

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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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.
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.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	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	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARCELINO, Flor	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.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	N.D.P.
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.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 5, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Morris, on a matter of privilege.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I understand that there are two conditions that need to be met to form a prima facie case of a matter of privilege, the first being that the matter must be raised at the first opportunity and, secondly, that my rights as a member of this Legislature have been breached.

Mr. Speaker, my matter of privilege is in response to statements made in this House by the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), the MLA for St. Vital, in question period last Thursday, and I will conclude with a motion for this House.

On Thursday, May 1, I asked the minister if a directive stating that the government intends to expand WCB coverage to low-risk workplaces was a free and full opportunity for consultation and discussion. The minister replied, and I'm quoting from *Hansard*: "I'm pleased to have an opportunity to put factual information on the record in regard to the expansion of coverage." We, the WCB, "is consulting for the second time in the last two years in regard to the expansion of coverage. There has been no expansion of coverage for Workers Compensation Board since 1959, Mr. Speaker. The industries that are covered actually remain the same as when the act was adopted in 1917."

Since this occurred in the most recent question period last Thursday, I had the opportunity to review *Hansard* to confirm the exact words of the Minister of Labour and Immigration, the MLA for St. Vital. As you can appreciate, Mr. Speaker, it is sometimes very difficult to hear what is said in the Chamber, so it is important to confirm in *Hansard* which was available Friday afternoon. Therefore, I submit that today being Monday is the first opportunity to raise this matter in the House.

Mr. Speaker, in a news release dated August 10, 2006, the Minister of Labour and Immigration, the

MLA for St. Vital, stated: "The province is extending the number of industries covered by Workers Compensation Board (WCB), effective January 1, 2007." I will table those news releases and, to be clear, the point is not regarding the expansion of Workers Compensation Board coverage but the fact that the minister put false information on the record, claiming there had not been any expansion of coverage since 1959.

Mr. Speaker, when a minister brings false or misleading statements to the House, it compromises our ability to perform our duties in this House. As the official opposition critic for Labour and Immigration, it is my duty to demand accountability and transparency from this minister and her department. How can I perform my duties as opposition critic to the best of my ability when the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), the MLA for St. Vital, gives me answers to questions in this House which are false or misleading?

The minister clearly stated there had been no expansion of coverage of Workers Compensation Board last Thursday, and, yet, while she was the minister, she issued a press release in August of 2006, stating there would be expansion of coverage on January 1 of 2007. That did occur, Mr. Speaker, so, clearly, she has knowingly misled this House.

Mr. Speaker, further, in last Thursday's exchange in question period the minister claimed, we are consulting with employers and labour in regard to how we should proceed following the unanimous recommendations in the report to expand coverage in three to five years. Again, the minister is knowingly misleading the House.

In 2005, the legislative review committee report on Workers Compensation Board contained 100 recommendations, all of which the minister is fully aware of. I've been told by members of that committee that the intent of achieving a unanimous report was that all of the recommendations would be implemented. The minister refers to unanimous recommendation No. 6 when she refers to expansion of coverage, yet she clearly ignores recommendation No. 4 which states that Workplace Safety and Health division should be fully funded through general revenues of the Province. She also ignores recommendation No. 7 which says extension of

coverage should only occur once there's been a full and free opportunity for consultation and discussion, and she also ignores recommendation No. 8 which says the Workers Compensation Board should vigorously encourage low-risk workplaces to opt in to Workers Compensation Board coverage.

The Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), the MLA for St. Vital, has twisted the meaning of unanimous in her statements in this House. This is misleading and false. I know the review committee worked very hard to achieve a consensus on the recommendations, and some feel betrayed because the minister has cherry-picked the ones that she wants and has ignored the others. She has made a sham of the whole review, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that I have brought this matter to the attention of the House at the earliest possible time, and I believe that the minister has knowingly and wilfully brought false information to this House. I believe that this has compromised my ability as a member of this Chamber and as the official opposition critic for Labour and Immigration to effectively perform my duties of holding the minister to accountability and transparency in her department.

Indeed, when false information is brought to this Chamber by a minister of the Crown, it is an infringement on the rights of all of us as members, Mr. Speaker. We deserve to hear the truth in this House.

Therefore, I move that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for review. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(13:40)

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member or any member to speak, I remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I think this matter can be dealt with relatively quickly.

First off, it's very clear that it's not a matter of privilege. In fact, at best, it's a point of order and a dispute over the facts, which you've ruled on on many occasions.

I've just had a discussion with the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan), but I will be followed in my comments by the Minister of Labour, who wishes to make a statement to the House with respect to this particular matter, which I think insofar as (a) it's not a matter of privilege (b) it can be dealt with in the House, I think will dispose of it.

I could go into a long dissertation as to the reasons why, both technically and in law and under our practices, it is not a privilege, but I think the matter can be disposed of very quickly because the Minister of Labour wishes to make a statement on this matter.

So perhaps with leave of the House the Minister of Labour can speak?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House?

Some Honourable Members: Leave. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. For information for the House, the alleged matter of privilege is pertaining to the Minister of Labour, so she does have a right to speak to it. So she doesn't need leave.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank my House leader for his comments that he has made in regard to whether or not this is a matter of privilege or whether or not it is simply a dispute over the facts. I know that you have the expertise in this House to make whatever judgment you will make in regard to those matters because you have the expertise in this area.

I would like to clarify to the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and the critic of Labour and Immigration that when we passed the legislation—it was unanimous legislation in this House—that there had not been a broad review of the expansion of coverage.

We did make a 1 percent expansion of coverage. We said very clearly from the very beginning that we were going to do high-risk workplaces which were the cousins. That's what we did, Mr. Speaker, and we are now consulting again in regard to any expansion of coverage.

The process for that expansion of coverage will be a report from the WCB to me as minister, Mr. Speaker, and then we will determine at that point, once we have that information from the WCB board of directors, that we will make our determination in regard to how to proceed once I have that document in place.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, just to add two points: First of all, to support the concerns that were raised by the MLA for Morris and also to say this, that you can argue with the technical details of the matter, as the NDP have done, or some of the aspects of what was said, but, clearly, when a minister provides information which misleads, surely the minister, at the very least, should apologize for what she's done.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): On the same matter of privilege, I take exception to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), the Government House Leader, with respect to his statement: This cannot be a matter of privilege. It's clear, absolutely clear within the precedents, that, in fact, this type of situation can become a matter of privilege.

Although it has been ruled in the past, of course, Mr. Speaker—now by yourself and others in your Chair in the past have ruled that, in fact, you have to knowingly mislead in order to form a matter of privilege.

So it's not the test of whether or not—you can't just simply dismiss the fact that there are false statements and dismiss it as a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is a point to be made and there is a precedent to show that, in fact, if there's a misleading in this House that the minister knew or ought to have known to be false, if she made statements or he made statements to this House that were false, that, in fact, it is a matter of privilege. The ability of members to perform their parliamentary duties is founded on information being brought to this House which is accurate and which we can rely on for debate in this House, not only for debate in this House but also to take out of this House and to our constituents in order to better serve our constituents.

Inaccurate information affects questions in question period. The accuracy of information that we receive here affects debate on bills. It affects questions in committees. It also affects our ability to respond accurately to questions for information from constituents, and it also affects whether we need to ask more questions to serve our constituents well, Mr. Speaker.

Deliberately misleading statements may be treated as a contempt to the House, and therefore it's a matter of privilege. As I indicated before, previous rulings have indicated that, short of admitting intent, it is virtually impossible to prove intent and that's the exact words that were stated in this House by you,

Mr. Speaker, and other Speakers in the past, virtually impossible, that doesn't mean it's impossible. There is a possibility of still proving intent without having a minister admit that they wanted to mislead the House.

There is that possibility. It's not impossible. It's almost impossible but not impossible, Mr. Speaker, and certainly when we have the Labour Minister who rose in this House and put information on the record in response to a question by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), and in her response she said she was pleased to put factual information on the record. The fact, as well, that this Minister of Labour is not new to this portfolio; she's been in that portfolio for quite a number of years and she ought to know better. She should know what the facts are and clearly, clearly she should have all the information in front of her.

She misled this House in terms of the information she put on the record. Mr. Speaker, simply the fact that the Labour Minister has been minister for quite some time and ought to have known better and knew the facts; in spite of knowing the facts she indicated otherwise. As a result of that I would support this privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Before moving on, I'd like to ask the honourable Member for Morris, you referenced Standing Committee on Privilege and Elections, that the name of that committee has been changed to Legislative Affairs. Is that okay to make the correction in your motion? Do you agree with that? Is that okay?

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, Mr. Speaker, Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, that's been agreed to.

A matter of privilege is a serious concern. I'm going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities, and I will return to the House with a ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): On a matter of privilege also, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a matter of privilege. Okay, the honourable Member for Inkster, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise today knowing that you're supposed to rise as soon as you can when

you feel that a privilege has been taken for granted possibly from the government. In reviewing *Hansard*, I still wasn't quite as comfortable in terms of presenting the privilege today, but based on the privilege that was just raised I think it behooves me to raise the privilege now.

I had asked the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) a very simple question back on April 21, Mr. Speaker. The question was, to the minister, whether it's advertising in the form of print, radio, television, what we do know is that government has spent an exceptional amount of money in terms of promoting this particular budget.

Mr. Speaker, I was trying to get to the fact of how much did the government spend. The Minister of Finance clearly indicated, and I quote right from *Hansard* because the critical thing here is did the Minister of Finance intentionally mislead the House. I believe I can prove that.

Here's what the Minister of Finance stated, and I quote: "Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the Estimates. We can discuss the details, but I can tell the member right now that the amount of money spent this year is 16 percent less than it was in '99-2000."

I took the matter to the Estimates Committee, Mr. Speaker. The minister then tabled a document, and the information that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) had said on April 21 was wrong.

* (13:50)

It shows 1999-00 budget, 2000 budget, that the government of the day spent \$173,013 on advertising for that budget, Mr. Speaker. In 2008, this year, it's \$196,582. Now that was actually more than what it was in '99-2000.

Here's what I mean in terms of how I believe I can prove that it was intentionally done, because I asked then the Minister of Finance the question about it in a question period last week, and the Minister of Finance then stood in his place, after I showed him that, in fact, he did mislead the House, and I asked him to apologize. He then stood up and he said something to the effect of I'm being selective in terms of a document that he tabled in the Finance Estimates, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am not being selective. I have a copy of it, and what I would like to have is one of the pages provide you the copy of the actual document in question. I am not being selective. The Minister of Finance clearly indicated that there was a decrease,

that they spent 16 percent less, and no matter what you look at, total production, even if you shifted over to include the cost of research, in '99, it was \$239,000. Well, in 2008, if you factor in the cost of research, it's \$236,000. So it would have been a couple thousand less. It definitely isn't 16 percent, but that's if you factor in research.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) knows, Mr. Speaker, my question was specifically on the advertising, so I would ultimately argue that he intentionally misled the House because he continued, a couple of days after the Estimates, to try to give the impression, which is just not true. The government did spend more.

Now, I would argue, Mr. Speaker, the reason why the minister intentionally misled was to try to manipulate members of the media to give them the impression that this government is not doing any more than what previous governments have done in terms of using propaganda to promote their budget, and that's where we have a very serious problem with the Minister of Finance.

This matter could be resolved by the Minister of Finance standing up and apologizing for the information, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, I would move that this—Therefore, I move that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs for review. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When moving a motion, the mover must have a seconder for the motion, and there was not one indicated. Would the member like to indicate a seconder of his motion?

