to compliment, and we have had our differences from time to time, but I do want to compliment your director of Water Services from Brandon because I have never seen anybody that could stretch dollars further or water lines in rural Manitoba than he could.

And going back to the deal that was there when PFRA was involved that, if my memory serves me correctly, it was only \$5 million across western Canada, and Manitoba was eligible for one and a half million of that out of PFRA, and another million and a half put up by the Province, and a million and a half put up locally. And sometimes we got a little slippage from other provinces that hadn't used it all. And we were always hoping to see that back in—a few years ago, we were hoping to see that get into the 10 to 12 million dollar range a year toward rural water pipelines.

And, as I've mentioned before, there's a huge demand and I would hope—I know the budget's done for this year, but I hope the minister certainly takes it into consideration when we're looking at future budgets because it—they're paramount. It's extremely important to rural Manitobans that they have a clean, safe, drinking water supply and the delivery system's good, everything's good. We need a little more funding. With PFRA out of the game, the municipalities need a little more funding into that process. Thank you.

Mr. Ashton: I can indicate—first of all, I agree and certainly Dick Menon and staff, they do a terrific job, both on the—obviously on the funding side, but also play a key role in terms of working with municipalities on specific projects. I can indicate, by the way, we are continuing to invest in rural water supply. It's been an ongoing commitment, so that is continuing, but I think the point is well taken about PFRA being a source of funding that's increasingly not available as an option.

And you know, essentially, we're continuing, you know, to have our share available—our one third—and obviously, one of the increasing elements is, in terms of water rates, you know, that's something that's being factored in so, obviously as much as we're trying to put in a provincial investment where possible, there's an ongoing element whereby communities are, you know, a key part of the solution through the water rates that are out there, you know, for the various different projects. But I

want to stress again, we're still committed in terms of rural water supply and we see as a priority over the next five to 10 years and we certainly look forward to continuing dialogue with the federal government.

Mr. Briese: Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I do want to really just to emphasize that I think we need to have—look at other options on funding them from a provincial level. Thank you.

Mr. Eichler: Just one question in regards to Water Services Board. I noticed in the—in the budget is cut in excess of a million dollars. What impact is that going to have in regards to projects that's on the table now in regards to some of those being turned down or will there be a significant impact in regards to that?

Mr. Ashton: I think it's important to recognize that we're involved pretty significantly through the board on project management. We're involved with management working with the partners—municipal partners—in the range of \$50 million. So, in actual fact, it's going to continue to be a very busy year on the water services side.

The bigger issue, and it gets back to a similar point that was raised earlier about, in terms of PFRA, is the degree to which some of the infrastructure sources, federally, will be drying up, no pun intended here. And quite frankly, that is the main consideration, you know, this next couple of years is, really, how much federal infrastructure funding is available.

*(16:30)

Mr. Eichler: What portion of the budget was spent on drought prevention for livestock last year? Do we have an indication or does that flow through another department in, say, Agriculture, for example?

Mr. Ashton: We don't distinguish the water supply whether it goes to livestock or for human consumption. I think most cases is a combination of both. So certainly I could take some time to break it down, and I'm not sure if it would be all that useful because such in areas where you do have a certain amount of livestock you're going to get some of the water supply as used by livestock, and I do want to indicate that, certainly, back to previous discussion in terms of water supply, that one of the key issues there has and continues to be on-farm consumption as well. I don't think we realize the degree to which our access to water in this province is a key driving factor in many agricultural sectors. So I know the

member does, with his own background, but it's also—it can also be a very restrictive factor in some parts of the province where drought is an ongoing challenge. And it's, I think, instructive that in any given year we have parts of the province that are flooded, some that are under drought, so water management generally continues to be an issue. So we can't necessarily break it up, but I can indicate the significant amount of support to livestock that go through the general water supply projects we're funding.

Mr. Eichler: Just to follow-up on that, I know in 2004 in the Interlake we—believe it or not, we had a drought in that area and actually we were knocking trees down to feed our livestock and, of course, we didn't have barely enough water at that time for them either. And I know last year we asked a number of questions in regards to the drought in the western part of the province. So, you know, it's interesting to see the funding that comes out of there, and even though there's just not a lot of money there to help with those types of programs. So I find that quite interesting in regards to, you know, for the livestock actually being in your department.

Mr. Ashton: And, actually, one of the projects we are working on right now is in the Brandon-Arthur area which has been drought-stricken on, you know, historically, so it certainly is a factor. And of course it's a factor both for human consumption, also for livestock. So we're certainly aware of that and it seems like an eternity to think—you know, if you think of the Interlake not being flooded. As the member knows representing part of that region, there's been some significant problems with flooding, overland flooding, over the last number of years that certainly indicates an addition to any wet cycle we're into which is, I think, fairly clear, that there's some longer term transit create some real challenges for all of us. So, but I want to stress that floods and drought, forest fires, tornadoes, you can get pretty well everything in Manitoba at any given time, so we understand there's no one size fits all in this province. Each region, each local area is unique.

Mr. Eichler: I agree a hundred percent with the minister on those comments. I do want to come back to CentrePort, and that's all I have on water services. So thank you very much and we appreciate you making the trip in, so, and it was nice to meet you.

Getting back to CentrePort, I have just a few questions in regards to CentrePort, and that's what role does the Winnipeg Airport Authority play in that

as far as the first phase or second phase in regards to the development of CentrePort?

Mr. Ashton: We are on the CentrePort board. Obviously, the airport is a key element of CentrePort and there are WAA-owned lands that will be serviced by CentrePort as well, so it's—they're very much a part of the—not just the vision of CentrePort, but also it's ongoing corporate structure and the development plans.

Mr. Eichler: Just to take it to the next step, then, and I know in the previous discussions and questions, there was considered debate back and forth with regards to the land-use plan and when that would be tabled. Will the land within the Winnipeg Airport Authority then be developed first, or is there a plan that you've attached to CentrePort in regards to what lands will be developed first or second or third in those phases?

Mr. Ashton: I think, probably, the best answer to that would be that the WAA is under federal jurisdiction. They do have their own land-use planning. They are, as the member is aware, right now, certainly, involved in a very ambitious shift in terms of their terminal. There are other changes that are taking place with the WAA, so any of the land-use planning for CentrePort would certainly take that into account. And I want to stress, again, that they are part of the planning and part of the planning process and will be part of the plan.

But it's really important, I think, to emphasize that this—you know, we're not talking about Winnipeg when we talk about CentrePort. That was a different time, different project, very different scope and—certainly, you know, I continuously hear this from the business community, from others, people that are confused. And one of the big differences is we're not just talking about air transport. We're talking about all modes and we have one big advantage in Manitoba. We have everything from a seaport through to, you know, the airport itself and we have trucking. We have, you know, three class 1 rail lines servicing Manitoba.

So I do want to stress, when I am responding in terms of the WAA, that they will continue to have their mandate. I think it's important to reflect, by the way, on the fact of the degree to which they are faced with ongoing, you know, financial goals. I mean, they do have to produce a certain amount of revenue that's not passenger based. The majority is not passenger, you know, airline based. It's based on spinoff activities, so this will, we believe, be of

significant benefit to the WAA. If you consider the additional air movements with any expansion of air cargo, that would also have significant benefits. So it's not just the land use side, but we see this as being very useful for WAA as well.

Mr. Eichler: Again, just for clarification, and I know that one of the key things we need to look at and we all agree on is for a trade-free zone within CentrePort. Would it be easier under the federal jurisdiction since that land is in under federal authority? Would it be—make any difference in regards to whether it's in the Province's or Rosser or whatever in regards to that?

Mr. Ashton: And I thank the member for raising that, because, certainly, this is one of the commercial dimensions, economic development dimensions, that would be part of CentrePort. Direct answer is no. Basically, we believe we can accomplish what we have set out to accomplish, in terms of any economic development zone, through a properly structured site plan and the various agreements that would go into ensuring that happened—with the municipalities, you know, with any other private stakeholders that might be included. So, yes, we—it doesn't require that at all, but clearly, when we do work with the airport authority, we do recognize they are under federal jurisdiction both in terms of the airport itself but also the land. So when we plan, we're not just talking to two municipalities; we're talking about working with the WAA. And when I say with, I mean, they are a key part of the governance and we're a key part of the vision, quite frankly, for CentrePort, so I do want to put that on the record.

Mr. Eichler: Just before I leave the airport authority, out of the 20,000 acres, how much is owned by the Winnipeg Airport Authority?

* (16:40)

Mr. Ashton: I can follow up in terms of that. It's outside of the 20,000. There—we can probably get a detailed response by tomorrow.

Mr. Eichler: The Port of Churchill, having spent some time there back in my banking days, I certainly have fond memories of Churchill and I've seen a number of things change and go as a result of the Port of Churchill. And I have certainly fond memories of the weather station there, and I know that there's been a number of articles put forward in regards to Saskatchewan using that facility, as well.

Where is the department leaning towards in regards to upgrades or rail line changes as talked

about in the Hudson Bay route with regards to CN? Has there been any discussions in regards to that?

Mr. Ashton: I thank the member for raising the question.

Certainly, the Port of Churchill should be of interest to all members of the Legislature and all Manitobans. It's a tremendous asset. One of the things I want to stress, by the way, with the Port of Churchill, it's had a number of port developments recently. The federal-provincial OmniTRAX agreement in terms of maintenance has been making significant progress. It has resulted in some significant improvements in track condition. That work will continue this year, and I want to indicate we're certainly pleased to be working with the federal government and OmniTRAX on that.

There've also been some good seasons at the port. I want to commend the Wheat Board, in particular, because the Wheat Board has been very proactive in using the Port of Churchill over the last number of years.

I want to stress with Churchill, it was on our agenda in our discussions with Saskatchewan. The vast majority of the grain in the catchment area for Churchill is in Saskatchewan, and I note, you know, that the Hudson Bay Route Association continues to be a very active lobby group. We did identify some of the issues on the rail lines, as well. I believe in and around Tisdale the—some issues there in terms of the subdivision. I want to stress, by the way, too, that we're also focussing in the Port of Churchill very much on resupply. We have been engaged with Nunavut, which has historic—many of the communities have historic connection with Churchill and will continue to do that. I anticipate that being a very significant priority this year for the department; certainly, it will be for me as minister.

And one thing I want to stress as well, too, at a time when we're looking at maybe some of the more negative aspects of climate change, certainly there's the reality of what is happening to ice and shipping-related issues, and certainly we're very aware of some of the potential opening up of shipping lanes, perhaps not in the immediate sense the Northwest Passage, but in the Arctic, generally. And I—you know, as much as we have to all be concerned about climate change, I think there are some aspects of the warming that will have a positive impact on transportation in the Arctic, particularly with the Port of Churchill.

So we're doing a lot right now, and I want to stress, by the way, as we continue to work with Saskatchewan, particularly focussing in on some huge benefit for them, we've offered them a seat on the Gateway corporation board. A number of years ago it was the Port of Churchill Development Board, which included Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and we'd like to see something of that nature reconstituted because it's in all of our best interests in western Canada to have a healthy and thriving Port of Churchill.

Mr. Eichler: I'm going to take the bait because I certainly want to hear more about the Gateway committee. Could you just elaborate on that just a little bit more?

Mr. Ashton: There is the gateway development corporation. If the member is interested, I can provide a list of board members, budget, et cetera, perhaps for tomorrow, certainly.

An Honourable Member: That would be great, yes, if you can do that.

Mr. Eichler: In regards to follow-up to the questions from the member from Morris in regards to St. Norbert, and for a bypass coming up 75 and, of course, one of the major opportunities I think that we could take advantage of, and I don't know if there's been any discussions or looks at in regards to Highway 227, off Highway 16, would come straight into CentrePort and, of course, Highway 44 from the Whiteshell. I think that would make a significant impact without having to buy any land. The land has been bought a number of years ago. In fact, we've had a number of governments that's changed and looked at upgrading 227 and Highway 44, and I see that as a very affordable alternative to getting traffic in and out of CentrePort.