Mr. Lamoureux: The Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: So the seconder will be the Member for River Heights, and before recognizing any other members to speak, I remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members will be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, again, this issue, I don't even think it's a question of a point of order in terms of being a dispute over the facts.

In point of fact, not only is the timing a little off for the member but, having said that, Mr. Speaker, let me portray the member's case. The member stood up in question period and asked the minister about

costs and the minister said, in fact, it was down 16 percent. They then went into Estimates, Supplementary Estimates, which are the line-by-line items, and the Minister of Finance provided the member with an actual copy of the expenditures which showed, in fact, expenses were less than 1999 by \$3,000.

Then the member says, well, the minister really knew that I wanted to ask about a specific area, and that's why he's deliberately misleading because I was asking about a specific area. The member asked the question; the minister answered the question and then went into Estimates and gave him the specific answer to the question which he brought forward today, and because he said that he thought he was asking a specific point that the member didn't ask, he has a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest it's very hard to make a case—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Inkster was rising on a point of order, and it's very rare to hear a point of order when there is a matter of privilege on the floor because all members have the opportunity to respond to it. I think it would only be proper to let the minister continue with his response to the matter of privilege.

Mr. Chomiak: And, in fact, if the member's concerned about the chart that the minister provided and it showed \$3,000, I'll take that out of my argument.

Let me go back to the argument. The member asks a question—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A matter of privilege or a point of order is a very serious matter, and I will have to make a decision on what I'm hearing on both sides to make a ruling, so I need to be able to hear every word. Matters of privilege are very serious and should be treated as such.

The honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. Chomiak: The member asked a general question. The minister gave a general response. The member went into Estimates. The minister gave him a specific breakdown, category, year-by-year, going back 10 years providing the information, and now the member stands up and says the minister deliberately, intentionally gave him a wrong answer

in question period and then slipped it in in the afternoon and gave him all the information that he could have raised anytime in this House and, in fact, that's a matter of privilege.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the member is playing politics. He's trying to raise the issue—*[interjection]* Well, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) who likes to make legal points knows things about intention and about knowingly and about the requirement it requires. The member ought to know that.

There is no sense of intention, Mr. Speaker, or requiring. In fact, if one were to relate this matter, actions happen in this Chamber on a regular basis. It would be one thing if the member had stood up; the minister had said something and then gone and given the member something that was then found to be inaccurate. In fact, the minister provided the member with the accurate information, and the member now says: But that's not the information I specifically requested; I wanted specific information on another category, to make his argument. That's, in fact, what the member said in his argument.

I say it's very difficult, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber where matters are a public forum for the member to say, well, he gave me an answer in the morning and then changed his answer in the afternoon based on specific numbers and specific facts that were, in fact, provided for him. It's very hard to find the element of intention or the element that the member wanted to mislead this House.

At best, Mr. Speaker, it's a dispute over the facts based on the member's interpretation of what his question was. At worst, at very worst, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) might have exaggerated a percentage, at worst. Depending on the categories you looked at, under the sum total the numbers provided to the member showed that the costs were, in fact, down. That's what the member asked.

I suggest this is not a matter of privilege. I suggest it's members opposite trying to make mischief in terms of this House. I seem to recall comments by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) recently in this Chamber that if some particular event didn't happen, he would put his seat on the line. That event did not occur. I'm still waiting for the Member for Inkster to put his seat on the line as a result of a pledge and a promise he made in this Chamber.

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker, we are not infallible in this place. From time to time, errors go back and forth. I'll admit to 10 a day myself, I guess. You know what, and I'm not afraid to say that because we're all human. In this case, the member provided an answer, he clarified and provided specific information in the afternoon. This is hardly a matter of privilege. It's an attempt by the member opposite to make politics out of an issue. I suggest that the member, I think ought to clarify both what his question is and his specifics are. He had the chance during Estimates. He got the specific information he wanted. Now he's coming back and saying he got inaccurate information. I suggest that strikes me as little bit of politicking. If the member truly wanted to be evasive, he would not have provided the information in the instance to the member on the specifics if he wanted to knowingly do something.

It's just patently obvious that the member is trying to make politics out of it. At the very worst, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) had made an error in his earlier statement, he certainly corrected it in the afternoon by providing specifics to the member. There is not a privilege here. There's not even a point of order. There is pure politics here. This is the second privilege we've seen today. I'm beginning to sense there might be a pattern emerging in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this matter of privilege. Of course, there are two issues in the matter of privilege. First of all, the matter has to arise at the earliest possible opportunity, and I take the Member for Inkster's word on that, that, in fact, this is his earliest opportunity, and, second, whether in fact the facts give rise to a breach of the privileges of this House.

Similar to the last matter of privilege, my same comments would apply. There are previous rulings that have indicated that, short of admitting that it's intent, it's virtually impossible to prove intent. But that doesn't mean it's absolutely impossible to prove intent without an admission of guilt. In the right set of facts and circumstances, it's possible to prove intent without the admission of intent, particularly if there's documentary proof.

I point to what happened in question period. The Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), when he asked the question on April 21, 2008, he asked about advertising in terms of promoting this particular budget by the Minister of Finance. The response was

very clearly, on page 784 of *Hansard*, very clearly, "I can tell the member right now that the amount of money spent this year is 16 percent less than it was in 1999-2000."

As I said, I take the Member for Inkster at his word when he says he just found out about the cost of production, media, buy and research for this particular budget, that he just received it following the Estimates last week. When I look at 1999-2000, cost of production, Mr. Speaker, \$11,098 in 1999-2000, \$28,000 in 2008. Clearly, that's an increase, not a decrease.

Cost of media, 1999-2000, \$161,915; 2008, \$168,000. Another increase, Mr. Speaker. No decrease at all.

I go throughout all of these categories and, in fact, the total, there is no decrease of expenses. So, obviously, there's a difference in terms of what the Finance Minister gave to the Member for Inkster in question period as opposed to the documentary proof that he received after the Estimates. Quite a difference, the Finance Minister should know better. He should know his numbers. He should know whether or not in fact the cost of advertising was less this year than it was in 1999-2000. He has all that information readily available to him, but to answer in such a flippant manner and just to get out of question period and to try to answer the question by giving him what the Member for Inkster would like to hear is irresponsible.

I note that the Member for Inkster was obviously arguing that the Finance Minister was inaccurate, and here we have the Government House Leader arguing that the Finance Minister's incompetent. So, I'm not sure which one it is, but obviously it's one of those and I support the matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: A matter of privilege is a serious concern. I'm going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities, and I'll return to the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I would like to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Kim Dyck, Dorothy Derksen, Sheldon Hildebrand, Kelly Ens and many, many others.

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

Provincial Nominee Program—Applications

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Immigration is critically important to the future of the province, and the 1998 federal Provincial Nominee Program is the best immigration program that Manitoba has ever had.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications causes additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

The government needs to recognize the unfairness in its current policy on who qualifies to be an applicant.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 80 percent of applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider removing the use of the restrictive job list when dealing with the family sponsor stream.

This is signed by Lorna Allen, E. Dayris and E. Aviles and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Lake Dauphin Fishery

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

To help ensure the sustainability of the Lake Dauphin fishery, it is essential that spawning fish in the lake and its tributaries are not disturbed during the critical reproductive cycle.

A seasonal moratorium on the harvesting of fish in Lake Dauphin and its tributaries may help create an environment that will produce a natural cycle of fish for Lake Dauphin, therefore ensuring a balanced stock of fish for all groups who harvest fish on the lake.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to consider placing a moratorium on harvesting of any species of fish on Lake Dauphin and its tributaries for the period April 1 to May 15 annually.

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship to consider doing regular studies of fish stocks on Lake Dauphin to help gauge the health of the fishery and to consider determining any steps needed to protect or enhance those stocks.

This petition is signed by Louise Griffins, Debbie Durston, Terri Rampton and many, many others.

Power Line Development

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct a third high voltage transmission line down the west side of Lake Winnipegosis instead of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, as recommended by Manitoba Hydro.

The line losses created by the NDP detour will result in a lost opportunity to displace dirty coal-generated electricity, which will create added and unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to an additional 57,000 vehicles on our roads annually.

The former chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has stated that an east-side bipole and a UNESCO World Heritage Site can co-exist contrary to NDP claims.

The NDP detour will cut through more forest than the eastern route, and will cut through threatened aspen parkland areas, unlike the eastern route.

Former Member of the Legislative Assembly Elijah Harper has stated that the east-side communities are devastated by the government's decision to abandon the east-side route, stating that this decision will resign them to poverty in perpetuity.

The NDP detour will lead to an additional debt of at least \$400 million related to the capital cost of line construction alone, to be left to future generations of Manitobans.

The NDP detour will result in increased line losses due to friction leading to lost energy sales of between \$250 million and \$1 billion over the life of the project.

The added debt and lost sales created by the NDP detour will make every Manitoba family at least \$4,000 poorer.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to abandon the NDP detour on the basis that it will result in massive environmental, social and economic damage to Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the route originally recommended by Manitoba Hydro, subject to necessary regulatory approvals.

This petition is signed by Dianne Lambert, Becky Cianflone, Debra Enns, and many, many Manitobans.

* (14:10)

Personal Care Homes—Virден

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virден): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba's provincial government has a responsibility to provide quality long-term care for qualifying Manitobans.

Personal care homes in the town of Virден currently have a significant number of empty beds that cannot be filled because of a critical nursing shortage in these facilities.

In 2006, a municipally formed retention committee was promised that the Virден nursing shortage would be resolved by the fall of 2006.

Virtually all personal care homes in southwestern Manitoba are full, yet as of early October 2007, the nursing shortage in Virден is so severe that more than one-quarter of the beds in the Westman Nursing Home are sitting empty.

Seniors, many of whom are war veterans, are therefore being transported to other communities for care. These communities are often a long distance from Virден and family members are forced to travel for more than two hours round trip to visit their loved ones, creating significant financial and emotional hardship for these families.

Those seniors that have been moved out of Virден have not received assurance that they will be moved back to Virден when those beds become available.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider taking serious action to fill the nursing vacancies at personal care homes in the town of Virден and to consider reopening the beds that have been closed as the result of this nursing shortage.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider prioritizing the needs of those citizens that have been moved out of their community by committing to move those individuals back into Virден as soon as the beds become available.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by S. Bundgaard, Verna Duffield, Maxine Beaford, John Liefso and many, many other Manitobans.

Bill 200, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Plastic bags are harmful to humans, animals and the environment.

Toxins from photodegradation, breakdown of plastic bags, end up in Manitoba's soil, waterways and food supply.

Plastic bags take many years to photodegrade and are a blemish on our roadways, parks, streets, hang from bushes and trees and litter our landfills.

There are many alternatives readily available, ranging from re-usable bags to biodegradable bags to crates and boxes.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly to consider supporting Bill 200, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act, presented by the honourable Member for River Heights, which will ban single-use checkout bags in Manitoba.

Signed by Dmytro Kushneryk, Mark Sopuck, Tiago Booth and many others.

Dividing of Trans-Canada Highway

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The seven-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway passing through Headingley is an extremely busy stretch of road, averaging 18,000 vehicles daily.

This section of the Trans-Canada Highway is one of the few remaining stretches of undivided highway in Manitoba, and it has seen more than 100 accidents in the last two years, some of them fatal.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it comes to highways projects the provincial government has a flexible response program, and we have a couple of opportunities to advance these projects in our five-year plan.

In the interests of protecting motorist safety, it is critical that the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley in 2008 an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider evaluating whether any other steps can be taken to improve motorist safety while the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is being completed.

This is signed by Chris Buzunis, Haley Thorne, George Davidson and many others, Mr. Speaker.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'm pleased to table the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'd like to table Supplementary Review information for IGA for Departmental Estimates.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): I'd like to table the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to table the Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Science, Technology, Energy and Mines for 2008-2009.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): I'd like to table the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2008-2009.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): I'm pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I'd like to table the Family Services and Housing Supplementary Information for Estimates.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw that attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today a group of students from Collège Béliveau under the direction of Jennifer McKinnon and Mike Johnston, who are the guests of the honourable Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today several members of the Warren Community Development Corporation who are the guests of the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 37

Government Intent

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Last year, Manitoba taxpayers contributed \$4.2 million to the three major political parties here in Manitoba. The Premier (Mr. Doer) obviously thinks that this isn't enough taxpayer contributions to political parties in our province, so he's introduced Bill 37 to give his party another million dollars between now and the next election year out of the pockets of Manitoba taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. This is at a time when Manitoba seniors are being asked to pay more for their prescription medicine.

My question to the Premier: Why is he taking money out of the pockets of Manitoba seniors and putting it into the pockets of his political party so they can run political propaganda at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the amendments that were tabled last week are the continuing efforts of the government to improve access to democracy, to improve—I remember the cries of the members opposite when we introduced banning corporate and union donations, and that's been followed across the country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in our society agrees that the banning of corporate and union donations and making accountability and electoral acts much better provides for a fairer and a more appropriate process to democracy.

We are seeing, Mr. Speaker, what goes on to the south of us where you can't even start a political campaign unless you have a million dollars per day. I think the provisions that are put in similar to Québec, similar to other provinces, similar to the federal government, of which that member is, I suppose, supportive of, enhances democracy in this province.

* (14:20)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I know he's using Jean Chrétien's amendments as a justification, and I don't know that it would be advisable for him to continue to trot out that example of what Jean Chrétien did to his party in his dying days in office. In any event, I'm sure members of his caucus may have a slightly different perspective on Mr. Chrétien's legacy, changes, and what they did to that party.

But I want to ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) if he will explain how it is that he feels that he needs to go into the next election campaign using forced donations from Manitoba taxpayers rather than voluntary donations from regular Manitobans. Is their record in government so bad that they need government handouts in order to run their next election campaign?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, when election finance rebates were first introduced in Manitoba in 1983, Gary Filmon and the Conservative Party said—and I quote—about the NDP: They're willing at every turn to rob from the taxpayer for the good of themselves.

That was then followed by 11 years of Gary Filmon and the Conservative government not touching that act and taking that money every single occasion. Then they came out and they opposed our ban on corporate and union donations, Mr. Speaker. I think most Manitobans will suggest that not only is democracy fairer on a level playing field, but it is more open and transparent by virtue of having to report all of those items.

We know what the legacy is of not reporting items, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we are very happy to finance our political party through the volunteer donations of regular—*[inaudible]* We're very happy to go to Manitobans and ask them to make that choice, that free choice to decide whether they want to support our party or support another political party. We don't believe Manitobans should be forced to contribute.

I want to ask the Member for Kildonan: Are they so devoid of ideas, are they so uninspiring to their potential donors that their voluntary donations are drying up so they need to come to the taxpayer for handouts to run their campaign, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, when the member rebates all of the money that their party took from the taxpayers, they'll have some credibility behind his comments.

Mr. Speaker, these have been introduced in Liberal provinces, in Conservative provinces and in NDP provinces, and we'll stand behind an act that is public disclosure, allows for voluntary donations, allows for making sure that large corporate interests who used to group together—and I might suggest support particular ideas and ventures—have some controls put on them to make democracy fairer and more equitable across this province.

We ran on that, Mr. Speaker. Members ran on getting rebates from the provincial government from 1983 until 2008. Is the member now changing his position?

Bill 37 Government Intent

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, when a business in Manitoba is looking for more customer support for their enterprise, they work harder to show people why they deserve it. Instead of the NDP government trying to do the same thing when it comes to political donations, instead of going to Manitobans and telling them why they should donate to them based on their ideas, they've decided to do what the NDP usually do. They legislate it.

Can the Minister of Justice tell Manitobans why he's so concerned about the NDP financial well running dry that he's decided to hold up Manitobans for more political money?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the federal system in Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. all have public funding. The federal government's \$1.91 per vote, I hope the member considers that if he's considering other options. New Brunswick is \$1.76 per vote. Nova Scotia is \$1.50 per vote. P.E.I. is no more than \$2 per vote. Manitoba is set at a lower level of \$1.25 per vote based on percentages.

It's a fair system, Mr. Speaker. We're willing to stand behind it. We were willing to stand behind our changes when we brought them in with respect to

corporate and union donations. The members cried then. They said all kinds of things. They cried and said all kinds of things in '83 when public financing came in, but they took every last penny. We think this is fairer to all Manitobans.

Mr. Goertzen: I would like the minister to consider the option of being responsible with taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker. One of the lessons that I was taught as a child was that if you wanted to get something, you had to go out and earn it. But, apparently, the Minister of Justice and the Premier (Mr. Doer) learned a different lesson. If you want to get something, join the NDP and legislate it.

In 2007, Manitobans, through their tax credits and reimbursements, subsidized political parties by \$4.2 million, but the NDP government doesn't think that that's enough. Can the Minister of Justice tell Manitobans why the NDP is afraid to earn the money that he thinks they deserve?

Mr. Chomiak: I suppose the provincial Comptroller will be waiting for the rebate cheque from the Member for Steinbach and the members opposite on the amount of money that they received as a result of public election financing. There have been limits put in that have been extended because I think members opposite were complaining about the advertising budget. It has been enhanced and expanded, Mr. Speaker, and all that's been introduced is interim maximum party limits of \$250,000 in the interim periods to deal with the more complex and convoluted matters dealing with the election act.

I must say, we are entering a new era where election officials spend a lot more time looking at parties and party financing and related matters, and we all know that auditors, legal costs, et cetera, are not something you can do on a volunteer basis.

Mr. Goertzen: In Manitoba we have a situation now where the NDP government relies on more than a third of its budget from Ottawa handouts. Because of the NDP government, Crown corporations have become little more than surrogates for government policies and directives. Now, because of the NDP government, taxpayers are told to shell out millions more to the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Justice because they believe their party needs a handout.

Handouts from Ottawa. Demands made to Crown corporations. Robbing the taxpayers to fund the NDP. Can't this government do anything on their own, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I think if you look at this act, it compares quite favourably to the federal act. I know there's some trouble in Ottawa concerning the application of the federal act.

But in a democracy we all should play by the same rules, Mr. Speaker. Special interests, outside interests have played their part, inappropriately. I think that the system we've evolved to, on recommendations that have been made by the Chief Electoral Officers, is fair. It's an incremental move forward. I think it provides for balance and fairness.

It's applicable to all members opposite. If members feel so strongly about the principle—I know they sold a Crown corporation and balanced the budget—perhaps they should rebate all of the money that they received—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some decorum here. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Chomiak: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I think their cries of complaint would have more credibility if they were to rebate all of the money they received from public financing and demonstrated their virtue in not dealing with that.

Bill 38 Government Intent

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, this government would have more credibility if they started giving taxes back to the people that paid them, back to the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 37 is an all-out assault on democracy as we know it. Bill 38, the balance-the-budget-once-every-four-years legislation, is an affront to fiscal accountability. This government can't be trusted to spend its own money, let alone use Crown corporations as their personal piggy banks. A summary budget is nothing less than a shell game.

Will the minister come clean and tell all Manitoba taxpayers that this legislation is nothing more than a sham and that the real balanced-budget legislation has been gutted by this minister?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, since 1998, the Auditor General of Manitoba has been calling for reform of the balanced-budget legislation the member would like to return to. The reality is that under the old legislation pension liabilities were left off the books. Crown corporations were left off the books. Crown

corporations could be sold and used to balance the budget. Money could go into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, counted once as revenue, then it could be taken out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, counted twice as revenue.

All of those things are illegal now. Mr. Speaker. One set of books, one bottom line, one set of rules according to the Auditor General's accounting standards for the country.

* (14:30)

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister's trying to snow Manitobans again. He's been waiting for eight years to get rid of balanced-budget legislation. Generally accepted accounting principles, or GAAP, does not give the Finance Minister the authority to hide the mismanagement of his core operating budget, but the minister is doing just that. He is now taking Manitoba Hydro net earnings to balance his spending appetite.

Manitoba Hydro cannot afford this minister's smoke and mirrors. When will the minister take responsibility for his own mismanagement of this budget?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we had a meeting in my office this morning where I explained to the member opposite the financial management requirements under the new balanced-budget legislation. They include reporting on what happens with respect to each department and all the revenues we receive for core operations. For the first time ever, that has to be reported on, has to be compared year over year. In addition, we have to report on what's happening in the university sector, the public school sector, the Crown corporation sector, the Workers Compensation Board. This is the widest reporting entity ever in the history of the province.

It follows the recommendations made by successive auditors general. It follows extensive consultations in the community, and it follows up on the recommendations made by our consultants who are experts in accounting methods and took a look at this.

I'm sure it will improve transparency and accountability in this province and not allow the sale of Crown corporations, like the members opposite so frequently did in the past.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister is falling back on his 1999 promises. Let's have a look at them, okay? In 1999, this government, his

government, had made some promises to Manitobans. He said he was going to end hallway medicine. Failure, absolute abject failure. He said he was going to renew the hope of young people, but we recognize that that's been an abject failure.

Oh, by the way, his government said they were going to make our communities safer. Well, I can tell you, that one's been an abject failure.

But the last thing they said, Mr. Speaker, is they would keep balanced budget legislation and lower property taxes. They've done nothing. They have not lowered property taxes, and they certainly haven't kept the balanced budget legislation that was put into place in 1999.

He can't hide behind GAAP. He has to make sure that his core operating budget is balanced every year. Unfortunately right now, using Crown corporations, he can hide any which way he wants to. Why can't he do a core operating budget and make sure that's *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Borotsik: –in this House.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member has missed the entire point. The member wants to maintain two sets of books. He wants to be able to sell Crown corporations. He wants to be able to dip into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to balance the budget. All of those procedures are now illegal under this new balanced budget legislation. Extensive consultation was done with the community. Everything will be in the reporting entity. The budget will have to be balanced every year, based on the current budget plus the three-year review of either good performance or bad performance.

There will no longer be the ability to run away from bad performance. He will have to be accounted for on an annual test of balanced budgets. By the way, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have more people working than ever in the history of the province, less people in the hallways, more people in education, safer communities than they had under '99.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Rebates

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): On April 25, the Premier (Mr. Doer) was in Estimates talking about MPI rebates. He said and I quote: Actually if I had to make a political decision—which he never has—I would prefer not to have it happen any way at anytime. I'd prefer to keep a reserve fund.

Why are you allowing the corporation to overcharge people in the first place? Rather than spend \$500,000 mailing out rebate cheques, will the NDP end this charade and simply take the rebate off the cost of next year's premiums?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, every year when MPI goes to the Public Utilities Board, which is an arm's-length body, they make recommendations. The Public Utilities Board sets the rates. The Public Utilities Board for the last few years has set the rates and ordered MPI to make a rebate cheque.

Last year, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) was saying we were politically manipulating it. This year the member is saying we shouldn't be doing it. We're following the procedures that have always been followed. The rates are set by the Public Utilities Board, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Graydon: There's certainly been a lot of manipulation going on. Along with the rebate cheques, Manitoba motorists received a letter from MPI. The letter says: Our success as your automobile insurer makes this rebate possible. What it doesn't say is that MPI and the Premier (Mr. Doer) would actually prefer to keep the money. It also doesn't say that it costs an extra \$500,000 in administration fees to mail out these cheques.