And I was just wondering if there's—might be any comments on that.

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly, there's been various proposals, various elements of enhancing the current highway network that could potentially relate to CentrePort. I don't want to suggest that we're anywhere close to anything other than, perhaps, the beginning of CentrePort over the next couple of years with the highway investments, or we certainly wouldn't exclude further consideration.

I do want to stress that we've really focussed on Highway 75 for obvious reasons, and Highway 1, and, quite frankly, Highway 16, I mean we've upgraded the significant interconnections from our

national highway system, designated highways here in the province. Down the line we could see some further enhancement to the national highway system. As well, we certainly have seen—the last several years of Highway 6, which the member knows well, it's now part of the national highway system. So I think, certainly, that Manitoba has advocated for—and so we, certainly, would be looking at any and all of the elements of our highway system over the period of time.

So I'll take it under advisement in the sense of appreciate the member raising the fact that there are other potential enhancements out there other than the ones that under—currently under construction.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that. I know that the—going back to the Howard Pawley days when they built the bridge in Selkirk in anticipation of the—Highway 16 being rerouted and taken through Warren, Stonewall, Selkirk, Beausejour and back around. So I know that was part of the plan then, and I know that a number of the properties have been bought and fences have been moved in a number of those areas. So I know it's certainly one of the affordable alternatives that the government can look at. So I thank the minister for those comments.

And the minister talked, in his comments in regards to CentrePort in regards to Saskatchewan, looking at feasibility through the gateway, is there going to be any funding shared between the two provinces in regards to cost, or is there a cost involved other than just discussions?

Mr. Ashton: I think it's Saskatchewan—or best way to characterize what's happening there, is they have sort of a smaller version of an inland port. It certainly wouldn't have all of the intermodal elements and the capacity that our port has. I know there's been some developments recently with CN in Calgary in terms of the yards. So you'll see other jurisdictions with elements of what goes into an inland port.

The reality is, though, that we are the inland port that essentially on the agenda right now. It has received funding from the federal government. That's very significant.

The main tie-in we see with Saskatchewan would probably be more in terms of our highway systems, our harmonization of the regulations in place on the trucking side, and we're working very aggressively on that. We'll have a date announced very shortly on that.

But I just met with my Saskatchewan counterpart when I was at the WESTAC conference this past week, and I can indicate that they are, certainly, very interested as well. And our view with CentrePort is no different from our borders, no different from—for Thunder Bay, the Pacific ports. They are just as much a part of our transportation system as our own port, you know, Port of Churchill, and I think that's the outlook of, certainly, the people I've talked to in Saskatchewan. They see CentrePort as being good for everyone, and, you know, we will—we'll take that vision forward.

Mr. Eichler: One last question, I believe, I think—I hope it'll be my last one on CentrePort—and that's the service agreements between the Province, the City, and Rosser. And I know the minister had talked briefly about that, but is there any sense of urgency in regards to the service agreement between Rosser and the City and the Province?

* (16:50)

Mr. Ashton: I would say that we need an agreement sooner rather than later. That's not a criticism of any of the parties to the discussion. I think it just reflects the fact that what we're looking at is a mid- to long-term commitment on the planning side, the service side. So, we believe that a lot of those issues need to be dealt with. And, I do want to, again, I mentioned this earlier, but I do want to stress that there's been some really good discussions back and forth on this already.

Mr. Eichler: You know, we certainly hear, being the MLA for the area for Rosser, that, you know, the talks, you know, are progressing, probably not to the rate which we'd like to see them done so that they were able to get that compromise in place.

I think the biggest frustration that I've been hearing is the fact that they're not that sure of the federal-provincial share that's going to be put forward in regards to placement of those services. And I think that's where the uncertainty comes in. And if you want to elaborate on that, that would be fine.

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly, there's ongoing discussions on that. There was a potential source of funding that's not available currently for—that was an issue being considered for some of the services.

And since the member does represent the R.M. of Rosser, I want to, particularly, put on the record

that I think the reeve and council have been very constructive in their approach, and I think have been very supportive of the—I won't say provincial vision, not the provincial government vision, but our vision, collectively, for CentrePort, and I don't think that always gets recognized. I have relayed that directly to the reeve and I think that's important to note here. There are two municipalities, one somewhat larger, one somewhat smaller, but they, you know, I think, are involved in some very constructive discussions. I—by the way, I've also—I've met directly with the mayor of the City of Winnipeg and I think there's a real commitment there from the mayor and city administration, to move along on this.

So, I'd like to thank the member for giving me the opportunity to encourage everybody to try to get an agreement fairly soon because that's critical down the line in terms of sequencing the—a lot of the other, you know, developments. We have a plan right now on the transportation side that's in place. We can have the land-use plan very shortly. But getting the services in—I mean, that's the first step to getting the private partners, private stakeholders, into CentrePort, which is a key part of the vision that I stressed earlier.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I want to jump in here on the basis that the member for Lakeside is at the other end of the Provincial Road 227. And I want to remind the minister that when he was previously transportation minister, he did engage to upgrade a significant portion of Provincial Road 227, and he only has about ten kilometres left to finish it, to the 16, to the junction of Highway 16 and the 227. I would encourage him to do so. It would be greatly welcomed by all residents in the Portage la Prairie R.M.

Which leads me, though, to the question on the Rat Creek, because the upgrade of Provincial 227 came to a halt, just before the Rat Creek crossing. I understand that there was significant amount of money required for a new bridge and, at this juncture in time, the Rat Creek is also on the table for bridge crossings at the Trans-Canada Highway and on Highway 16 with the redevelopment of the junction of 1 and 16 interchange.

So, I would like to ask the minister, in co-operation with the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), where is the study on the Rat Creek diversion proposal, as presented by the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District, that had an original

feasibility study done to divert some of the waters of the Rat Creek to the Assiniboine River diversion? And I'm sure the minister is familiar with the Assiniboine River diversion.

And, in that way then, if this proposal went ahead, the volume of water in the Rat Creek, not only for the traversing of the Trans-Canada Highway and Highway 16, but also of Provincial Road 227, if the water volume could be regulated and, I believe, it would ultimately have an impact on the size of bridges on the respective highways which I just mentioned. So, if the minister wants to comment—but I do want to ask him to investigate as to where that study is on the Rat Creek and, also, if the minister could comment at this juncture in time as to where the 1 and 16 interchange proposal is presently at.

Mr. Ashton: I want to say on the Rat Creek question, I certainly appreciate the member's point. I'm aware of the issue, obviously. Also, thank you for putting on the record, again, the announcement we did make on 227. I believe that project had been talked about for 40 years, I was advised—40 years—and I won't get into the politics of it, but the member was there.

I want to give him credit, but I did have one of his constituents come over and thank us for being the government—this is in a non-partisan way, here—that managed to deliver the upgrading at 227, something that had been talked about—did I mention 40 years?—and the last, you know—and now I've been newly reappointed, I'm actually running into many other issues that have been out there for decades that we're checking off as part of our \$366-million capital program. So—and I know the member was highways critic at the time and I—I'll just say to the current highways critic that I think I used to get him in regular trouble with his own caucus by saying he was doing a good job as critic so if—I won't do that with the current critic but, you know, even if he is doing a good job, I just don't want him to get into trouble with his own caucus afterwards.

But certainly I'll undertake to do that. And I think, in the interest of time, I can give the member an update on 1 and 16 tomorrow. It's certainly been identified in the capital program and I'll—you know, we'll be updating a series of questions that were raised and I'll do that first thing tomorrow.

Mr. Faurschou: There was a project undertaken this past winter to start to remove the silt that have been accumulating over 35 years in the Assiniboine River

basin as to the proximity of the Assiniboine River Diversion.

The—I believe it's MIT that undertook the excavation work. Could I get a proposal or a—update as to that work? I do understand that it is an immense amount of earth to move and persons have been noting that the elevation of the Crown properties in the vicinity of the diversion have been elevated quite significantly because there's a lot of siltation in there. And whether the minister wants to comment or leave this over till tomorrow—because, again, it's important not only to the intake to the water treatment plant, which the minister was the Minister of Water Stewardship when he expanded the water treatment plant in Portage la Prairie.

The Drotts have had to go out and routinely excavate the siltation away from the intake pipe to the water treatment plant. So it's important on a number of different avenues.

Mr. Ashton: I thank the member for reminding me of yet another announcement that I was minister at in Portage on behalf of the provincial government. You know, it seems it's been a regular occurrence, and I do want to thank the member for putting—actually I do thank him for reminding the public again of the many wonderful things that are happening in Portage la Prairie, but I will get—I will—I'm aware I'm almost out of time. I'll answer a bit more detail tomorrow.

Mr. Faurschou: Well I appreciate that, certainly, and we did have a bridge closure over the CN main line because of catastrophic failure of the—on the west side of Portage la Prairie. The same vintage of bridge is over the CP main line. I'm just wondering whether there's consideration ongoing at the present time for upgrade and improvement before we end up facing a catastrophic failure—

Mr. Chairperson: Please forgive the interruption, but the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

ABORIGINAL AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Does the honourable Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs have an opening statement?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Well, thank you very much, Madam Chairperson. I am pleased to discuss some of the important activities that the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs has been engaged in.

Very briefly, of course, it's well-known that our government is moving forward with the construction of an all-season road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, which I don't believe requires a lot of justification given the climate change that has occurred in the last few years. This year, particularly, was very trying because of the early melt. That was one of the reasons why, but it's also one of the key recommendations that resulted on the document, Promises to Keep toward a broad area of plan for the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the status report that was issued in September 2004.

The construction of the all-season road will not only improve transportation in the region, but will also be one of the largest economic development projects in the region's history, and it'll also eliminate the high cost that is borne by the communities and the—particularly, the federal government in having to bring in needed supplies to some of these remote communities over on the east side.

The East Side Road Authority has entered into several community benefits agreements with communities that live on the east side, or communities on the east side to ensure that they're prepared and develop the capacity to benefit from the economic opportunities that'll accompany the road construction in that area.

I took over the ministry again back in November of 2009, following the death of our colleague, the late Oscar Lathlin. And I know that Oscar left a legacy of hope for our people in the province of Manitoba. He was one of the most recognized figures in northern Manitoba with respect to issues that people had in mind, and he was truly committed to the issues of Aboriginal people and, indeed, northern Manitobans. So I'm deeply honoured to try and follow in his footsteps of trying to uphold that proud integrity that he held within.

Our department recently introduced some new legislation for first reading, and that was to— that is to recognize the original languages of our province—our great province: the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Michif and Ojibway, and the Oji-Cree languages as the Aboriginal languages of our province.

We're told quite firmly by people in the know, particularly educators, that when a language is taken away from a people, it's a major step toward the loss of a culture. And since we introduced that bill, I noted that there's been work done in other areas of Canada, including in British Columbia. And we're very proud of that. I believe that we're the first province outside, of course, the territories to recognize and acknowledge the languages act, the recognition act, that we introduced in this Legislature. And I believe that all members in this House ought to be very proud of that, because the dangers of Aboriginal people losing their languages across Canada is very strong, and it is something that we are certainly working hard to try and protect.

We're working towards, also, hosting the first-ever World Indigenous Nations Games in Manitoba in 2012. Our provinces will be welcoming over 3,000 athletes, by all estimations at the current time, including cultural performers, coaches and team officials from around the world. And some 250 Manitoba athletes will also be participating in the games. It's an opportunity, we believe, that will generate at least \$50 million in economic activity in the city of Winnipeg.