Why are the MPI and the NDP government trying to take credit for this rebate when both have admitted that they would rather just keep the money that they've overcharged in the first place?

Mr. Chomiak: As I said, Mr. Speaker, the business case it put forward on rates by MPI to PUB did not envision a rebate cheque. It envisioned a particular rate level and a particular accounting procedure that MPI wanted to follow. The Public Utilities Board ordered MPI to cut and provide rebate cheques to all Manitobans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the information that goes from MPI to the—I wish members opposite would note that we have the lowest insurance rates in North America. I wish the members opposite would note the fact that we have millions of dollars staying in Manitoba, providing services in Manitoba, providing head office jobs in Manitoba, instead of constantly attacking, when they're in opposition, Crown corporations, and then when they're in government, trying to sell them off.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the whole process is a runaround. The Premier wants to keep the motorists' money. MPI wants to keep the motorists' money. The PUB, thankfully, wants to give it back.

The reason that MPI has this money is because they overcharged us. Bragging about the prowess of the investment committee for the MPI, they should use that same committee for the rest of their government, Mr. Speaker, instead of one-third of the federal budget.

Mr. Speaker, why do they have to dole out a rebate if they hadn't have overcharged us in the first place?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the determination by PUB is based on performance. There are positive returns. There are negative returns. The PUB looks at the analysis. They listen to presentations from the public. Then they make a binding order, a binding order upon the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation to do.

Is the member suggesting that we interfere and go to the Public Utilities Board and tell them what to do, because I've heard members opposite talk for years about the validity and the—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, it's incredible. Money's going back to Manitobans in tax returns. Money's going back to Manitobans from MPI. We have the lowest hydro rates in the country. They want to put hydro rates at market rates. They want it up 40 percent.

Why don't they talk about that fact instead of taking it to the Public Utilities Board? That's where they want to go if they don't sell it.

Lake Winnipeg Nutrient Reduction

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, over the last nine years, we have heard this government make countless promises about its plan to restore the health of Lake Winnipeg, yet we have yet to see anything in the way of real results. Now the government has introduced legislation to extend the livestock moratorium in spite of the fact that the Clean Environment Commission did not recommend this. In fact, the CEC recommended more research in key areas such as nutrient management.

Mr. Speaker, what research has the government done to ensure that this moratorium will result in a meaningful reduction in nutrient levels in Lake Winnipeg?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, clearly Manitobans get this and the opposition in this House don't get it. Manitobans very clearly want us to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member was allowed to put his question. Let's allow the honourable minister to respond.

Mr. Struthers: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans get this and the opposition across the way don't seem to understand. Manitobans want us to move forward in a comprehensive way to protect Lake Winnipeg and other lakes and rivers in this province. That is what we're doing.

Sector by sector, case by case, we're putting in place a framework that will limit and reduce the amount of nutrients that go into lakes and rivers. We know, and I think the members opposite know, even with continuing supports to research, we know that keeping nutrients out of Lake Winnipeg is a good thing. We're going to do that. I think they should try to do it too.

* (14:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: I think that the minister is somewhat confused. What Manitobans want is real results when it comes to clean-up of Lake Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker, and yet they have not seen anything to that nature.

Mr. Speaker, the dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences has examined the Clean Environment Commission's report and has questioned the government's rationale for extending the moratorium. Trevan was quoted in a March 20 newspaper article as saying, and I quote: ". . . if you actually took all of the hog barns out of production, you wouldn't actually make any sensible dent into the amount of phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg."

Mr. Speaker, the CEC has recommended more research in key areas. Why won't the government listen to the CEC and do further studies to see the impacts? Why are they willing to impose a job-killing moratorium with no supporting scientific evidence, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is absolutely wrong. The Clean Environment Commission did a very good job in speaking with not just the people of Manitoba in public meetings, but they did talk with researchers from the University of Manitoba and elsewhere.

They said to me in that report—which is available to everybody opposite—that there are regional imbalances in this province when it comes to the development of the hog industry and that we as a government could not stick our heads in the sand like members opposite seem to be doing, that we had to deal with this. The Clean Environment Commission report was very clear in that.

Mr. Speaker, we have the courage to move forward in a strong way to protect Manitoba's lakes and to protect Manitoba's water. I wish members opposite would get that strong as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister should get his head out of the sand and actually take the recommendations of the CEC reports.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know that we don't need to kill jobs and we don't need to kill business in this province in order to help our environment. We need to provide incentives for business and incentives for individuals to help out in this area. We don't need to shut them down.

Mr. Speaker, after nine years there have been no real results. Clearly this government's plan is not working. Why is the minister refusing to listen to the CEC and other experts? Why does he think we need to kill jobs and kill business in order to help the environment?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should actually read the report. There are recommendations in the report and in the report it very clearly points to regional imbalances in this province.

I'd also like to suggest, Mr. Speaker—*[interjection]* It's in the report. You should read it. I also want to say, why is it that the member thinks that there's not research that's continuing? It's ongoing and it's happening all the time.

We're not going to just stick our heads in the sand, wait for her research to come forward and do nothing, Mr. Speaker. We owe it to the people of Manitoba to act strongly and we've done that.

Bill 17 Economic Impact Study

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, it's this minister that should read the report. There's no mention of a moratorium anywhere in that report. So the minister is the one that should be reading it.

Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg once was home to numerous meat-processing plants including Canada Packers, Burns, East West, Swift, Jack Morgan, Schneider's, OK Packers, just to name a few. The packing industry is virtually extinct, thanks to mismanagement of this NDP government.

Now the NDP has introduced Bill 17, which will put a permanent moratorium on hog production. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Conservation tell this House whether this government has done an economic impact study to examine the effects of Bill 17 on the pork industry and the allied stakeholders?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Well, the Member for Lakeside has to do his homework, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, there was a very strong section in the CEC report dealing with the COOL legislation, the country-of-origin legislation that we're all quite concerned about in this House. In response to that, our government stepped up to the plate in places like Brandon and Neepawa and put some money forward to say you can have a win-win. You can increase the slaughter capacity in this province and you can protect the environment at the same time. What's wrong with that?

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously missed the question.

Mr. Speaker, the *Winnipeg Free Press* has challenged the government's decision to extend the moratorium. In a March 27 editorial, the newspaper editor stated, and I quote: The Doer government's decision has disabled an industry that is worth \$1 billion to the provincial economy and provides direct and indirect jobs for 15,000 Manitobans.

I ask the Minister of Conservation again: Is he satisfied he is making the right decision by enacting a permanent job-killing moratorium? Has he fully considered the economic ramifications of this bill, which is based only on politics and not on good science, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: I find it amazing, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Lakeside thinks he's the arbiter of what's good science and what's not.

The member opposite ought to look at even his own leader's statements. Even prior to us bringing forward a moratorium, when we announced a pause in November, his leader said, we're not going to do anything in terms of protecting Manitoba water; we reject even those regulations.

Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely irresponsible. We know in this province that we have to deal with water quality. We know for *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Struthers: –reasons, including the economic downside of not making decisions to protect Manitoba's water. Where do you stand on that?

Mr. Eichler: Any science based on a moratorium would be beneficial from this government. They have nothing to go on other than their rhetoric.

The Manitoba Chamber of Commerce has also expressed concerns about the economic impact of this political decision and called for withdrawal of Bill 17.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture: Is she going to sit idly by while her colleague inflicts major economic damage in one of the province's key sectors, or is this minister out of the loop as well?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I would ask the member to look at the record and let him look at where we have stood by the industry and, indeed, we have stood by them. We put additional resources and additional funds into the safety net programs for producers. When the pork producers came to us and said they needed to have bridge financing, they asked us for loans, we did that.

The challenges facing the pork industry right now are not the fact that they can't build barns. The issue is pork producers cannot afford to keep the existing barns full. There is high-input cost, Mr. Speaker. We're fighting the country-of-origin labelling. We're fighting the fact that U.S. barns will not take our weanlings. The member opposite should get his head out of the sand and realize that there are very serious issues facing our—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Home Care Support Patient Qualifications

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the gallery today is Mrs. Seamen. Mrs. Anna Seamen's son has complicated mental, physical and social issues. If he had just a physical illness, then home care said they would look after things and help. If he were just a social issue, issue, problem, and he had the right IQ to fit the government's criteria, then he would receive social support. But the reality is he's now falling through the cracks, and

Mrs. Seamen has been told, well, your son, I'm sorry, is dropping through the cracks; we can't help.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) or Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) why the government is running an operation which has such big cracks that people like Mrs. Seamen's son just fall through them. Surely he should be considered first and his needs considered first, and the government should get their act together to provide support.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. Certainly, if the member has some specific details about a case of which I may not be aware, I appreciate that. I will take the question and any further information the member has to bring forward so that we can work together to come to some solutions.

* (14:50)

Outside of the specifics of the case, I can say that the Department of Health, the Department of Family Services and Housing work jointly on a number of issues, whether it's concerning persons with disabilities, persons with mental health issues, a combination of all of those things. We know that we need to work together, not only as two departments but across many departments to help address some of the complex needs of Manitoba families, and we're pleased to do that and to continue the work to do that.

Jordan's Principle Implementation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the government has been made fully aware of the problems here. The excuses are wearing thin. The back and forth between two government departments is a reminder that, like Jordan's Principle, the patient or the person should be considered first and the problem solved rather than members of two departments fighting over who can get out of the business fastest.

Mrs. Seamen has been told, if your son were to get into trouble with the law, then he would be looked after. But he's a law-abiding person who's had no problems with the law, and he's not being looked after.

I ask the Premier or Deputy Premier, who's responsible for the two departments getting together, surely they would support the application of

Jordan's Principle in this case and ensure Mrs. Seamen's son is adequately supported in spite of the fact that he doesn't fit neatly into the programs of one department or another.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Again, if there are specifics about a case at the moment about which I am not aware, I'm very happy to receive those details.

We know that there are families in Manitoba, a number of families, that have needs that are so complex that we need to ensure that our departments are working together. That's why we have developed programs like PACT that work on mental health issues outside of institutions and in communities. That's why we have the very existence of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, so we can break down the walls between departments, Mr. Speaker, so that we can work in a cross-departmental way.

We know that this particular structure in government has received international attention for its ability to work together. We need to continue to do that work for families such as the one that the member is mentioning and others of which we may not know right now.

Manitoba Hydro Power Line Location

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, in talking to members of the public, one of the things that has become very clear is the government has lost its credibility in terms of the decision on the west-side development for the Bipole III.

The concern is how do we ensure that some sort of an independent assessment based on fact is going to be acted on, not one based on the political decision. Mr. Speaker, we're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars. We're talking about the future of our environment and so many other issues.

The question then to the Minister of Finance is: How is he going to tell Manitobans, how is he going to convince Manitobans that any decision on what to do with the bipole, whether it's the west side, east side or under Lake Winnipeg is, in fact, in Manitoba's best interests based on fact, not on what this minister or this Premier (Mr. Doer) feels is in their best political interest, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, the government undertook 82 community consultations on the east side before it decided to

take a policy decision on this, and what they decided to do was to balance three big risks that need to be managed in terms of public policy.

The risk of improving reliability: That required a new bipole to be built, something that was known when members opposite were in government but refused to act on it. The second risk they needed to manage was the risk with respect to markets, customers and the reputation of the Crown corporation who provides the product to them. They managed that risk by avoiding a confrontation that could seriously damage our potential to sell up to 40 percent of the energy produced every year. And the third risk they needed to manage was the risk preserving the opportunity for a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

These are all matters of public policy. We stated them for the public and we backed it.