So we're very proud of the work that has been done with the people from the World Indigenous Nations Games board of directors and the folks that work that. Mr. Wayne Lord is one of the key figures that heads that up. And, of course, this was a dream that was first enunciated by Dr. Wilton Littlechild of Helina, Alberta, in a speech that he gave in Sweden some years ago. And one of his visions was to bring the world together in the spirit of promoting our culture and identity as indigenous peoples and, in the spirit of friendly competition, to stage an event in a location somewhere in North America. And we're very happy that the board of directors have chosen Winnipeg to be the location of the first ever World Indigenous Nations Games, and I will be appealing to all members of the Legislative Assembly to support that initiative.

Of course, we are faced, Madam Chairperson, as well, with the unfortunate situation of missing and murdered Aboriginal women nationwide. In a recent report, 582 Aboriginal women have been reported missing or murdered, over 75 alone here in the province of Manitoba. And this is something that's tremendously troubling. And we have approached this issue on two fronts: the two fronts being at the—through the previous Justice Minister, my colleague

from Kildonan is—when he was still the Minister of Justice, initiated—he created the police task force, which is comprised of the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service.

Following that, we announced the Manitoba action group comprised of the Minister of Housing and myself as co-chairs, with invited participation by the Mothers of Red Nations council, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the North End women's transition centre and the Métis Women of Manitoba. And the work is ongoing; we are obviously trying to engage.

The first order of business, obviously, is try to bring about some comfort for these families of these people that have been—whose lives were taken away. And we are doing our best to ensure that, first of all, the victims are treated in a proper and respectful way.

Now, since working on this fall, a lot of things have been brought to my attention that I was not aware of as one of the citizens of this province, for example, on victim service availability, as one example. So we take that very seriously.

We also took the issue to the national level and brought it to the attention of the other Aboriginal Affairs ministers nationwide and the national Aboriginal organizations. And the Justice ministers had their meeting at the same time, and Fredericton, New Brunswick, did the same thing. And we were very happy about the recent announcement by the federal government that this was one of the items of their Throne Speech and budget speech and they had allocated money. Certainly, I think, as time goes on in this process, I will have an opportunity to talk more about some of the other initiatives that are currently under way in the province of Manitoba and also some of the effects that we've had nationwide on some of the key issues facing Aboriginal people nationwide today.

So, by way of introduction to the Estimates of this department, Madam Chairperson, those are my comments. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, have opening comments?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I thank the minister for his opening comments, and I would say that I don't have any opening statement. I prefer

to go directly to the introduction of staff and then to a discussion on a global basis from there.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic for his comments.

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

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

Mr. Robinson: Madam Chairperson, I'm joined by Mr. Harvey Bostrom, the Deputy Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; Freda Albert, the executive director of the Local Government Development Division; Mr. Joe Morrisseau, executive director of the Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Secretariat; and Rene Gagnon, who is the director of Finance and Administrative Services.

Madam Chairperson: At this time, we would like to know, does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Hawranik: I'd prefer to do a global discussion first and then, in the end, go line by line. I do have some questions, though, on the line-by-line basis, but I think it might be easier and probably more beneficial to everyone involved if we went on a global basis, at least for now.

Madam Chairperson: Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Hawranik: I have to say, first of all, that I thank the staff for all of their work for the past year. And I've just been appointed the critic for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs just a few short months ago, and, of course, I held that portfolio for, in fact, while the minister was previous—I think in 2002-2003, and I was the critic at that point as well. And, of course, I know the Bostrom name very well. I have—I believe it's your brother who has the Bostrom's catering business in Manigotagan. And I've used them a number of times and I can tell you that they're second to none. I tell people that, in fact, their catering business is probably the best in the province, and I think—and anyone who's obviously used them would know what I'm talking about.

* (14:50)

But, in any event, I first would like to ask the minister whether he could undertake to provide me with the name of each political staffperson that he has on staff, including the title of their positions and their full-time equivalent, whether they're full time or whether they're part time. I don't expect him necessarily to tell me today; maybe he can, but, if not, if he could give me an undertaking at least to provide me with that within a reasonable period of time.

Mr. Robinson: The special assistant is Jean-Marc Prévost; the executive assistant is Kevin Hart; the appointment secretary is Barb Robson; administrative secretary is Pat Chapko; and the administrative secretary is Marilyn Ringland.

Mr. Hawranik: I want to thank the minister for that. I take it, then, that those are political staff, as opposed to staff, and if—and he may not be able to provide me with it today, but I'd like to have at least an undertaking that he could provide me with a list of all staff in the minister and deputy minister's office, including their name, position and full-time equivalent, as well.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I will avail myself to providing that information for the member, including the staff in the deputy minister's office. Certainly, to answer the earlier part of his question, the political staff in my office are Jean-Marc Prévost and Kevin Hart, as I indicated earlier. Jean-Marc Prévost is the special assistant and Kevin Hart is the executive assistant.

And, of course, the staff in the office, including the ones I outlined, are really members of the Civil Service Commission who are allocated to the ministers' offices, and I will provide the names of the individuals that are employed in the deputy minister's office, as well.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, I note that, last year, the minister indicated that he had 94 full-time employees within the department. Can the minister indicate whether that number has changed, whether it's gone up or whether it's gone down and, if so, what the number is today?

Mr. Robinson: The numbers are quite comparable to that of last year with the exception of two staff from Human Resources who were transferred or the amalgamation to the Civil Service Commission.

So the number of staff within the department is, roughly, 92 for the department, and I would say that's

a reasonable number given the responsibility of this department, which encompasses 82 percent of the land mass of the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Hawranik: If the minister could also indicate to me—and, as I say, if he doesn't have that information today, certainly would appreciate it at some point in time, within a reasonable period of time—the names of staff that have been hired in the last fiscal year, 2009 to 2010, including an indication whether each of those hires have been hired through competition or hired through a type of an appointment, and the kind of staff that are involved in that particular hire in terms of their duties and responsibilities and titles.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I will make sure that the information is forwarded to the member in quick order to provide that information that he's requested.

Mr. Hawranik: I also ask the minister to advise whether any positions within the department itself have been reclassified in the last year, in '08—or '09-2010, and who that involved and the position that it perhaps was at before and what it is today.

Mr. Robinson: I can advise the member that there's been no reclassification since the last Estimates process that this department underwent about a year ago. So I can report to him quite confidently about that.

The previous information that he requested certainly will be provided to him in quick order, as I said.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Good afternoon, Minister, and good afternoon, staff. I'm going to miss the opportunity to do Estimates with the minister. I've had a good go over the last few years and I've learned a lot about the portfolio from not only yourself but from your staff, so I'm going to only be allowed one question. But I want to just put that on the record that I will miss the portfolio.

With regard to infrastructure and maintenance audits, I notice that the Office of the Auditor General presented a report in March 2010 that talked about the status of recommendations with regard to financial reporting standards, and it appears that there's—there were four recommendations by the Auditor submitted in March of '04 to the department. The first follow-up was in March of '09 and then this report right now. There appears to be three out of the four recommendations are a work in progress.

The reason I ask the government to respond to this is because I've had a community, Fisher Bay,

raise some very serious concerns with regard to the audit process, and has been raising concerns with regard to that process for a number of years. In October 2008, the community need for stronger reporting standards were identified—and by the department itself—indicating that there were no marked improvements from previous years.

So I just want to know from the minister why you have three out of the four recommendations to tighten your reporting standards, and very little has been done to this date to address that, and now we have a community that has come forward and has shown some very serious issues with the reporting—or the financial commitments from this community, so if you can just respond to that.

Mr. Robinson: I want to thank the member for Minnedosa. She has certainly been a very credible member of this Assembly for a number of years now and I've had the pleasure of working with her on some major issues. Certainly, she doesn't—she never lets go of an issue when an issue is before her, and it's probably the politest way I can say that, and I commend her for her tenacity in the work that we're all elected to do in this Legislature.

With reference to the question, there are certain recommendations that I don't have before me—I don't have in front of me to respond. Certainly, the recommendations of the Auditor General will be adhered to. With the matter on Fisher Bay, I understand that the officials from our department are working to—with the community to correct the issue. And I do have with me a number of pieces of correspondence from the member on different issues that she has raised with me and I thank her for that because, certainly, that is our job to keep each other feet to the fire, so to speak, I suppose, in trying to keep track of these issues that are all so very important. And I will be following up with our department staff on the specific issues that she has raised. But, certainly, I don't have that information before me, but I will gladly respond by letter. And I know that the member will take me on my word because I've always tried to provide the information in a timely fashion whenever she's requested it.

*(15:00)

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what the consequences to community councils who receive consecutive negative infrastructure and maintenance audits—what type of consequences there are? And what consequences to community councils would be implemented if—who—to them, when they

are continually unwilling to submit a five-year maintenance and capital plan on time?

Mr. Robinson: Certainly, there is no method of punishment, Madam Chairperson, but, certainly, we ensure that staff from the department are vigilant and working with those communities that perhaps are not in compliance from time to time. And we ensure that the proper follow-up is done with these communities.

You must remember that we have several communities under our responsibility throughout the province of Manitoba, and some of these communities vary in size from a dozen people to a few hundred. So it is a commendable job, given the budgets that these community councils have to work with. And I would say that, for the most part, the work that they have done is truly remarkable and outstanding. So it's quite rare for community councils and, particularly this department, to fall off the good work that is generally done by community councils and, generally, the hardworking staff of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Mrs. Rowat: And I believe Fisher Bay, and many other communities like Fisher Bay take great pride in their communities, and it's disheartening to see infrastructure within their community deteriorate under the responsibility of a community council and the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, who fund the councils. So I guess, from what I'm hearing, is there's no mechanisms in place to ensure that the funding provided by Aboriginal and Northern Affairs to communities, such as Fisher Bay community council, is utilized to fix infrastructure and maintenance issues highlighted in annual audits?

Mr. Robinson: Well, that's not what I said. I said that there's no punishment, but there is methods in how department officials work with these communities to ensure that these problems don't reoccur. And there are, from time to time, as any government, you know, it may fall short sometime on expectations. But, generally, I think that these community councils should be commended for the tremendous work that they have done. And, certainly, in the case of Fisher Bay, as I indicated earlier, our department officials are working with the community to ensure that the problems that have arisen in that community are eradicated or corrected, and ensure that they don't occur in the time to come.

Mr. Hawranik: Yeah, just getting back to personnel matters, finishing off with personnel matters. I wonder if the minister can indicate to me whether or not there are any vacancies in the department and,

secondly, if there are vacancies, which positions are vacant.

Mr. Robinson: I believe that there is only a couple vacancies, and I can't elaborate at this point. The member heard me talking about the nature of the responsibility of this department. We have responsibility for 49 communities, encompassing 82 percent of the land mass of the province of Manitoba. In my response to him that I committed to providing, I will include the vacancy numbers currently in the department, because this is something that is changing. And, given the number of communities and also the huge land mass that Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is responsible for, 92 employees in the department, I believe, is not unreasonable. And, given the workload of each and every one of these staff members, I think is something that is—something that ought to be commended. So, in my response, the specific question on vacancy rates I shall be providing to my colleague from Lac du Bonnet when I respond to him on the earlier question that he raised.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate what the acceptable vacancy level is for 2010-2011? Is there a goal toward a certain level of vacancies in the department, or is he intending to have all positions filled within 2010-2011?

Mr. Robinson: We used to be held to a 5 percent previously, but that number has not been necessarily carved in stone, so to speak. Every available staffperson—and I just described the responsibility and the hardworking staff that we have in this department—sometimes is necessary and sometimes we find the department to be understaffed, given the number of responsibilities that we have, and, also, the attention that has to be given to many of the issues that arise on a regular basis in these Northern Affairs communities throughout the province of Manitoba.