Mental Health and Addictions Services Government Initiatives

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the House that this is Mental Health Awareness Week. Public awareness of mental illness is important to reduce the stigma sometimes faced by those living with mental health issues and/or addictions.

Would the Minister of Healthy Living please advise the House of some of the initiatives the department is undertaking to address mental health and addictions services in Manitoba?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the House that the theme of Mental Health Week is "Make It Your Business," and that's exactly what the Doer government has been doing since 1999. We've made it our business to ensure that we have mental health and addiction services available to all Manitobans.

Today I had the privilege of being joined by the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) to make an announcement, an announcement that spoke about \$2.8 million over the next two years to support mental health and addictions agencies, as well as providing 20 new mental health service providers across the province of Manitoba. These individuals will provide exceptional service on the front lines for in-patient and out-patient services as well. As well, we were able to unveil our five-point plan for the addiction system.

Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation Overdue Stocker Loans

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, the MASC Stocker Loans program currently has 355 loans worth \$16,596,000. However, 22 percent of these loans are in arrears in the amount of \$3,665,000.

My question to the Minister of Agriculture: What efforts are being taken to collect on these loans that are past being overdue and are now in arrears?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity to discuss this issue in Estimates, but I will say to the member again, when an individual takes out a Stocker Loan, they sign an agreement and they must meet the terms of that agreement when they sell their livestock. If they do not meet the terms of that agreement, steps are taken by the corporation to collect.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there have been some pressures, and there are some of those loans that are in arrears. The staff of MASC will continue to work to recover as much money as we can from that.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, these loans of \$3.665 million are in arrears. The security for these loans, being the cattle, are long gone, and MASC is left as an unsecured creditor.

How does the minister intend to collect this money owing, or will MASC be forced to write off over \$3.6 million in addition to the \$800,000 written off over the past four years?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, when an individual takes out a Stocker Loan, they are required by the agreement that they have signed that they will pay the loan when they have sold the cattle. If they have not paid off the loan when they pay the cattle, they are in breach of the agreement, and then the corporation will make every effort to collect from them.

The member asks if there will be some write-offs. Yes. Given where the industry is—and I'm quite surprised that the member opposite wouldn't recognize that there are very great challenges in our beef industry right now. These loans worked for some, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there will be some write-offs as there have been in the past.

Personal Care Home (Russell) Renovations Needed

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister responsible for Manitoba Housing.

Mr. Speaker, the Russell and District Banner County senior citizens home is one that has been in need of repairs for a number of years. The sidewalks leading to this facility are broken and raised in places and because of poor lighting along the sidewalks, many seniors who are trying to make their way into their residences at night trip on these sidewalks and injuries have occurred. Repeated requests to have this corrected have fallen on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, additionally, carpeting in the facility has not been replaced for well over 30 years, and citizens again have requested the minister to address this and nothing has happened.

I want to ask the Minister responsible for Housing whether or not he is prepared to answer those questions that keep coming to him and address the issues that are safety issues and also quality-of-life issues.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, the member didn't indicate whether this was a Manitoba Housing complex or whether it was independently operated, but in either event, if the department can assist we're currently making a three-year investment of about \$84 million to enhance Manitoba Housing properties.

We can also look to see whether it's scheduled for enhancements because it's important that we respond to local needs in local buildings and more than happy to look into that for the member.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

* (15:00)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Béliveau Heroes

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to highlight the Béliveau Heroes program at Collège Béliveau. The Béliveau Heroes began with a small group of high school students led by teachers Jennifer McKinnon and Mike Johnston looking to lend a hand and make a difference in their community.

Now in its second year, the group has grown to 60 students who are enthusiastic about getting involved and volunteering their time. The Béliveau Heroes volunteer at least once a month for a variety of causes and organizations. Past projects have seen the students planting trees, spending time with seniors, cleaning up litter and caring for animals. The diverse opportunities available to the students through this program provide them with new experience and life skills as they seek to discover their path in life. It also gives them a wider perspective on the issues affecting their world and allows them to engage in those issues in a very tangible way.

I would like to extend my appreciation and my congratulations to the two founders of Béliveau Heroes, Jennifer McKinnon and Mike Johnston. Mr. Speaker, we entrust our children to the schools not only to receive an education, but to learn life lessons, to develop a sense of citizenship and to grow as individuals. I'm proud of this innovative program taking place at Collège Béliveau which teaches these young people in my constituency to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, I also commend the young people involved in the Béliveau Heroes who, despite homework, part-time jobs and other after-school and weekend commitments, have shown incredible dedication to their community. The active role they have chosen to take in effecting positive change in their city has made a tremendous difference in the lives of the people they've served and is an excellent example to us all. Thank you.

International Midwifery Day

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, midwives and families around the world are celebrating international midwifery day with the theme of "Healthy Families." I would like to commend all Manitoba midwives for their daily contribution to helping create healthy families by offering women and their partners skilled and supportive care throughout their pregnancy, labour and delivery. Midwives work with women and their families in a personalized way, encouraging informed choices while responding to emotional, social, cultural and physical needs. Midwifery care respects the normal healthy process of a pregnancy and birth and the profound meaning that childbirth has in a woman's life.

Midwifery is recognized as a standard of care by the World Health Organization, but the numbers of practising midwives in Manitoba is still very small,

unfortunately. Consider, by comparison, that there are 2,000 midwives serving New Zealand's population of 4 million and there are 35,000 in the United Kingdom. But, unfortunately, in Manitoba, we do not have enough midwives to meet the demand, with less than three dozen practising midwives in the province. The Manitoba Midwifery Action Group suggests that we could, in fact, use 200 given that there's at least 50 percent women who were declined care when they asked for midwifery support. That's not hard to understand when only six in Manitoba's 11 regional health authorities offer midwifery services.

Midwifery has come a long way in Manitoba since the introduction of The Midwifery Act in 1997 that established midwifery as a regulated profession. We have a long way to go. Training more midwives in Manitoba is the best way to increase our supply of midwives, and it's something that our party promised during the last provincial campaign. Indeed, so did members opposite, but Manitobans are still waiting for the details of their training program.

Today, on international midwifery day, we congratulate all Manitoba midwives for their dedication to their practice and to helping create healthy families. We, on this side of the House look forward to hearing more about the government's pending training program so that more women can have the midwifery care that they would like. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

River Osborne Community Centre

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to be able to attend the River Osborne Community Centre's annual general meeting on Monday, April 28. River Osborne Community Centre is an important meeting place in my constituency. The programming offered to neighbours of all ages is key to having quality and affordable recreation. On any day of the week, you will find activities going on such as kick-boxing, belly dancing, skating or soccer.

The centre also provides a venue for various educational initiatives and community gatherings. The centre's vitally important to children and young people living in Fort Rouge. Recently, the centre has started offering activities for children at the Mayfair Recreation Centre, located in a neighbourhood that is densely populated with young families. A youth action centre is now operating as well, offering positive programming to teens. These types of

initiatives are integral to our goals of providing healthy and safe places for kids to grow up.

I would like to thank all the volunteers of River Osborne Community Centre for their hard work and dedication to keeping the centre running. I would also like to congratulate the board members, Ron Iftody, Sheri Russell, Gregory Chomichuk, Alys-Lynne Furgal, Trevor Russell, Steve West, Shannon Morley, Chris Bloom, Preston McCaffrey and Eden Steele for their leadership.

Mr. Speaker, one of the joys of being an MLA is the opportunity to meet people who are committed to improving their communities by giving of their time and talent.

Last month I was thrilled to attend the City Centre Volunteer Reception for community centre volunteers. A long-time volunteer for River Osborne Community Centre, Graham Davison, was honoured as one of the volunteers of the year. Without the efforts from dedicated volunteers and staff, indispensable neighbourhood resources, like this community centre, would not be possible. We all owe them our gratitude and appreciation. Thank you.

Jay and Angela Fox

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber we are all aware of the many challenges our farmers in the province can face, from weather issues to trade challenges to high-input costs. However, even during these difficult times, there are many success stories and I am pleased to share one with the House today.

I would like to congratulate Major Jay and Angela Fox who were named the recipients of the 2008 Manitoba Outstanding Young Farmers Award. Jay and Angela were given the award in Portage la Prairie on April 18. They will now go on to proudly represent Manitoba in the National Outstanding Young Farmers' events in Calgary next November.

Both Jay and Angela grew up on farms. It's promising to hear them say they always want to continue in the agricultural tradition. In 2006 they took the hard yet rewarding work of operating Jay's family cattle operation, took over the operation. On their 440-hectare ranch north of Eddystone they run 450 cows. I am sure they are both very busy during the hectic calving season.

The Outstanding Young Farmer Program is open to farmers between the ages of 18 and 39. It highlights the young men and women who are

achieving success in providing leadership in the farming industry. Any successful candidate for this award is community-orientated and incorporates innovative practices into their farm operations.

Both Jay and Angela are active in their community. For example, Jay is a director with the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association.

Once again, I would like to congratulate Jay and Angela Fox for receiving the Manitoba Outstanding Young Farmers Award this year. I wish them the best of luck in Calgary at the national event in November. They are certainly positive role models in their community and they exemplify how rewarding our farming profession can be.

Occupational Safety and Health Week

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Speaker, this week, May 4 to 10, is Occupational Safety Week, an annual initiative recognized across Canada in concert with North American partners in Mexico and the United States.

The theme for this year's event is "Safety and Health: A Commitment for Life. Start Today! Live It Every Day!"

In 2002 our government responded to the report of the Workplace Safety and Health Review Committee by calling on Manitobans to join with our provincial government to build a strong workplace, safety and health culture. Since that time, we have developed a solid and modernized legislative framework for the prevention of occupational injuries and illness. Six years ago our government kicked off a significant education and public awareness program under the banner, Safe Manitoba, which I hope all members have seen.

As a part of the many continuing initiatives, Safety and Health curriculum resource materials continue to be promoted and distributed to help prepare our young people for the risks that they face in the workplace every day. Because youth are among the most susceptible to workplace injury and represent the future of Manitoba, they are the key target audience for these prevention messages.

I am very proud to be a part of a government that has made workplace safety and health a priority. Budget 2008 provides for the addition of 10 new Workplace Safety and Health officers this year to strengthen our inspection and enforcement efforts.

Mr. Speaker, just as governments accept their responsibility to lead and support prevention

initiatives in Manitoba, we anticipate that employers, workers, educators and prevention organizers will also accept their individual and shared responsibility to improve prevention in the workplace. I call on all honourable members to observe NAOSH Week by making a commitment to strengthen the culture of workplace safety and health in province. Thank you.

* (15:10)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet on Wednesday, May 7, at 7 p.m., to consider Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2003; Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2004; Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2005; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2005, including a Review of School Division Financial Accounting and Reporting.

Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2006; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2006; Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007; the Provincial Auditor's Report – Investigation of an Adult Learning Centre ("The Program") in Morris-Macdonald School Division, No. 19, dated September 2001.

I would also like to announce that the following individuals will be called as witnesses for the May 7 meeting:

On the Public Accounts volumes and the audits of the Public Accounts, the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and Diane Gray, Deputy Minister of Finance.

On the Morris-Macdonald report, the honourable Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) and Dr. Gerald Farthing, Deputy Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

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Wednesday, May 7, at 7 p.m., to consider Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2003; Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2004; Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2005; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2005, including a Review of School Division Financial Accounting and Reporting.

Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2006; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2006; Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007; the Auditor General's Report – Audit of the Public Accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007; The Provincial Auditor's Report – Investigation of an Adult Learning Centre ("The Program") in Morris-Macdonald School Division, No. 19, dated September 2001.

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On the Morris-Macdonald report, the honourable Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, and Dr. Gerald Farthing, Deputy Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Mr. Chomiak: Would you please canvass the House to see if there is an agreement for this week on Tuesday and Thursday morning for two sections of Supply to consider concurrently with the House while the House considers private members' business with no recorded votes or quorum calls to be in effect?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for this week on Tuesday and Thursday morning for the two sections of Supply to sit concurrently with the House while the House considers private members' business with no recorded votes or quorum calls to be in effect?
[Agreed]

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the House.

Would you also see if there is agreement for the Estimates of Intergovernmental Affairs to follow the Estimates of Water Stewardship, Finance in Room 255, with the change to apply on a permanent basis?

I'll just repeat this for clarity. Would you see if there is agreement for the Estimates of Intergovernmental Affairs to follow the Estimates of Water Stewardship in Room 255, with the change to apply on a permanent basis?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for the Estimates of Intergovernmental Affairs to follow the Estimates of Water Stewardship in Room 255, with the change to apply on a permanent basis? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, could we resolve into Committee of Supply?

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply. Will the Chairs please go to their respective rooms. In the Chamber will be Labour and Immigration. In Room 255 will be Water Stewardship. In Room 254 will be Health and Healthy Living.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIVING

* (15:20)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health and Healthy Living. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Just a follow up, Madam Chairperson. The minister had indicated that she'd be able to provide some information on questions we had regarding vacancies at CancerCare. Those questions were posed on Friday. Can she indicate whether or not she has that information?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I will be able to provide that information for the member in minutes. I have a staff member who is just detained at the moment, but soon.

Mr. Goertzen: That's good. It sounds like it will be up-to-date information then, if it's within minutes.

Can the minister indicate, I just made a statement in the House regarding it being International Midwifery Week, and just some questions related to that. I've had the opportunity to meet with some people involved with midwifery,

some who want to be involved, some are doulas and other qualifications.

Does the minister have an indication of what the decline rate is in Manitoba for people who are looking for midwifery service? Obviously, if you're not in one of the RHAs that offers that service, the decline rate would be 100 percent. For the RHAs that do have the service, does she have an indication of what the decline rate is?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, certainly, we do know from our discussions with moms and with families, from our discussions in meeting with the College of Midwives, as the member points out, our discussions with regional health authorities that the requests for the services of midwives exceed our ability to be able to provide midwives. We know for certain that that is true. We also know that we have been working in partnership with the regional health authorities to build our complement of midwife positions in Manitoba. We know that when we started in 1999 there were no funded midwife positions in Manitoba, and, today, we have 34 funded positions. More than half of those, and that's 18, are in rural and northern Manitoba, four in Brandon, four in Central, three in NOR-MAN, three in South Eastman and 16 in Winnipeg. We do have a couple of vacancies, currently, in Winnipeg as well.

So I would have to endeavour to get back to the member concerning any specific wait list, or compiled numbers for people that have asked for services and have been declined, to endeavour to give the member more accurate information. But I can certainly go on the record today saying that the asks for the services of midwives exceed our current ability to deliver them.

Mr. Goertzen: I look forward to getting the response on the decline rate that there is in Manitoba.

Can the minister give us an update on, I know during the campaign, there was a discussion about a training program for midwives. Will we be seeing an announcement shortly on fulfilment of that commitment?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, we did make a commitment during the election to look at our training opportunities for midwives. We know that when we began our journey, we had no midwifery education program in Manitoba, and we worked to establish the first Aboriginal Midwifery Education Program at the University College of the North in September of 2006.

Now, this particular midwifery program, as the member opposite is aware, was the first of its kind, you know, in the world, we believe, and it's been internationally recognized. People from across the globe are looking to Manitoba for the very special cultural elements of this program and, indeed, for the nature of the program broadly.

We know that our greatest need for midwives has been in remote settings, and that's where we wanted to begin the focus of our efforts in education, and we've made very good strides there. But we did commit to expanding midwifery education, and we are working diligently with our partners in Advanced Education on options that will suit potential candidates in southern Manitoba.

We're also working, the member might be interested to know, to help internationally educated midwives practise in Manitoba by helping to develop an assessment process to give them education credits for skills and knowledge that they have gained through prior learning and experience, arguably, the most valuable kind of education one can have, and also working in collaboration with other jurisdictions to develop a bridging program to help those internationally educated midwives meet the education standards in Manitoba.

So we did commit to expanding our training. We're going to work as swiftly as we can because the member opposite quite rightly states that there are people in Manitoba that want to have the services of midwives to whom those services are not yet available, and we want to work to fix that.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister's answer to that was actually stay tuned, so we will stay tuned, and we'll watch for future announcements on it. Hopefully, they meet the needs that are out there throughout Manitoba.

Just on the same topic, Minister, are you aware of a—Madam Chairperson, is the minister aware of the Manitoba Midwifery Action Group and has she met with this group to hear their concerns about midwifery in the province?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chairperson, I have met recently with members of the College of Midwives. I have not yet had the opportunity to meet with the action group that the member cites but, of course, would be very pleased to do so, to hear the challenges that they're facing and work together to address those challenges.

* (15:30)

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the minister's commitment to meet with the Manitoba midwifery group. I know they will appreciate that. I've had the opportunity to meet with some of the group, not all of them, but, certainly, they, I think, are well-reasoned, a well-balanced group in terms of what they're trying to present. I know that they will look forward to meeting with you, Madam Minister, in the weeks ahead.

Just before I turn it over to my colleague for Pembina who has questions related to his region, this might dovetail a bit into his questions. I never know what members will ask, if the name Tabor Home will come up or not, but I do want to ask the minister, on health capital planning I know that, when the capital plans for education for schools comes up, for example, it all comes up all en masse. People have a good idea then, with some possible variations, basically have a good idea of what could happen, what will happen within that year for capital expenditures in education.

Is there a reason, other than maybe a politically obvious reason, why there isn't a health capital plan announced at the beginning of any given year, a fiscal year, so that individuals in Manitoba would have a good idea where the health capital dollars are directed that year, as opposed to announcing things one at a time?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, it would be clear and obvious to state that, as far as our capital plan goes, we made those plans very clear and as public as can be during the election campaign when we committed to build a new women's hospital. We committed to construct a south-end birthing centre; we committed to redevelop emergency rooms. We committed to ensure that those areas across the province that would require other capital construction or an infusion of equipment that may also require capital adaptations. We made those commitments very clear. As far as a year over year plan goes, those commitments would be well-entrenched in our year-over-year planning.

In addition to that, we also, as the member knows, work very closely with the regional health authorities who yearly submit their plans and submit their desires for developments in their regions. We also know that year over year we can see those capital plans adapt and, in some cases, change dramatically.

I might cite a case in point, the proposal for the Minnedosa-Neepawa hospital. That certainly was not

on the capital radar screen over a year ago and now is very boldly being placed there as something that we ought to be establishing. We want to maintain, of course, the plan that we went to the people with, concerning capital construction. We also have an obligation to work with our regions in prioritizing, in being able to be nimble in the changing or adapting of priorities. In partnership with the regions, we work each year to look at their priorities, to endeavour to try to build our capital construction as very best we can within the resources that we are limited to.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister because, in some ways, she made my point there. During a campaign in an election period, the minister or the government seems to be able to come up with at least some capital priorities that might be further in advance when they say we are going to build a new women's hospital or have an ER for mental health-care services.

Certainly, in Ste. Anne, they say they're going to redevelop the emergency rooms in Ste. Anne, even though the health authority hadn't been prioritizing that. In fact, the health authority was quite surprised. It's strange because the minister says, we work with the health authorities and, yet, the health authority in South Eastman was surprised by the announcement and saying, I'm not ungrateful but certainly surprised because they weren't prioritizing that one, so it didn't seem like there was a lot of working going on.

Then, at the bottom of a press release, it said, Bethesda Hospital. We know that there are problems there and we'll try to work that out later.

So it seems that where there's a will, where there's a political will, there is an ability to determine capital projects. Certainly, a year in advance doesn't seem like an unreasonable amount of time to say this is what we're going to do for the next year. I'm not expecting a four-year plan, but, certainly, a one-year plan seems reasonable if you truly are working with the health authorities, because a cynic would say, and I'm not a cynic, but some might say that it seems to be purely political and that there's more bang for the buck to just announce a redevelopment here, or a redevelopment there throughout the year and continue to get news and headlines over the course of a year, as opposed to all at once, although I think a more practical approach, and from a management perspective, and those in the regions would probably suggest, that having that knowledge a year in advance would be helpful.

So the minister doesn't need to respond if she doesn't want to. I suspect she might. But I will now turn it over to my colleague from Pembina if he has questions. If the minister wants to respond, of course, she has every right to.

Ms. Oswald: I appreciate the member opposite, in his queries about capital construction, and I know that the member is not a cynic. I know he's as optimistic as the dawn, as am I. Of course, he would realize, if our capital construction plans were purely political, an announcement to redevelop an ER at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach—I don't spend a lot of time looking at pluralities and so forth, but I'm not sure that that would necessarily be our first choice as a seat we might be gunning for, that might be hanging in the balance.

Indeed, we were busy for seven years building a hospital in Brandon and reconstructing the Health Sciences Centre for \$134 million, the largest capital project ever in the history of Manitoba. Of course, we know that we have to make a very careful balance between our full-term commitments—like the construction of a new women's hospital—to the people of Manitoba, while at the same time doing that which the member opposite asks us to do and that is, pay close attention to the growing population in Steinbach and the surrounding region, and ensuring that the capital infra—you just encouraged me to say that last time, I don't know why it's of special interest to you, but I am now at your bidding.

So we have to balance, of course, our election commitments with the needs of a region brought forward to us by the member opposite and by the regional health authority, in a very well-articulated way, to show how the increase in population, absolutely, outside of partisan concerns, warranted the construction and redevelopment of that ER. So, again, noting that the member himself says he's not cynical and nor am I, that we can build these longer-range plans and we can also be nimble and work with the regions to address the needs that they have where the population is increasing.

I also just want to take a moment to address, very quickly, the request of the member concerning the vacancies he was inquiring about. I believe he asked me about oncologists and radiation therapy vacancies. I can let the member know that the current oncology vacancy rate is 3.79 full-time equivalents at CancerCare Manitoba out of 46 positions. This is down from 4.24 vacancies in August of 2007. The number of oncology positions, as I've stated, has

increased from 37 to 43 since 1999. Currently, there are no vacancies for radiation therapists at CancerCare Manitoba. This was also the case in August of 2007, and that means there are currently 52.5 positions for radiation therapists.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Just expanding on the whole part of population growth and, of course, the minister knows where I'm coming on this one, but I don't think she's expecting this question, and that is regarding the RHA and the representation. The area that I represent, ever since the RHAs were formed, has grown dramatically, as the minister is aware.

So, on representation on the board of the RHA, we certainly have not kept up pace with the population growth. I'm wondering if the minister has at all considered either expanding the board and adding one more board member, or somehow re-devising and reconstituting the make-up of the board. If she could comment on that I'd appreciate it.

*(15:40)

Ms. Oswald: I think the member raises an interesting point. It's one that I wish to explore further.

I believe that the Central Regional Health Authority is allowed, within the context of their by-laws, 15 board members. I know these are by-laws that are created by the board and approved by the minister. I'm not aware of any current conversations that may be going on about making any amendments to those by-laws. I can say that it wouldn't be something that I would be wholly against in any way and would want to see, if indeed, the central board presently has any vacancies in that complement of 15. I don't know off the top of my head, but I can endeavour to find that out.