Again, there's no set number, but, in our case, I think, it's fair to say that we could use more manpower to ensure that the work is done, to ensure that—certainly, at the very least, we need three, four more bodies to ensure that the work is carried out. But we don't have a set number, acceptable number, as the member for Lac du Bonnet has pointed out. But I will, again, include that as part of the information that he previously requested.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, thank you for that response. And, further to that, I wonder if the minister can indicate how many positions within the department

have been relocated from rural or northern Manitoba into Winnipeg, or relocated around the province, and indicate why, in fact, if there were relocations, why that was occurring.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Madam Chairperson, we've had one relocation, and that was from Thompson to Winnipeg.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate why the department felt it necessary to move them from Thompson to Winnipeg?

Mr. Robinson: The nature of the position that the— that we're talking about is that the cost of the travel from Thompson to Winnipeg was getting costlier. As a result, it made more sense, economic sense, to have that person, that position situated in Winnipeg to enable that person to be here in the—in Winnipeg.

The senior staff that we have at the table with me, for example, are here from Thompson. The other two are located in Winnipeg. But to bring them here, of course, requires them to book flights, accommodation, and stay an extra day, in this case, because we didn't go through the Estimates process as originally scheduled yesterday. So that's an additional cost.

So these things we take into account and, certainly, take consideration for the economic impact that they do have on government generally. So we have to make these decisions. And the decision on the matter of the person being relocated to Winnipeg boiled down to dollars and cents, that we felt that the responsibilities were greater—better delivered from Winnipeg—the Winnipeg office, and that's why we relocated the position and the individual from the Thompson office to the Winnipeg office.

* (15:10)

Mr. Hawranik: With respect to the fiscal year 2009-2010, can the minister provide me with a list of all out-of-province travel that he had taken during that particular time, where that travel was to, what purpose the travel was for and who was included in the duration of each trip during 2009-2010? I don't expect him to necessarily have that at his fingertips today, but certainly I would accept an undertaking to have that given to me within a reasonable period of time.

Mr. Robinson: What is available on-line—in addition to that, we will provide information to the member for Lac du Bonnet on any additional costs that may have incurred. Just let me try and recollect off the top

of my head. We had a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting very recently in Toronto of Aboriginal Affairs ministers. Previous to that, we had one in the same city in the month of October 2009, and I will be meeting with the minister responsible for Fisheries and Oceans with respect of the east-side road project tomorrow or the day after tomorrow in Ottawa. So that is the purpose of some of these trips that we have to embark upon, and some of them, of course, include a meeting with other ministers from other jurisdictions or the senior government in Ottawa, so it requires us to be there. But I'll certainly try and make available to the member some of the trips that were taken out of province and also the breakdown of the costs that he has requested.

For the most part I can say with confidence that the trips were taken with the special assistant, Jean-Marc Prévost, on some of these because he's got the responsibility of working with other ministers in other jurisdictions, whether it's the federal government or the other provinces and their senior staff, to ensure that these meetings occur and, of course, the documentation of the dialogue that occurs between ministers, as an example, between ourselves here in Manitoba and that of the federal government. And I've had a number of meetings with the federal Minister of Indian Affairs, Mr. Strahl, and resulting from that has been some substantial inroads that we've made with the federal government. And I'm very happy about our relationship with the federal government and the progress that has been made in that regard.

So, on the original question, I will try and provide the number of trips that were taken in this year, and I'm sure that the member will concur that these trips are sometimes necessary. Certainly, I don't think any of us that are in this occupation take trips needlessly, and it's primarily to ensure that the work of the government is carried out in a responsible fashion.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that undertaking and look forward to seeing that complete list, including all the details that I requested.

The department itself, obviously, enters into contracts for suppliers or services at different points in time. Can the minister indicate what the standards are, what the policy is with regard to contracts awarded—being awarded without a tendering process?

Mr. Robinson: Certainly, we followed the—and make every attempt to adhere to the guidelines as set out by the Civil Service Commission. Currently, off the top of my head, there is two contracts that have been awarded: one to deal with Infrastructure, and that is Don Kuryk, a long-time civil servant in the province of Manitoba; and requirements on local government, a contract was awarded to Roger Bouvier. And I will make an attempt to provide additional details to the member by letter in short order as well.

Mr. Hawranik: I wonder if the minister can confirm that those two particular contracts are ones that were done without going to tender and, if so, if he could provide the details as he mentioned, including kinds of contract, the amount of each contract, for me, at a later date.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, they were done without tender, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that. Recently, I meet—met with Chief Donovan Fontaine. And I'm sure the minister knows who that is, chief of Sagkeeng, and he's one of my constituents. And he's doing a tremendous job, actually, in Sagkeeng. I keep in contact with him on a fairly regular basis.

But one of the issues that Chief Fontaine had brought up to me, which is of great concern to the Sagkeeng First Nation, is the erosion along the Winnipeg River as it affects the northern shore of the Winnipeg River, as it intersects the Lake Winnipeg near Traverse Bay. And what's been happening over the last few years is that, of course, with increased storm activity and increased water levels within the Lake Winnipeg, that, at times, they've been—there's been severe shoreline erosion, even to the extent of three, 400 feet at a time, of erosion.

And I did voice my concerns to Manitoba Hydro with regard to that issue because a number of homes that are on the First Nations community are in danger of actually falling into the river. And I voiced my concerns and it seemed that Hydro replied with a response that wasn't—that was less than satisfactory to the reserve. And I'm wondering whether the minister has, in fact, been approached by Chief Fontaine with respect to the same issue and, if he has, if he can tell me what kind of action he has taken to help alleviate this concern.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, Madam Chairperson, I'm very well aware of the issue that the member for Lac du Bonnet raises in our Estimates today. I too

have had a number of discussions with Chief Fontaine. We—we've—we were in a community, actually, about a year and a half ago, including the Minister responsible for Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), who was part of the group, and the former minister of Conservation, who is now the Minister responsible for Agriculture (Mr. Struthers), and in a community meeting. And then later, after the community meeting, we had a tour of the community.

It was pointed out of the—not only the erosion, but certainly the poor housing conditions that exist on the Sagkeeng First Nation. With members of our government, we had a tour of where an elderly woman lived. I believe the elderly woman was in her late seventies. We also visited the home of the late Lawrence Morrisseau, a decorated World War II veteran, at that time who has since passed on, regrettably.

* (15:20)

And the mould situation that exists in these communities—and I would have to agree that, indeed, one of the houses that's located on a south shore of the community was in danger of actually sliding into the river. Since that time, we understand, the community, along with the federal Indian Affairs Department, have taken measures to move the house away from the area of danger. Certainly, the erosion has occurred in quick order, in the last two decades, I'm told.

When Sagkeeng was part of Rupertsland, I represented the community proudly, and this was an issue that was just beginning at the time that I was representing Sagkeeng in the Manitoba Legislature. Our intervention, as the Minister of Water Stewardship and the now Minister of Agriculture, formerly the Minister responsible for Conservation, certainly, this was brought home to us. It was brought to our attention and we joined with Chief Donovan Fontaine in expressing his concern. Upon our return from that trip, we've asked Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, to work with the community. And I understand that that work is ongoing with the two other said parties, to attempt to address the issue.

Whether it is, as a result of hydro development in that region and the dams along the Winnipeg River, we don't know. Some experts have told us otherwise; that the cause of the erosion is the natural course of Mother Nature. Others have told us that it's a combination of fluctuating water levels caused by

the hydro development project on the Winnipeg River and the ones further north on the Nelson River further north, because of the north-south flow of Lake Winnipeg.

Whatever the case may be, no doubt, the issue will continue to be there. But the important thing is that the safety and the comfort of the citizens and the residents of Sagkeeng is, I think, first and foremost. And measures are being taken now by the Manitoba government, as represented by Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, along with Manitoba Hydro, and working with the Chief and council of the community to attempt to address this problem in a serious fashion. And I'm confident that solutions will be found to the existing problem.

Mr. Hawranik: Another issue that was mentioned to me—and there were a number of issues, actually, mentioned to me by Chief and council at Sagkeeng—but another particular issue that is a real concern to them, as well as the fact that the Tembec mill has shut down at this point in Pine Falls, and is—in Powerview-Pine Falls—and there's a possibility, I think, of the employees and of the First Nation community of Sagkeeng to participate in purchasing this mill and reopening it. Whether it's done on the same scale, I don't know.

But, as you know, we passed a resolution unanimously last Thursday, providing, or at least looking at providing assistance, MIOP loan assistance, to any purchaser who puts together a viable proposal to purchase the mill. And there is a distinct possibility, given what was in the feasibility study, that that purchaser could be, in fact, the employees and Sagkeeng First Nation, and, perhaps, even Black River First Nation. There's a possibility there.

Given the fact that we've passed this all-party—this resolution on an unanimous basis here in the Legislature, I'd like to have the minister indicate whether or not there's—and I know that there are capital grants that are available within the department—whether or not any kind of assistance may be anticipated, coming from the department with respect to any purchase in that kind of scenario.

Mr. Robinson: Of course, this matter was brought to our attention, and I know that early on sometime this winter when the lockout occurred, I, along with the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) and the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie), had the opportunity of meeting with the chief and council, the labour union and members of the R.M., I believe it was, and the

Town of Pine Falls, to talk about the unfortunate state of affairs in that community, given the lockout and the circumstances and the true hardship that were felt by the employees of the mill. Following that meeting, we enacted or we forwarded the community adjustment program money of \$1 million. Our government moved on that very quickly. All along, I had telephone conference–telephone conversations with Chief Fontaine to talk about his concern as a leader of a First Nation that lives in the region, but directly impacted by the lockout. And, certainly, there are, as I understand it, currently, at the very least, employment insurance benefits now being paid to the employees.

We also previously announced that \$600,000 was being committed towards retrofitting and upgrading the Winnipeg River Learning Centre that's going to be in partnership with the federal government towards a total investment of \$2.7 million that'll expand access to training programs in the region. Now, why I say that is because I believe that, if there is any opportunity for Sagkeeng as a member of a consortium that has made a bid to purchase the mill, that'll give, certainly, First Nations members in that region, an opportunity. And the member references Little Black River. That'll certainly give them an opportunity to secure long-term and sustainable employment opportunities in the event that the—and, of course, the member and I both know that those discussions are currently occurring.

Certainly, I want to commend the member for Lac du Bonnet for bringing the private member's resolution and receiving unanimous support in this Legislature last week. I think that is commendable, and I thank him for that because not many people, I think, are aware, nor do they fully appreciate the hardship that the people in that region have had to endure since the lockout commenced. And, certainly, many things are still in the works and a lot of things have to be ironed out, and we're confident that in the time ahead and, hopefully, not in the not-too-distant future, that a resolution'll be found to make the mill viable and provide opportunities again to the people that live in that region because these hardships are unacceptable.

Regrettably, because of circumstances with the world markets with respect to softwood lumber and the like, these are circumstances that sometimes that is beyond the control of any government or beyond the control of any individual, but, certainly, we were hoping and praying that these will be overcome and

the challenges that are currently before us will be overcome, and I look forward to continuing to work with the member.

But allow me to add my words of thank-you to him in the work that he has done to bring this matter to the attention of legislators in this Assembly, but, moreover, the—to the public at large because this is something that is truly, truly regrettable, and I know that last—when the lockout first took shape, it was a very hard Christmas for a lot of those people that live and rely on the mill's operation to—for their employment. And many of them are actually friends of mine. Many of them I have regular contact with, particularly the ones that live on the Sagkeeng First Nation.

*(15:30)

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

But, certainly, I think that our government's open to working with the successful individual that is going through the process of bidding on the purchase of the mill, and I know that there are considerations of different sorts, currently, and I know that the Sagkeeng First Nation is also a bidder in one of the offers that are being made to purchase the company.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, and I thank the minister as well. I think he knows that I also thanked the government when they stepped up to the plate with a \$1-million adjustment fund at the time, but having said that, the reality is is \$1 million is really just a start, particularly if this mill does not reopen. And that's another concern that I'm going to have going forward, and I'm hoping that the government also believes that's a huge concern as well because when I look at the \$1 million, while it may be fine for now and hopefully the mill will reopen, I think everyone's hoping and praying that that happens.