I think it's also interesting to have this conversation in the context of the external review of regional health authorities, some recommendations and ideas that were brought forward in that review about the composition of boards and any efforts that we can be making in partnership with the regional health authorities about helping to improve governance and accountability, whether or not that means an increased number of boards or of positions on the board, as it relates to population. It may or may not be relevant to the conversation but certainly we would be open to exploring this conversation further.

Mr. Dyck: The reason I bring this to the minister is it was, in fact, brought to my attention by the board

members. I guess it was my understanding that this was certainly within the purview of the minister's responsibility. Maybe it's just been the fact of X number of board members per region, but the distribution of it though, I thought, was—I mean the minister does the appointments, and I know that the appointments are very often done in consultation with the RHA. However, that is my understanding and that's why I'm bringing it here because it has been raised as a concern by board members on the Central RHA who wanted me to bring this to the attention of the minister.

Ms. Oswald: Again, I'm going to endeavour to double-check so that I'm not speaking out of turn here with the member. I will double-check to see if there have indeed been any inquiries or correspondence of any kind from the Central Regional Health Authority about amending their by-laws to enhance the numbers on their board.

The member is quite right; it is up to the minister to approve or disapprove of those ideas or concepts, but I don't know that that has yet been brought forward. I will investigate and see that we follow a process that is appropriate. It's suggested to me that it's a requirement of the board itself to make that request to the minister and then the minister respond to it. I've never been wild about these kinds of procedural wranglings, so I'll just find out what the proper process is and continue the dialogue with the central region, because it is a growing population; it's a very vibrant population. There are many important health initiatives going on in the region. We want to make sure that we have the right number and that we also have the right skill set on that board to be able to serve the citizens as best they can.

Mr. Dyck: I appreciate those comments. I won't belabour this situation; it's just, of course, that it's been brought to our attention again with the whole area of boundaries and the redistribution for the current boundaries the way they are and then the growth that has taken place there. Whether it's of interest or not but the R.M. of Stanley, which basically encompasses the city of Winkler and the town of Morden, was the fastest growing area within all of Canada in the last year. So the growth is there and I know that you had mentioned that, so it's important, I believe, that we address that.

The other one, and I know that the minister would be heartbroken if I didn't ask about Tabor Home. I'll just leave it at that. If the minister could respond to that, please.

Ms. Oswald: I would be heartbroken if you didn't mention this, of course. I make a light-hearted comment, but I know that this is a very serious issue for the member, for the people of his region, and we do take it very seriously. We know that since 1999 we've invested nearly \$350,000 in upgrades to Tabor Home, including roof repairs, security wandering system and replacement of the nurse call system. We are looking into the upgrades—as I, you know, certainly saw with my own eyes—that the people of Tabor Home very much want to have happen.

I take also, very seriously, issues of concern about safety and making sure that the residents of Tabor Home and the staff in Tabor Home are fully prepared for any emergency situation. I have been given assurances that there are plans in place, fully functional fire alarm, fire drills are performed regularly. We've double-checked with the Office of the Fire Commissioner who confirmed with the local fire chief that he is confident that the building is safe. The fire commissioner last visited the facility in August of '07.

We know that Morden-Winkler will, indeed, benefit from our \$40-million announcement in November of '07 to address staffing guidelines for personal care homes which had not been addressed—as the member knows—since 1973, I believe it was. This additional staffing will go a long way to help those residents—or those professionals that are working, nurses, health-care aides and so forth, that are working in Tabor Home in an environment that is indeed full. They're very busy every day.

We know that in February of '07, we announced a \$21-million fund to expand community housing options for seniors in rural and northern Manitoba which included supports for 50 seniors living in a group setting in Morden and 140 in Winkler to help them remain in their home. I know the member and I have had this conversation before that, while not to downplay the needs of the residents of Tabor Home and the structure itself, that we also have a responsibility to be increasing the number of options that are available to people in the community.

So I'm going to conclude those remarks by saying that we have not finished our discussions with the regional health authority in helping to prioritize what work we can be doing, not only in continuing safety and security and comfort upgrades, but working toward an ultimate goal of meeting the dreams of those people that are working so diligently with Tabor Home. Those conversations are not

finished yet. We continue to receive information from the regions about what their plans are. We're going through them right now and I hope to be able to speak more specifically to the member about upcoming plans just as soon as we can.

Mr. Dyck: Well, just to elaborate a little bit on Tabor itself, and I think the minister indicated that they were looking at safety issues and I realize that they are. Add to that, though, is the fact that the doorways are—you know originally the building, 56 years ago, was built in order to accommodate elderly people, but not really the personal care side of it, and that's where we run into the real problem where the doorways are not wide enough to accommodate beds being moved in and out. Should any situation arise where a bed needs to be moved, they wouldn't be able to get them through the doorways.

As I indicated, the structure was built originally for—we called it an old folks home. It would be a seniors home, but not a personal care home, and that's where things have really changed. So I would just encourage the minister, if she's looking at her capital plans for the coming year, to seriously and very seriously consider that.

Again, as I indicated, you know, the growth is certainly there to substantiate it. That's not the other part problem, and just to add to this, it's not only the beds that we need there. We need more beds. As the minister is aware, on any given day, we've got 14 to 15 beds tied up in Boundary Trails Health Centre, of people who should be in a personal care facility, and so they are taking valuable space at Boundary Trails that could be utilized for much better purposes. I'm not saying it's not important to have these elderly people there, but they do have to be someplace.

* (15:50)

I know I just was talking to a constituent of mine on the weekend whose mother is in Boundary Trails who should not be there, should be in a personal care home. But, at this point of time, Salem, in Winkler, has, I believe, a waiting list of around 40 people. Morden has, the last count I think was 25, but those waiting lists are up there all the time of people needing to access those facilities.

It's not only a matter of replacing the Tabor, which is desperately needed, but also adding spaces so that we can accommodate these people.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, the member raises several points, all of which are good ones. I will concede those points right down the line. When some

of our personal care homes were constructed years and years ago, they were, absolutely, constructed for more ambulatory residents. We, with technology and equipment, know that when personal care homes are constructed today, they are constructed in a different way, doorways included, hallways included, and so we know the situation at Tabor Home is not ideal in that regard. It was not built for today's personal care home patient, and we know that that is why we have to work with the region to look seriously at what we can be doing in that regard.

As I said, I've committed to the member that we will have these ongoing conversations. He knows that virtually every member of the Legislature, not just those on his side of the House, but on every side and some from the ceiling, I'm convinced, are asking for capital construction. We need to work hard to balance that.

The member makes a good point about our elderly residents spending time in hospital beds when there are settings that would be better for them. I appreciate that point and, again, he also makes an important point about the growing population in the region and our need to be providing as many options from the personal care home side, from the supportive housing side, from supports for seniors in group living side and even enhancing whatever home care options we have. We need to be building our resources in that region, and we're going to continue to work with the region to do that.

So I thank the member for his questions. These are not easy challenges. I know he knows that, and we're just committed to do the best we can to meet those requests as quickly as we can.

Mr. Dyck: Before I turn it back to my colleague from Steinbach, just a few points I'd like to make. In Salem, statistically, just to show the type of people on the personal care side who are entering the facility: their average stay there is less than two years. So that means they really are there in their—they wouldn't call them golden years any more, either; they would call them some really challenging years. I know the same has taken place for Tabor.

These are really, really high-needs area. In fact, I was at a fundraiser just several weeks ago, where they are now needing to put these sliding lifts, or whatever you call, sliding tracks into all of the rooms. They were raising money to do that because it's just too hard on staff. The staff just don't have the strength to move the clients from the bed to whatever they need to be moved to, to the wheelchair.

The community is certainly trying to address a lot of the situation that is out there, and yet are finding that the needs are going higher every year. The minister mentioned something regarding supportive housing and, certainly, we need that assisted living, that gap that's in there. As I look in my community, I'm sure it's the same in most, but we've really just changed the needs; the needs of the individuals have gone up. Where they used to be in facilities where you just have home care, those facilities now, because of the age, the life span of people going up, increasing, that the intent of what the building was built for a number of years ago has dramatically changed. In all of this, I know that we need to continue to address the issues that are out there, to be able to provide the people who have lived within the region all their lives at least the best that we can, as support for them in the last years of their lives.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, again, I appreciate what the member is saying about the changing needs of our senior population in personal care homes and the issue that he raises, for example, about ceiling tracks, the need for lifts. We know that, when we look for example at workplace injuries of nurses and health-care aides, there are a significant number of individuals that have sustained some injuries at work when it comes to lifting patients.

In the context of our personal care home staffing announcement, we did commit over \$950,000 a year for 10 years to go toward augmenting personal care home facilities with the ceiling tracks because of the very issue that the member raises.

We are working and listening to seniors, which I think is the most critical thing that we can do, seniors and their families who say that personal care homes are very, very important for a particular population but they want to have options. Because we've worked to build those options and will continue to work to do that, the acuity level of the individual that does reside now in a personal care home setting is exactly what the member said. It's not the same as it was in 1973 when those staffing guidelines were put in place, which is why we made a commitment last year to change them.

The kinds of individuals that lived at Tabor 56 years ago are not the same kinds of patients now. The single most important thing we can do is make sure that the staffing that we have on the floor is augmented, and it is the right complement of nurses to health-care aides to allied health and so forth.

We don't disagree with what the member is saying about those higher acuity levels. That's why we made that commitment, \$40-million commitment, to make sure the people on the ground would be there. I'll just go back to the comments that I made earlier about working with all of our regions to try to create a balance among the many, many requests that are out there for capital construction. We'll continue to work with his region to make sure that we can do the best that we can on the capital and on the staffing side.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Chairperson, I thank my colleague for his questions. He's always a strong and passionate advocate for the Pembina constituency, raising their concerns here in the Legislature.

I just want to ask the minister a few questions regarding an issue that came to light late last week, the pathologist review as a result of some concerns about the actual test reviews that were done by a particular pathologist at DSM, Diagnostic Services of Manitoba.

Can the minister indicate when these concerns were first raised about this pathologist's work to her and when she was first advised of it?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chairperson, I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to put information on the record about this very serious issue.

I can let the member know that I was first notified at the end of March that an initial review of a pathologist's work had begun and that any potentially affected patients would be notified by their doctors. That is to say, information would go to the referring doctor; then that referring doctor would work to notify the patients as soon as was possible and sensible, that is to say, the information could be given and to determine if a change in treatment was required.

It was the middle of last week, I believe, when I received some initial results of the larger review that was going on. Diagnostic Services of Manitoba and the WRHA together did assure me that doctors and their patients were being notified as the amended results were being identified.

*(16:00)

I think what's really important to note in this current situation is that these notifications are going on as we speak, and that any patients that would be requiring additional treatment as a result of any

change in diagnosis would be treated on an expedited basis.

We are working very hard, and I would say appropriately, to be open and transparent in recognition that really there's a new way of handling medical errors. After the Sinclair and the Thomas reports, the biggest lesson that everybody learned was that medical errors cannot be swept under the carpet. It's a change in culture. We know that said under-the-carpet sweeping was happening pre-Sinclair and that's alarming to all of us.

The culture change in medical care in Manitoba has happened as a result of policies and regulations that require full disclosure and the investigation of medical mistakes. Unlike in many, many ways—unlike what we have seen recently in some other provinces, we have been open and transparent by communicating this to patients and to the public very early in the process, and we know that any word in the public about the confidence of our doctors being questioned, the confidence of a single pathologist being questioned, can be frightening to families and to patients. We want to make sure that, even though the review is not yet finished, as we uncover any discrepancies in what is admittedly a very subjective, an interpretive bit of science in any sort of discrepancies that we're finding in the tests of this individual pathologist, the referring doctor is being notified immediately and working to notify the patient to ensure if—and that's an important point in this—if there is indeed any need for an amendment to any treatment that is ongoing, that that can happen in as rapid a manner as possible.