If it does not reopen, if it's mothballed and there's no one coming forward to purchase that mill and to reopen it and start more employment opportunities in that area, I think we have to compare this kind of disaster in that community, Powerview-Pine Falls Sagkeeng and the surrounding communities, as similar to the one that happened in Pinawa just 15 years ago when AECL withdrew from the community and downsized from 1,200 down to 200 and then, well, recently now up to 300 employees. It had a devastating effect on that community, and, at that time, what happened is the federal government, because it was Atomic Energy

of Canada Limited, a federal agency, they stepped up with a \$20-million adjustment fund which really created a lot more employment opportunities and continues to do so.

One million certainly wouldn't be enough, so I'm just getting the minister's thoughts. I'd like to have the minister's thoughts in terms of if the mill does not reopen—and that's a real possibility—whether he'd be prepared, of course, to go to Cabinet or to government and advocate for a fund that perhaps could be of the magnitude that was offered in Atomic—in Pinawa, when AECL closed in the Pinawa operations.

Mr. Robinson: Well, I thank the member for Lac du Bonnet. Certainly, I think that is a good comparison with what happened in Pinawa some 15 years ago with the AECL. But I want to assure the member that I will do my best in working with him to ensure that we don't have that suffering reoccur. I mean, there's been enough suffering as it is, granted, in the community of Pine Falls, and I know my deputy minister and I share the same sentiments. He, living in that region, in Manigotagan, is very well aware of the employment losses in that area and he is very much of the same mind as I am.

We did make that investment of the \$1 million as the member correctly pointed out, but we also asked that there be a study done, a feasibility study done to look at all options, and we hope that whatever options are provided to us will make sense to alleviate any more hardship that shouldn't occur in the region and we've asked that the buyout, or the possible buyout, take into consideration—and the last buyout occurred, actually, in 1994. I was in the Legislature already at that time, and we certainly want to ensure that employee benefits and pensions are not put at risk as a result of that. That's another important aspect of this as well.

So we want to ensure that those remain intact and we are going to work—I think that this is a matter that crosses political lines as well. I think that we're all agreed that this is something that we have to work together on, and, for myself, I'll certainly provide any information that comes to my attention openly. These are, after all, our fellow citizens and they in that region have a very proud region and share many common ideals. And they are out there trying to provide for their families very proudly, and they're very proud to go to work each and every day to earn a living for their loved ones and their families.

So I'm committed to ensuring that I work with the member from Lac du Bonnet and all members of this Legislative Assembly to ensure that this doesn't go by the wayside. I think that we have to be open. I think we committed to that by way of supporting the resolution that was adopted by all parties in this Legislature last week, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

Mr. Hawranik: I look forward to working with the minister with respect to those issues. I think it's not just a—it's not really a partisan issue. It's one that—an issue that involves the community and should involve himself and myself and the Premier and anyone else that is, of course, affected.

I noted in the opening statement—minister's opening statement—he used a part of his opening statement—a good part of it anyway, to describe what's happening with respect to the construction of the road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. And I don't think you'd—the minister would have any argument from this side of the House as to whether or not it's an important initiative. We believe too that the road on the east side is necessary to connect those communities with communities to the south. And, in fact, the east-side road is going to funnel directly through his constituency, of course, because it involves most of his constituency, and it—directly south is mine in the constituency of Lac du Bonnet. So I feel the road is important on the east side.

Having been on the winter road quite a number of times, actually, during the winter—I've travelled on that winter road a number of times and, thankfully, this year I didn't go at the wrong time because otherwise I probably wouldn't be here. But, in any event, it was the weekend before it was shut down—actually is the weekend that I was to go, and I'm glad in a way I didn't because I would've got stranded on that road.

But, in any event—and I know the first phase is currently under construction. I'm well aware of that. And I'm wondering if the minister could give me a general indication as to the area of forest—the area of trees that will actually be cut down during the first phase. I don't think it'll be a lot, from what I can tell, but if he—does—wondering whether he has that information in terms of how much treed area will be cut down in order to complete that first phase.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Acting Chairperson, certainly, I think that the member and I share some knowledge about the winter road system. I think both he and I have been on it a number of times. Certainly, I've—it's been a while, a couple of years now, since I've been

on a winter road in the northern part of it, but, on the Rice River Road from Hollow Water to Berens River, which is the first phase of the all-weather road work that's occurring right now, it's going to be very minimal in terms of clearing, because the cut is already there, the—for the winter road that is already there.

Further on, in the north-central side, the work and the area that has been identified as being the area for the preliminary work is also going to be very minimal in terms of clearing any trees or forest. Certainly, if the member is going down the road of comparing it to a transmission line, there's no comparison whatsoever. I want to make that very clear right at the outset before he gets to part 2 or part 3 of the question that he's put before me.

The community benefits agreements are set as well and have been signed with Hollow Water, Bloodvein and Berens River. Now, the community benefits agreements are the pre-work that has to be done in providing training, the rock crushing and the necessary work in order for us to proceed with the all-weather road construction in the first phase.

* (15:40)

Similar agreements have also been made with the communities in the Island Lake region, Red Sucker Lake. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) and I had the opportunity of visiting the Island Lake communities very recently, last month, prior to us reassembling in the Legislature. We had the opportunity of going to, well actually, four communities in the last several months—the four communities in the Island Lake region. We visited Wasagamack to sign their community benefits agreements.

So community benefits agreements have been signed with Wasagamack, in the central part of the east side, along with Ste. Theresa Point and Red Sucker Lake. And there's one pending in Garden Hill, which would complete the preliminary community benefits agreements in that region. On the south side of lower east side, we have agreements with Berens River, Bloodvein and Hollow Water.

And we believe that these offer tremendous opportunities, as we've never done—at least in my lifetime, we've never done this before—where First Nations communities that occupy the east side have an opportunity to have a say in what goes on in their community. And it's also providing employment and economic opportunities for local people. It's

enhancing opportunities for sustainable economic development opportunities in that region. And, currently, the people that live on the east side are dependent on the winter road network to bring in fuel, food, construction materials, other supplies into their communities.

And there are obstacles, no doubt, with respect to the waterways that exist on the east side, that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have problems with, and the minister and I will be meeting on Thursday morning in Ottawa to try and iron out circumstances. There's a Supreme Court ruling that is got to be taken into consideration as a result and we hope that we'll be able to satisfy that because—to accommodate the ongoing work of the all-weather road on the east side—has received the support of the communities that live there and they're providing band council resolutions supporting the work of the East Side Road Authority, that I have the great pleasure of having responsibility over, to ensure that it moves and should satisfy the bureaucratic requirements of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. And that is why Minister Shea and I will be meeting on Thursday morning, hopefully to begin the work in trying to iron out some of these problems that currently exist and appear to be causing some problems or concern for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Hawranik: Since the minister has been down the winter road, I'd like to remind him that along much of the way north of Bloodvein, where the winter road currently travels for many miles, there's a very wide right-of-way because there's the transmission line there already.

Is it the plan of the road authority to follow that transmission line as it—as the winter road also follows that transmission line?

Mr. Robinson: The all-weather road follows the winter road route already and that's what it's meant to do. The cutout is there already for the winter road area, which goes all the way up to Berens River. So no additional cutting—if there is any cutting to be done, it's going to be very minimal at best, because of the right-of-way already that's there. And I don't think—if the member is alluding to potential environmental damages, certainly, those concerns are being addressed, I think, in a very respectful and in a very careful manner.

Mr. Hawranik: I take it then, from the minister's comments, that the all-weather road will be following the route of the transmission line and the

existing winter road, which is where it should be, in my view, because it certainly cuts down a lot less boreal forest than if it was not. Can the minister indicate, with respect to the bridge over the Bloodvein River, where will the bridge be constructed? Will it be constructed where the winter road crosses, which is a very narrow part of the Bloodvein, or will it be constructed in a different location?

Mr. Robinson: I think it was on that basis that the environmental approval was given to the East Side Road Authority to proceed on the route that has been selected because, for the most part, the transmission line goes down the current cut-out for the winter route—winter road route that is currently in place and, like I said to the member, I think that we are doing this in a responsible manner.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Hawranik: With respect to the payment for services for contracts to build the all-weather road in the first phase, can the minister indicate who's going to be disbursing those funds? Is it going to be the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs or will it be the Road Authority, or who's going to be disbursing those funds?

Mr. Robinson: The authority lies with the East Side Road Authority which is really a model that was selected by this government because of the success it had with the north—the Winnipeg Floodway Authority, so it's pretty much one and the same. The Winnipeg Floodway Authority appeared to have a lot of success in engaging and through procurement policies and the like, engaging Aboriginal employment opportunities. I know that Métis people had the opportunity as well to have opportunities when the floodway work was commencing, and the East Side Road Authority, which is really a spin-off of the Winnipeg Floodway Authority, is the responsible body and I'm convinced that they'll do a credible job in ensuring that all responsible action and the engagement of the people that live on the east side will be taken into consideration as the work continues in developing an east side road.

Mr. Hawranik: I take it then, from the minister's answer, that the East Side Road Authority will be entering into those contracts and negotiating those contracts and disbursing the funds in payment of those contracts, and the reason I ask that is because of Bill 18, which the minister has provided to this—to the House regarding the Communities Economic Development Fund. I would take it, because of the

changes to the investment authority of CEDF that this would allow the CEDF to administer the money or at least invest the money for the east-side road, and is this plan? I just—I would like to have an answer in terms of whether that's the plan as to who holds the funds, and, secondly, who disburses the funds and who enters into contracts?

Mr. Robinson: The—let me separate the question, Madam Chairperson. First of all, the East Side Road Authority and their responsibility, obviously, is to do the necessary work. And I know that Mr. Gord Wakeling, the CEO of the CEDF, had a briefing with my colleague from Lac du Bonnet very recently to talk about the necessary modernizing—the act itself, the CEDF act required. So I can't marry those two issues. I know that the CEDF has its own mandate, has certain responsibilities, but I've yet to have it pointed out to me that there's any connection in it too. It could be that, down the road, there may be people that'll access necessary financing from CEDF that may want to become engaged in any aspect of road development with respect to the east side.

* (15:50)

But, certainly, there's no plans and there's no hidden agenda here as to why we're modernizing an outdated act like the CEDF fund, which is what we're doing. And that gives it more agility, gives it more—it broadens the opportunity for northerners and, generally, entrepreneurs that want to be entrepreneurs, that opportunity to get engaged in business opportunities like others.

So this is—it was often viewed as the place of last resort for entrepreneurs, but we're modernizing the act. I think that we're giving CEDF the opportunity for more agility to do business in other areas. It has certainly done a tremendous amount of work with the amount of money it does work with. But I can't marry the two issues between modernizing the CEDF Act and the East Side Road Authority. The East Side Road Authority, its mandate is clearly pointed out, as is the CEDF. So the two don't necessarily work hand in hand unless it's by coincidence.

Mr. Hawranik: The reason I point this out to the minister is the fact that, under the amendments to the act, the CEDF will be permitted to invest and administer trust funds, and, clearly, the money being held for the reconstruction of this road is, in effect, a trust fund. And I'm just asking the question whether or not that was part of the plan. It might even make sense for CEDF to actually hold on to the funds and administer them on behalf of the East Side Road

Authority. But if that's not the plan, that's not the plan. I'm just inquiring as to whether or not that's a possibility of doing that.

My next question, and probably my last before we go line to line, is with respect to Bill 24, The Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act, and I agree with the minister in his opening statement that language and culture are really inextricably linked together. If you lose your language, you lose part of your culture and possibly forever.

But I note that the act is very simple and maybe that's all that was ever intended. It's really just an act recognizing certain languages. There's no ability to make regulations, and will the minister advise whether there's anything planned, in his view, or any thoughts about changing—we haven't even passed the act yet, but any thoughts of changing the act to give certain rights to those languages in terms of education, in terms of other ways of preserving languages other than just saying we recognize you. Is there any other plans out there? Any thoughts about how that might play out in the long term?

Mr. Robinson: Well, I think that we have to get to step 1 first, and step 1 is that we recognize the existence of these languages, that they have been here way before anybody else was here and within what is now known as the boundaries of the province of Manitoba, the six–seven languages, of course, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuktitut, Ojibway and Oji-Cree.

And, of course, with the mixing of cultures, when the French arrived and in Canada there was, of course, interaction with the Ojibway and the Cree people, therefore, creating the Michif language, and a new language was born which we regard today as an indigenous language, as an Aboriginal language that is spoken in the province of Manitoba.

And the member is right; when a language is taken away from a people that it's gone. It's gone forever and then it's the first step in the loss of a culture. So, in many places throughout the world, there is actually dead languages now around the world. It's been brought to my attention.

I had the opportunity of addressing the indigenous forum on indigenous issues at the United Nations General Assembly a week and a half ago, and I was very proud to speak my own language, even though it was only a couple of paragraphs long, along with promoting the World Indigenous Nations Games.

And I talked about the importance of the preservation of our languages in order for us to retain our culture, and there's a lot of dysfunction in many communities. This was one of the areas identified by people like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that are going to be holding their first major event here in the city of Winnipeg, June 15th to 19th, in a couple months from now. The loss of language in many places has caused irreparable harm to people that live there because a sense of pride has been taken away.

But this is—this legislation that we're proposing in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly aims to ensure the longevity of indigenous languages in Manitoba, and it makes the first step towards preserving and promoting Manitoba's proud language heritage for the benefit of future generations of Aboriginal people. And I think that the member would agree with me that we have to take the first step. Now, I'll be criticized for not going far enough and my government will be criticized for not going far enough, but we have to take the first step.

There's nothing more I'd like to see in 20 years from now or a generation from now than to take the second step, maybe within the shorter period of time, but there are languages that are now in danger, and the least we can do as a government is recognize the existence of these Aboriginal languages. And we're the first province in Canada, aside from the Territories, to acknowledge the existence of Aboriginal languages, and we should be very proud of that.

And I would ask the member for Lac du Bonnet and other members in this Assembly that, when the time for us comes to vote on this recognition act, that all of us stand up with Yeas and Nays to proclaim to the world and to proclaim to this country the pride and the diversity that we have in this Legislative Assembly, this Chamber, and we support this. And I would suspect that the vote would be some like 56 to zero. So I will be asking my House Leader to initiate that, and to make sure that we put this on record, because all of us legislators in this Assembly ought to be very proud of the fact that we are taking step one, the first province.

Now, there was a meeting that occurred in British Columbia last week that talked about the 32 languages that once existed, and their language—there are three—there are five languages that are virtually dead, and three that they proclaimed to be sleeping now, and the rest are in danger. And, in

some of these language groups, only 5 percent of the people use that language.

I'm proud to say that in Manitoba—and other studies have indicated that only three languages will survive time in the years ahead, that being Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut. And that is very dangerous because the other language families we want to ensure that these continue to thrive into the future. The Michif language, I am told by the experts, that there are only 1,000 people that speak that language in the province of Manitoba.

So we have to take the first step, and I'm very proud to take that first step with the member from Lac du Bonnet and all members of this Legislature. And I hope that the day when we vote on these bills we will stand up for—particularly for this one and proclaim to Canada that we were a progressive province here and we can see through—see our differences through party lines and be able to support something as fundamental as the protection of Aboriginal languages in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Chairperson: Is the House ready for resolutions? *[Agreed]*

Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$35,660,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$115,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 19.1.

At this point I request that the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

* (16:00)

Mr. Robison: Yes, Madam Chairperson, I move that item 19 Minister's Salary—19.(a) Minister's Salary, pardon me—be reduced by 20 percent, or

\$9,000, to \$37,000. I put this forward as members are aware of the nature of the motion.

Madam Chairperson: It has been moved that item 19.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent, or \$9,000, to \$37,000.

Is there agreement for the resolution to pass? *[Agreed]*

Resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,082,000 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Revised resolution agreed to.

And that concludes this section of the Committee of Supply.

For the information of the Committee the next set of Estimates that will be considered for this section of the Committee are the Estimates of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

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

The committee recessed at 4:02 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:04 p.m.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, TRAINING AND TRADE

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Yes, thank you very much. It is a pleasure and privilege to speak as Minister of the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

Madam Chairperson, 2009 was a very challenging year as governments worldwide responded to global recession through a variety of economic measures, and for the information of the committee, ministers are already receiving a

20 percent reduction in salaries announced in Budget 2010, a year earlier than what is required under the current law. And as committee members will note, this reduction is included in the total calculation of expenditures and is reflected on pages 8, 9, and 11 of Budget 2010, Estimate of Expenditure and Revenue. And the 20 percent reduction will continue if the applicable legislation is enacted by the Legislative Assembly.

I'd like to start by thanking the staff in the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. I had the privilege of serving as Education Minister one day shy of six years and worked with a number of very dedicated civil servants and I certainly have had the privilege of working with a number of very dedicated civil servants in the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. And the transition has been a very good one, a very positive one. In fact, the staff did a wonderful job preparing a fairly lengthy statement, but I know in the interests of time I'd just like to provide a thumbnail sketch of some of the highlights that have been included in this statement with respect to the work that my department is doing.

The global recession and tighter credit conditions resulted in several of our sectors' performances declining in 2009, unfortunately. But Manitoba outperformed the national average in most key economic indicators. Our construction sector experienced 9.2 percent growth in 2009 following a 12.5 percent increase in 2008. Reduced demand saw Manitoba foreign exports fall by 17.8 percent and the value of metal mining production fell 21.7 percent in 2009. But manufacturing, our largest industry, experienced 11 percent contraction sales compared to a national contraction of 17.3.

So certainly the province has fared quite well, enjoying one of the most stable economies in Canada during the last 10 years with continuous and steady growth, and the real GDP growth exceeded Canadian growth from '06 to '08, and according to Stats Canada our real GDP growth was 2 percent in '08, significantly better than the 0.4 percent growth for Canada. And Stats Canada estimates Manitoba's real GDP contracted by 0.2 percent in 2009, well above the 2.9 percent decline for the rest of Canada, making it the fourth straight year that Manitoba's outperformed the national growth rate.

We continue to have one of the strongest labour markets in Canada, one of only three provinces to post an increase in employment, which compares to

the substantial national decrease of 276,900, in Manitoba the second-lowest unemployment and youth unemployment rates of all provinces last year. Employment has grown by 1.4 percent since December '09; we're already 200 jobs more, well above the national growth rate of 0.5 percent and the strongest among the provinces. We now rest at 5.2 percent unemployment, second lowest in Canada and slightly above Saskatchewan's 5.1 percent, while our youth unemployment rate is 10.3, second-lowest behind Saskatchewan.

Of course we've seen significant growth in Manitoba, welcoming 13,517 immigrants in 2009, the most immigrants to arrive in Manitoba since 1971, and a steady—and recent statistics say 15,761 babies were born in Manitoba last year, the highest since 1995. The labour force development continues to be a key area to focus to ensure Manitoba's economic success. And working towards meeting our commitment to create 4,000 additional training seats for apprentices, Budget 2010 allocated \$2 million towards 600 additional seats. Of course The Apprenticeship and Certification Act was proclaimed on April 1. The Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate has been expanded to include graduates of apprenticeship programs and the early level apprenticeship hiring incentive was announced in Budget 2010 to encourage graduates to live and work in Manitoba upon completion of their training.

There are several other initiatives that the department has undertaken. The Canadian Labour Market Development Agreement and the Canada-Manitoba Labour Market Agreement provide funding to over 8,000 individuals annually to access skills development training opportunities. Family Services and Consumer Affairs is involved with supporting vulnerable workers and \$11.2 million has been dedicated to rebound a two-year back to work initiative.

We're also focussing our efforts on northern employment opportunities in Manitoba. The mining industry are partnering in the development of the Northern Mining Academy in Flin Flon.

Enjoyed being a part of many launches of the BizPaL initiative, have also produced red tape with online services through the TAXcess where individuals—businesses can file returns and pay provincial taxes online in both official languages. And the Invest in Manitoba Web site is focussed on the international investment community and provides

information for individuals and businesses seeking to invest or establish businesses in Manitoba.

And, yes, 2009 was very challenging because of the global economy, but also issues related to increased protectionism, such as Buy America, and strong competition for market share resulting in declining merchandise exports. In '09, Manitoba's total merchandise exports declined by 17.8 percent with U.S. destined exports down 1.7 billion or 18.9 percent, but our decline in total merchandise exports compared favourably to the 26.7 percent decline experienced nationally and, for 2009, is the second strongest performance among the provinces after P.E.I.'s 1.9 percent decline.

* (16:10)

On a year-over-year comparison, Manitoba continues to be the top two—our 2009 exports to the top two emerging markets, China and India, were up by 4.2 percent.

We are, of course, involved in a number of initiatives in the department such as CentrePort, as members are very well aware. There is also an advisory council on workforce development that continues to provide us a platform to ensure the full workforce development information to industry workers—industry sectors, government and educational institutions; 1000 Waverley business and training centre is a partnership with the Alliance of Manitoba Sector Councils. In Workplace Education in Manitoba is conducting over 500 assessments and providing training for over 2,000 participants and outreach for over 35,000 individuals and businesses. I could talk about Workplace Essential Skills. I could talk about small business continuing to make up over 90 percent—97 percent of all business in Manitoba; the Canada-Manitoba Business Service Centre and federal-provincial partnership, completing its 12th year of successful operations; business start in loan guarantee program to assist entrepreneurs in establishing new business and creating jobs. The effort to continue to cut red tape, and, as I mentioned already, BizPaL, which is providing on-line services in Winnipeg, Brandon, Dauphin, Steinbach, Portage la Prairie and 26 other municipalities—and, as I said, I've had the opportunity to launch BizPaL in Holland, Carman, St. Pierre-Jolys, and Gimli, and look forward to visiting many more communities in the not-so-distant future.

Over the last year, Manitoba has worked with other jurisdictions to reduce interprovincial barriers to trade and mobility and, in '08 successfully

negotiated a strength and dispute resolution chapter, and in '09 successfully negotiated an improved agriculture and agrifood chapter. And Manitoba will continue to work in interprovincial trade barriers in the coming year guided by the Council of the Federation.

In my concluding remarks, I would like to thank my deputy minister and staff for their support and good efforts to build and develop our department's initiatives and policies, and once again thank them for their tutoring and the transition from the Education Department to Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. And, of course, the relationship that Education had with the Apprenticeship branch is one that I was very familiar with, and I really appreciated the continuity of that part of the portfolio and certainly the opportunities and challenges that the new dimensions to my portfolio present.

And I'm very pleased to be here today to address any questions that my colleague from Brandon West will have for me today. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Brandon West, have any opening comments?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): I appreciate the opportunity to make some very brief opening comments. First of all, as I realize the minister is new to his portfolio, I'm sure the minister also recognizes that I, too, am new to this critic portfolio, so perhaps between the two of us, we can ask questions and get answers that perhaps may seem somewhat obvious at the time, but I'm sure the minister will give me a little bit of a leeway.

The—I've been originally scheduled for two hours, which means that we will extend into tomorrow for a short period of time, so I'll give the minister a bit of a breakdown. The first questions, certainly, that I wish to deal with are going to be with respect to staffing levels in the minister's office and other staffing issues. I'll then run into MIOP and then into Apprenticeship and then into some trade and economic development issues. So, just for the minister's benefit and for the staff members here, that will be sort of the outline.

I would like to simply say that I believe that ETT, Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, is a very vital portfolio in the province of Manitoba. We

recognize that in Manitoba now, like every other jurisdiction, we're not just simply competing with domestic and certainly provincial competitors, we're dealing with interprovincial as well as global competition at the present time, and certainly it's important that we be competitive and that we have the necessary training, necessary initiatives in place so that we can compete with those other jurisdictions. The minister knows full well that Manitoba itself is totally dependent on trade. Domestically, we could not consume as much as we produce, nor could we provide the standard of living that we have at the current time unless we had trade beyond our borders. It's about 70 percent. Obviously, our major training partner is the U.S., and it's necessary to develop those new trading partners, not only interprovincially, but, certainly, internationally.

I am, I have to say, initially, at the onset, that I am somewhat—somewhat—no, I am terribly disappointed of the recent news with respect to the New West development that has been put forward with respect to Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, and we will get into those trade issues and that debate and those discussions and those questions certainly later into the Estimates. And I'm sure the minister will have some justification and some answers as to why Manitoba has been left out.

I guess, in closing, Madam Chairperson, my comment would be, you know, it's—we cannot, in Manitoba, be an island unto ourselves. And it seems, at this point in time, perhaps through no fault of the department, perhaps through the fault of the department and the government of the day, that it seems that Manitoba is fast becoming that island unto itself. But when dealing with the economy and dealing with trade and dealing with labour mobility and dealing with other major economic issues throughout the country as well as the globe, going it on your own really doesn't seem to be the way to increase our economy. So I'm sure the minister's going to have some response to some of my questions at that point. But those would be my opening comments and, as I said, my initial questions will be with respect to staffing levels, staffing limits, some of the FTEs, some of the changes in the department that's being proposed going into the next budget year.

So, thank you very much, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. We thank the member for those comments.

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

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Bjornson: I'm joined today by Deputy Minister Hugh Eliasson, Eliasson to some, but Eliasson to us Vikings; Leigh Anne Lumbard, who is the acting executive director of Finance and Administration; Scott Sinclair, executive director of Apprenticeship Manitoba, and Jim Kilgour, director of Financial Services.

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

Mr. Borotsik: I would ask the indulgence of the minister to allow discussion on a global fashion. We could go through line by line on the Estimates, but I don't think the minister would like to do that. I would much prefer to go on a global fashion and then go with the line by line afterwards.

Madam Chairperson: Is it agreed that we will go on a global discussion basis? Honourable minister—agree? *[Agreed]*

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Borotsik: First of all, I guess it is Eliasson. As a member of the PAC committee and having Mr. Eliasson appear before that, I have been told on numerous occasions that that's the pronunciation. So, Mr. Eliasson and staff, thank you again for being here and being part of the government and the department.

First question, Mr. Minister, if I could, a simple question as usual, a listing of all the political staff that you have in your office, Mr. Minister, including the names and positions and whether they're a full-time equivalent. And I know that the—if you could list those please.

* (16:20)

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, Greg Merner is my special assistant, and my executive assistant is Cindy Alexander.

Mr. Borotsik: And they're full-time?

Mr. Bjornson: Correct. That's correct.

Mr. Borotsik: One would be the SA; one would be the EA. Which is which?

Mr. Bjornson: Greg Merner is my special assistant, and the EA is Cindy Alexander.

Mr. Borotsik: Could the minister also, and not necessarily today, but the minister, could he provide a list of all of the staff members in the minister's and the deputy minister's office?

Mr. Bjornson: I can certainly do that, in the minister's office, there are three other staff. I could put them on the record right now. Lisa Rowe is secretary to the minister; Alison DePauw is administrative secretary; and Cindy Field is administrative secretary. And the staff in the deputy minister's office, of course, Deputy Minister Eliasson, and Gail Lemoine, secretary to the deputy, and Shannon Gerbrandt, administrative secretary.

Mr. Borotsik: Can the minister—I do have the FTEs. On page 13 of the Estimates book, it is identified that the FTE for the department for the 2010-2011 is 441.3 FTEs. Can the minister tell me what the final complement of FTEs were effective March 31st, 2010?

Mr. Bjornson: As printed, 439.8.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, and that is printed in the book and I see that and that is, in fact, the actual number of FTEs that were in the department effective March 31st, 2010?

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. Can the minister please tell me what vacancy there is currently in the proposed 441.30 FTEs?

Mr. Bjornson: That number does change from time to time as we staff positions, but right now it is a little bit over 7 percent.

Mr. Borotsik: Seven percent is the current number at the present time within the department, a 7 percent vacancy? Can the minister please tell me if that 7 percent is to be held at that level throughout this fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: As I said in the last response, that the number tends to fluctuate and generally the number is approximately 5 percent. So it's 7 percent approximately right now, but we will be filling some of the positions, and, as a rule, it's approximately 5 percent vacancy.

Mr. Borotsik: On page 14 of the—oh, by the way, before I do that, I would like to thank the minister and his department for having the Estimates books available sooner than the day before the Estimates were to be heard, and I do appreciate that. I don't know if it was a mistake from the department because it hasn't happened in the past, but I would like to encourage the minister and his department to continue with that practice because it is certainly most appreciated from the official opposition's critic and I do thank the minister in advance of that. Thank you very much.

On page No. 14 of the Estimates books, there's a staff turnover credit, if you will, of \$941,000. When you go through the salary costs and the benefits and the net salary costs for the department, there's \$941,000. Is that identified as the vacancies that have been identified at the 7 percent level?

Mr. Bjornson: As positions become vacant due to retirement, there is a bit of a time lag between the retirement and the vacancy being filled, and that's the anticipated difference in salary that would be accrued as a result of that lag between the retirement or somebody leaving the department and the vacancy being filled.

Mr. Borotsik: Yeah, what I'm trying to get at is if you're looking at anywhere between 5 and 7 percent vacancies, the total cost for FTEs is \$27 million, is budgeted for this coming budget year. If you look at a 5 percent vacancy, or 7 percent to 5 percent vacancy, you're looking at about a 1.3 to 1.4 million dollars.

Is that 1.3 or 4 million dollars included in the budget? We're looking at 441.3 FTEs. I assume that that 1.3 is already included in the \$27 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Bjornson: You assume correctly, and the number that you see before you, the 941 represents approximately 3 percent of salaries. And that's consistent with what's happened in the past with respect to the time between, as mentioned earlier—an individual retiring or leaving the department and those vacancies being filled.

Mr. Borotsik: Is there currently a hiring freeze in the department?

Mr. Bjornson: No, there is not.

Mr. Borotsik: So the anticipation is to fill the 5 percent vacancies? And the reason I'm getting to

this, is that there is, if the 5 percent vacancies–vacancy rate is retained through the full fiscal year, there is a bit of cushion that's already built into the \$27.5 million in total salaries.

Is it the department's intention to retain that 5 percent throughout the fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: This would be our best estimate in that the member can appreciate that some of the positions might be difficult to fill because of the skill sets that are required and candidate searches from the time you post an ad to the time you get a response to that ad.

So, as the member can appreciate, that some of these skill sets, the positions are difficult to fill. And as such, this is our best estimate with respect to the funds that would be lapsed between the—as I said, the retirement for somebody leaving the department and new hires filling those vacancies.

Mr. Borotsik: The human resources function has been transferred out of the department and consolidated with the Civil Service Commission. How many employees, FTEs, were transferred not necessarily physically, but transferred into the Civil Service Commission?

Mr. Bjornson: That would be two–two.

Mr. Borotsik: So if there's been a 1.5 percent increase in staffing levels, and two have been transferred out, so in effect there's been an additional three staffing members into the department this fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: The two that were transferred show up as an adjustment to the 9-10 number. I suspect that's where the member is making that inference about the adjustment in the staffing levels.

Mr. Borotsik: Okay, we can just clarify this then. In the 9-10 numbers there were 439.8 FTEs. In the 2010-11 there were 441.30. That's an increase of 1.5. If you've reduced your staffing levels by 2 from HR, do I not take it that there were 3.5 new bodies in the department at this time?

* (16:30)

Mr. Bjornson: There's actually a few variables that contribute to the change in the numbers. The adjustment was made, as I said, for the two staff members who've moved to Human Resources in the '09-10, but there was also an addition of two and a half staff members to the Apprenticeship department. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we've put

\$2 million on the table to expand our commitment to apprenticeship and increase the spaces, so the department's very, very—the branch is a very busy branch in the department, as they all are, but, of course, we've got commitments to continue to grow to the Apprenticeship program.

And we also saw a reduction of two staff positions in the Ottawa office that had been maintained by the department, and that's no longer being maintained. The lease has expired and the employees have—one has retired, and one is seeking other employment right now, I believe.

Mr. Borotsik: You're absolutely correct. The Manitoba office was shut down in Ottawa. That was two staff members, so that certainly was a reduction.

But, if you could turn to page 49 in the Estimates book, on the office of the senior executive director, it seems that there was one FTE, a managerial position, approximately \$100,000, added to that particular. Can you explain who that managerial position—who fills that managerial position and at the \$100,000 level?

Mr. Bjornson: That's an adjustment based on the fact that the Hydro Northern Training project had wound down, and the individual's transferred from one part of the department to this department. And it's reflected in—or to this part of the department, in Labour Market Skills, and that's why you see an increase in this—on this particular page with respect to FTEs.

Mr. Borotsik: Who was the individual transferred to this department from the Hydro?

Mr. Bjornson: I don't know if I'm pronouncing the name right. Jenny Styrchak.

Mr. Borotsik: I'm sure *Hansard* will get that properly, so thank you.

How many contract workers or contract employees are there with the department?

Mr. Bjornson: We don't have a list available, but I can endeavour to get a list for the honourable member.

Mr. Borotsik: Yeah, I do appreciate that, but just sort of ballpark. The list will be appreciated, and we will, I'm certain, receive it. The minister has promised it, but can you give me a ballpark as to how many contract employees there are and where their expenses would be identified in the Estimates?

Mr. Bjornson: I can't give you a specific number, but we can get that for you. I would expect it's less than five. I don't know for sure.

Mr. Borotsik: The department, the deputy minister, and the staff don't know how many contract employees there are within the department? Does the deputy minister and staff know the function of those contract employees if, in fact, they don't know how many and what the names are?

Mr. Bjornson: Most of our staff are civil service and full-time employees. We try to stay away from contracts, but they're—we will, as I said, endeavour to get the list of contract employees for the member.

Mr. Borotsik: Each contract employee must have a mandate and certainly have a task associated with the contract that they've entered into with the department. I go back to my other question, those costs associated with the contract employees. Can the minister please tell me where those costs are identified in the Estimates, the Estimates of Expenditures?

Mr. Bjornson: They'd be in the appropriation for the division in which the contract employee works.

Mr. Borotsik: I'm sorry. I missed that from the minister. They would be in the appropriation for—where—and could the minister or the deputy minister please point out that particular page in the Estimates?

Mr. Bjornson: I'll refer the member to page 23. There's a section that refers to supplies and services.

Mr. Borotsik: I'm sorry. Was that page 53?

Mr. Bjornson: Page 23.

Mr. Borotsik: Again, could you—I've got page 23 now. Could the minister please point me in the right direction as to where those contract employees would be—where their salaries or their contracts would be identified?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, if he was to go down, almost to the bottom to the page other—under other expenditures, it's identified as supplies and services.

Mr. Borotsik: Total other expenditures are identified by transportation, communications, supplies and service, minor capital and other operating capital, for a total of \$237,000. That doesn't identify any salaries for that contract.

Could the minister please identify where the salaries are for those five contract employees?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, first of all, I'll clarify that they're—that when he asked about the number of contracted employees—said less than five. I didn't have an exact figure for the member and I will endeavour to do so. So it doesn't identify five employees. Supplies and services is the category under which a contract would be identified.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, I'm still a little confused as to where we've identified the contract employees. I wonder if I could perhaps be a little bit more specific. There's one contract employee that I know the department has; Mr. Smith. Could the deputy minister or the minister please tell me where Mr. Smith is employed, what his title is and where his salary would be identified in the Estimates?

Mr. Bjornson: The number that I referred to under supplies and services on page 23 represents the contract for Mr. Smith.

Mr. Borotsik: Okay, still, on page 23, which is policy planning and co-ordination, we have one managerial position, we have eight professional and technical, we have one administrative support and then I do not see anything there with respect to any other contractual arrangement. Where would that contract be identified in those salaries?

* (16:40)

Mr. Bjornson: Under other expenditures, and the line is supplies and services.

Mr. Borotsik: Okay, supplies and services at \$92,000, that would be the item that we're looking for. Can the minister please explain to me what the contract entails with that supplies and services for policy planning and co-ordination.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I will gladly do that. Mr. Smith has been engaged, as the member knows previously, in a political level with respect to labour mobility in Canada and the commitment to reduce barriers to labour mobility. That was something that had been championed by Premier Doer, and certainly Mr. Smith had done, you know, tremendous work in his role as minister and has continued to do tremendous work in his role under contract.

There's a number of job descriptors that I'd be glad to provide for the member. His duties since 2008 have included developing a stakeholder communication and information sharing strategy; develop an interdepartmental communication and implementation strategy; co-ordinate a preparation of information and briefing information for senior

officials; represented Manitoba by communicating Manitoba's interests in the development and drafting—pardon me, redrafting—of the agreement on internal trade, chapter 7 labour mobility; represented Manitoba in the interjurisdictional Labour Mobility Coordinating Group; developed information materials and tools for public presentations; identified all provincial regulatory bodies affected by the amended AIT—and there's a pretty substantial list of regulatory bodies that were engaged in that process; co-ordinated process for engaging all of the identified regulators to ensure they meet Manitoba's obligations while providing resources to regulators to understand the amended agreement; met with interested stakeholder organizations to review the amended chapter 7; communication related to Manitoba's Labour Mobility Act as it relates to the obligations of chapter 7; continued meetings of all of the identified regulatory authorities to assess requests for exceptions of labour mobility—or to labour mobility—based on legitimate objections and compiling recommendations in accordance to the intent of the redrafted chapter 7 of the AIT; continued preparation of information material for senior officials; assisted in the development of draft legislation to enable compliance; continued to work with Labour Mobility Coordinating Group to develop a work plan for continued regulator assessment processes and implementation insurance; developed a list of all Manitoba occupations, professional and trades, that are implicated by changes to the AIT chapter 7; interjurisdictional work to match Manitoba's occupations to those regulated in other jurisdictions; continued stakeholder resource for interpretation and application of the amended chapter 7; identify and review exceptions to full labour mobility posted against Manitoba occupation; determine if the jurisdiction—or justification of such exceptions are accurate and, if necessary, work with other jurisdictions to resolve issues related to the exception; continue to identify regulated financial sector occupations in Manitoba; work with regulated financial sector occupations and stakeholders to communicate the obligations of chapter 7 as it related to recommendations for their potential inclusion within chapter 7; represent Manitoba's interests with respect to recommendations for the potential inclusion of regulated financial services occupations within the chapter 7 obligations. And that's been part of the job.

Mr. Smith is also undertaking activities related to Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, and I'll gladly list what that means if the member would like me to do so.

Mr. Borotsik: I'm just curious. There are 10 other staff in that department, and we have a total of some 300 and 400-and-some-odd, 444.03 staff in the department. Are there no other staff members in your department that could provide that staffing function in your department? There's nobody in the 441 that can provide that staffing function?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, when you consider the list of responsibilities and duties Mr. Smith has undertaken since September of '08, and the responsibilities that continue under the expansion of the recognition of foreign credentials, this is a very involved project that many staff are currently engaged on or working on.

On the foreign qualifications recognition—assessment and recognition for example, Mr. Smith will represent Manitoba by communicating our interests in implementing pan-Canadian efforts to streamline, simplify and improve foreign qualifications recognition in Canada, which the member certainly can appreciate is critical to the success of our Provincial Nominee Program which has been very successful to this point, but I can only see it get better as we work towards the recognition of foreign qualifications.

In fact, I believe there was a seminar held on that very issue this afternoon at the Delta Hotel, if I'm not mistaken. They will advise regulators, departments and stakeholders on the interrelationships between labour mobility, chapter, and the Pan-Canadian Framework.. They'll represent Manitoba inter-jurisdictional foreign qualifications recognition working group, work interjurisdictionally to refine the Pan-Canadian Framework's implementation strategy, lead interdepartmental efforts working with regulators and stakeholders to implement the new agreed Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, complementing Manitoba's Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act which was enacted in '07, and the implementation of Chapter 7 of the AIT, and who will also work with identified occupations to implement the Pan-Canadian Framework in Manitoba within the specified time frames.

And as the member probably knows the history, this is something that has been ongoing in Canada for quite some time, the discussions on labour

mobility issues and discussions on foreign qualification recognition. And this is something that had for all intents and purposes slowed down quite a few years ago and has recently been recharged, if I can use that word, in the last decade to ensure that we recognize foreign credentials and to ensure that there's more mobility among professionals across Canada and professionals in trades.

So Mr. Smith has been engaged in two very important exercises for the government since September of '08.

Mr. Borotsik: As the minister's probably aware if he's read the New West agreement that's been entered into by Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, as a matter of fact, labour mobility and the foreign accreditation and credentials are very—play a very integral part into that agreement. Has Mr. Smith been part of those particular negotiations with the New West agreement?

Mr. Bjornson: No, Mr. Smith has not been engaged in those discussions, but these are integral parts of the national Agreement on Internal Trade. It's part of the AIT and something that's been part of our mandate certainly for the last couple of years, internal agreement on trade.

Mr. Borotsik: So it's not totally pan-Canadian then if we are missing a fairly large portion of the western Canadian marketplace with respect to labour mobility and foreign credentials and accreditation, which as they say, reading the document is a very important part of the New West agreement. So having not had any influence in the New West agreement, does that mean that labour mobility and the foreign credential accreditation is not something that we're looking forward to in western Canada?

Mr. Bjornson: Labour mobility and foreign credential recognition through the Agreement on Internal Trade is something that all provinces and territories have been signatories to, not just regional blocks of provinces. So this something that the AIT has addressed and it's addressed through the hard work of the department and the work that Mr. Smith has been doing.

Mr. Borotsik: Is there travel associated with that particular contract position and if so, is there a budget for that particular travel?

Mr. Bjornson: There is a limited amount of travel and that shows up on page 23 under Transportation, but that allocation is for all the employees that have

some travel requirements for the performance of their duties.

Mr. Borotsik: On a contract employee basis, expenses are submitted to the department. Has there been travel that has been incurred by Mr. Smith in his capacity in the department?

* (16:50)

Mr. Bjornson: I could get that information for the member. I'm not sure where Mr. Smith has travelled for the performance of his duties, but I understand that the amount of travel would be not—would not be that significant.

Mr. Borotsik: I thank the minister for that offer, and I will be looking forward to it. The other operating category of \$87,000 under other expenses, other operating, would that include offices and secretarial and other kind of costs associated to that particular contract?

Mr. Bjornson: Those expenditures relate to the branch as a whole, not any particular individual office or position. They relate to the entire branch.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. I do appreciate your offer for providing those—that information and I look forward to it. Just one last question with respect to the department and its staffing. Can the minister tell me if he has taken any particular travel or any trips in the—over his course of the duties that has been relatively recent?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I will tell the member that I have travelled extensively in the province by car as well as by plane to Thompson and Thompson and The Pas to tour the incredible industry that we have in northern Manitoba as well as trips to Brandon and Portage la Prairie, and I do hope to tour many of the small and medium enterprises.

As far as out-of-province travel thus far, as the member knows, CentrePort is a very important initiative of this government. It's very important to the future of this province and, as such, I was the head of the delegation for CentrePort in Guanajuato, Mexico, in Dallas-Fort Worth and in Memphis, at which time the Premier had joined me in Memphis and he took over the heading of the delegation from Memphis to Chicago, and I dutifully rushed back to Manitoba.

I have also recently returned from Poitiers, France, where Futurallia was held. Futurallia is a European brand of business-to-business meetings, and I was asked by ANIM, an organization that is

jointly funded by the province and the federal government who is hosting Centrallia here on 2010–2010, where they hope to have between 500 and 600 businesses registered to come and have, essentially, speed dates for business where a computer program will allow them to submit profiles. The profiles that they submit will generate a list of potential dates, if I could use that term, and at which point the businesses will sit down, have 15 minutes to pitch their services or their products and have 15 minutes to have services and products pitched to them based on the matchmaking, if you will, that the computer program will allow. The largest economic summit of its kind to be held here in Manitoba.

And one thing I was particularly pleased about in France was the opportunities that have presented themselves for future collaboration. In fact, one of the businesses I visited was flying Manitoba flags as they had googled Manitoba to see what it was that we had to offer and I'm very encouraged by their interest that they've expressed here in Manitoba and some of the potential for trade and employment.

And another thing that was very—something we were very proud of as the Manitoba delegation is the fact that—her name escapes me—Marianne Mulaire, sorry, how could I forget that? Marianne Mulaire, who is with ANIM, has been appointed to the Futurallia board of directors, which is great news for Manitoba and also the opportunity to visit the—Canada's ambassador to France who's talked about some of the innovative things that have been happening through ANIM and the progress that has been made in expanding trade in France and specific areas of France and the—it was an opportunity to thank the ambassador and his staff for how they have accommodated ANIM and the province of Manitoba, which is now able to be a recognizable brand in areas of France that are looking to do business with Manitoba.

So, as you can expect, the minister responsible for trade, there will be some travel and as such, I've been in two international trips, and there are some that are pending.

Mr. Borotsik: I thank the minister for that explanation. It wasn't the trips to Thompson and Brandon that I was concerned about, but thank you for explaining your international travel.

Can the minister tell me who accompanied him in that international travel?

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly. There was a fairly substantial delegation of business and members of the CentrePort board. As well as—I did have staff, one staff member, accompany me to Guanajuato, Dallas and Memphis, and I had one staff member accompany me, because my high-school French—it's been 26 years since I studied French—perhaps a bit more—no more than that actually. So I did have a bilingual staff member accompany me to Paris.

Mr. Borotsik: Were any of the Premier's costs allocated to the department of ET and T?

Mr. Bjornson: I don't believe that's the case. No.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. I wonder if I can go to—in a short period of time, we can go to page 29 in the Estimates book. I would like to touch on the program delivery which is MIOP, Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program. At the bottom of that one bullet, it says that as of March 31st, 2009, the program had 19 active loans totalling \$77.2 million under management. It also says above that that there was, I believe, previously \$198 million for 42 businesses' expansion projects. And then it does say that in 2008–2009, the branch had 37 million of new loans approved.

Is the actual total outstanding now of MIOP, as of the end of March 31st, 2009—\$77.2 million? Is that the MIOP outstandings?

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Borotsik: Without having to divulge any confidentialities, of the 19 active loans of the 72–77.2 million outstanding, what's the condition of those loans? Are there any past dues of that 77.2 million?

Mr. Bjornson: We do monitor the loans, but we can't identify which loans we specifically monitor. But there is some provision for companies that might be experiencing difficulty in their schedules.

Mr. Borotsik: The minister's absolutely correct. There would be a payment schedule that would be attached to that loan.

The question was simple. Of the 19, how many are in current position, and I'm not asking for names and I don't expect to get any, nor do I want any, okay, because there is some confidentialities.

However, of the 19, how many in the current position, are there of those 19, how many are in a—I won't say default position, but a past due position with respect to the payments schedule?

Mr. Bjornson: There are two loans that aren't current right now. Two loans that are not current.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

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