Mr. Goertzen: So, to be clear, then, the minister was advised at the end of March that that review was being undertaken and that patients who'd had test results analyzed by this particular pathologist were being notified as of that point?

Ms. Oswald: I can tell you that concerns were raised by one of the pathologists in question's colleagues through Diagnostic Services of Manitoba's internal quality assurance process, so one might say at the end of March that the question was raised.

An initial review of 35 selected complex cases uncovered some diagnostic inconsistencies which resulted in the amendment of reports for seven of the cases, and it was then that a further review of about 107 randomly selected general cases from the prior month, from February 2008, resulted in a further amendment to two cases for a total of nine errors among 142 cases, or 6.3 percent.

Yes, in fact, I was notified that there were questions at the end of March. I was notified last week of what the initial review was showing. I was assured from Diagnostic Services of Manitoba and from the WRHA that, as each amended test appeared, their doctors, the referring doctor, would be notified, and, as appropriate, the patients would be notified. I asked the question this morning as to whether or not each patient of the nine cases of which we are aware today had been notified, and I'm waiting for confirmation on that, but, certainly, that was the commitment of DSM and of the WRHA to endeavour to do that. There may be any number of reasons why a patient might not be notified, their presence or absence in the province or whatever, but that the effort to do that and the commitment to do that has been made. I take great comfort in that. We know that this was not a process that we saw happening in other provinces, which led people to be come very concerned; we are very pleased that, although this review is not yet complete, the wheels are already turning to endeavour to see if any treatment needs to be amended in any way. If it does, of course, these individuals will be addressed on a priority basis.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister clarify, then, seven cases at the end of March were identified where she describes a discrepancy in the diagnosis. Can she, obviously, without any specifics attached in terms of names, but can she describe for us what those discrepancies would be?

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Oswald: I apologize, Mr. Acting Chairperson, I may have missed the last part of the question as I was conferring, so I may ask you to repeat it.

What I can say is that, at the end of March, I was notified that there were seven out of 35 of this review of the complex cases after some questions were raised about the process that was in place. Let's bear in mind here that what has happened is, the system has worked, and it has caught a mistake.

The review of the 35 cases in which there were seven discrepancies found, we were made aware of that at the end of March which certainly constituted a larger review to begin; that review would be of randomly selected general cases from February 2008. It was last week that I was able to confirm that two additional cases had been added to the amended cases for a total of nine out of 142 or 6.3 percent; that review is ongoing. That's just where we know that we are today. The process of notifying the

referring doctors who would then, in turn, notify their patients as appropriate, has begun.

Mr. Goertzen: I'll just repeat the last part of my last question. Perhaps in layman's terms because, obviously, the minister is trained in education and I'm trained in law, so we're both outside of our natural fields, but she talks about seven cases out of 35 that were identified at the end of March with discrepancies. Can she give us, in a layperson's vernacular what kind of discrepancies we're talking about? What does that mean when she says there were discrepancies?

Ms. Oswald: I will give exactly that, the layperson's language for it and I don't purport to be a pathologist. I'll tell you what I understand to be true in a layperson's terms.

These discrepancies, unlike what we have seen in other provinces where there have been cases of an individual having cancer and being told that they did not or an individual being told, you have cancer when, in fact, they did not, is not what these discrepancies are about.

As I said earlier and as I have been informed by experts, these tests are very much of an interpretative nature where a pathologist will look at a slide and endeavour, with the best information that he or she has in front of him, make a judgment about perhaps the stage of cancer or the level of illness that someone might have.

As Dr. Dhaliwal would explain, the top 10 pathologists in the world could get together and look at these slides, and we could find, among these top 10 pathologists in the world, a difference in interpretation of what they see on these slides. The internal quality assurance process has caught a discrepancy between pathologists—again, I will apologize to doctors everywhere if I'm not using the proper terminology—about the level or stage or development of an illness, of a cancer, if you will. But we have been informed of the discrepancies that have been found to date. There have been, so far, no cases of an individual being told that they did not have cancer when, in fact, they did, or an individual being told that they did have cancer when, in fact, they did not. We did see this happen in other provinces; it raises concerns for all Canadians. What we have seen here is a discrepancy in the interpretation of, perhaps, the advancement of an illness.

* (16:10)

Now, this is not to say that these discrepancies are not concerning, because they can—can—perhaps have an influence on the course of treatment that one might be receiving. We cannot confirm yet, the work is still ongoing, that even of these nine that have been identified any course of treatment whatsoever would be changed for these individuals. But in an abundance of caution, because we have these processes in place of internal quality assurance, and because we have learned lessons from other jurisdictions where we know some things have gone terribly wrong, we want to make sure that we are letting patients know at the earliest opportunity with the most information that we have right now.

We also know that in the days ahead there will likely be more information, and there may be some people that might suggest that why don't you wait until you get every last bit of detail from the review and then talk to patients, and that's a question for debate. Our choosing was to—in the culture of the post-Sinclair era—be as open and transparent with patients and with their referring doctors as quickly as we could, and I believe that, together, patients, their doctors, their families, will be able to work to make the best possible decisions so that we have the best possible outcomes for these individuals.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that, and I do appreciate that there's a distinction, obviously, between a misdiagnosis of whether one has a disease like cancer or not, as opposed to what stage that cancer is in, although, realistically, a misdiagnosis of the stage of cancer might in some ways have the same end result and if you're not able to treat it properly, that person might then lose their chance of recovery from the disease. So the minister's right not to discount it, not to say it isn't serious, because, in fact, it is serious.

Of the seven cases at the end of March then, that were discovered, and two other discrepancies then were discovered in the course of that month of investigation, I am assuming that the seven individual cases, the referring doctors would've immediately been notified of the discrepancies at the end of March? For those seven cases?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Acting Chair, I can confirm for the member, on the first point that he raised, that certainly a discrepancy in a test that resulted in one course of treatment being given when another one would have been superior. The member is not wrong in any way in suggesting that waiting too long to make such a decision could indeed be very

problematic and that's—I want to make clear, if I didn't make it clear before, that while we don't necessarily know at this point, of the nine, if there are going to be changes in the course of treatment for these individuals.

We are working with DSM, with the WRHA, with CancerCare Manitoba in partnership and, if it is decided in the course of that team that a different course of treatment is better for those patients, then they will be treated on a priority basis. Certainly, one slide, one test that a pathologist looks at is, I am informed, but a piece of the comprehensive puzzle, and that a slide of tissue that one pathologist has looked at with no knowledge of any details of the case, of the patient, of the history can only be one piece of the complex medical-treatment puzzle, if you will. So that's why this information has been given and that the continuum of individuals that are dealing with these individual patients and their families will be taken into account to see if, in fact, when all of the information the doctors are able to have is put together and a course of treatment is planned, if it needs to be changed from its original course then they will be given priority treatment.

As for the last part of the question, I can tell the member that, as soon as the amended reports were made, doctors were informed. That is what Diagnostic Services told us and we have confidence that what they're telling us is accurate.

Mr. Goertzen: So, then, the seven cases, the referring doctors are notified and then it's up to the doctors then to notify their own individual patients, that's correct?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, that's correct. Again, as I was just saying to the member, the pathologist is not the one with the relationship with the patient, and we have every confidence and, of course, are working to follow up to ensure that this work is being done in an abundance of caution, but we are—as the member has rightly pointed out in this discussion and in other discussions, when we're talking about serious illnesses like cancer, issues being handled with an abundance of compassion with doctors with whom relationships have been established and formed are very, very important. So, while DSM and the WRHA and CancerCare Manitoba and Manitoba Health will be working very diligently to ensure these notifications have and will continue to happen as we go forward, although I'm hoping there aren't any more cases found, the relationships between patients

and doctors is one to be respected, a very important one, and those doctors will be delivering the results.

Mr. Goertzen: I guess my concern, Madam Minister, through you, Mr. Acting Chair, is that at this stage—which has now been five weeks since the seven cases were identified and there have been two additional cases of discrepancy since then—you're still not aware of whether or not these patients have been notified.

I know when there are concerns within the child welfare system and there were hundreds, thousands of kids where the commitment was made to check on every child in Manitoba, that was done maybe not exactly at the same time frame, but it was done, I think, relatively quickly. It just seems strange to me that you're not able to tell the committee here today whether the at least seven of the complex cases were able to be notified five weeks later because, as my colleague points out to me, five weeks might not seem like a lot of time to me and you sitting here, but it certainly is a long time in the life of somebody dealing with cancer.

So is there sort of a plausible reason why you're not able to tell us if these seven individuals and the nine in total have gotten notification that their diagnostic test may have had a discrepancy in it?

*(16:20)

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know that, as I said earlier, these are complex cases, and in notifying patients or referring doctors and then notifying patients who are dealing with these issues, we also want to ensure that these patients are not notified only part of what their potential diagnosis or further course of action is.

We agree fully that the very soonest opportunity that a patient can be notified with the details of what the next step is going to be they absolutely will be, and we agree with that whole-heartedly.

We know that in the case of three of the individuals, they have had some surgery. There needs to be a discussion amongst the radiation oncologist, the pathologist and the surgeon together, with this new information of amended pathology report, to ensure that that patient who will be told, that indeed, there is new information that they need to have as a result of their pathology. They'll be given that information as rapidly as possible with the plan of what the next step is and with a prioritization of where they are going.

The five-week gap that the individual sites may indeed not have been the case for every one of the seven. We know that DSM and the WRHA have committed to pass on this information as quickly as possible. We take them at their word and at the same time, will continue to be working with them.

I will endeavour to confirm for the member, as quickly as I can, confirming how many of the seven have, in fact, been notified in part or in full. How many of them are, if amended treatments need to happen, how many of them are in fact, already engaged in that amended treatment. I will endeavour to report to the member as soon as possible of the full nine that we know now.

I hasten to add that the work is continuing on the review of this individual pathologist's tests. There may be more than nine but I will endeavour to keep the member, and, indeed, all members of the House as appropriate, of the progress on when patients have been notified, how quickly that's happening and what course of treatment, if any, needs to be amended for these individuals.

We don't disagree with the members opposite when they say that for an individual living with cancer, for an individual having a loved one living with cancer, that it seems like hours can take forever, let alone days or weeks. So we agree that this needs to happen as quickly as possible. It needs to be as appropriate and knowledgeable as possible and we're going to work with DSM to ensure that that happens.

There's not a member of this House, I would suggest, that hasn't been touched in some pretty deep and profound way by somebody living with cancer. I include myself in that group.

I'm very, very concerned, and I want to assure Manitobans that the system has caught a problem and that it's working very diligently to act on the problem. To learn from what has happened in other jurisdictions, that perhaps, did not move this swiftly and that was regrettable but we're going to work to ensure that we can move as swiftly as is safe for these patients.

Mr. Goertzen: With all due respect, I have a hard time agreeing with the minister that this has been a swift process when she talks about the post-Sinclair era. When you're talking about seven cases and the minister indicates maybe some people are out of country and that, I don't know how many people with cancer diagnosis necessarily are leaving the country. Regardless, I just find it strange that the minister

doesn't seem to have been quite on top of the file in the sense that you'd think that she would have an answer in terms of whether or not they were contacted.

Again, thankfully, it's not hundreds of people were talking about; it's a much smaller number, but that makes it, you'd think, easier to have that information provided.

So she indicates, then, that seven of 35 complex cases were diagnosed, and then, of course, there were less numbers on the less complex cases, I presume, but I'm not sure that complexity necessarily equates to severity when it comes to diagnosis or the treatment. But seven cases out of 35 cases being misdiagnosed or, sorry, a discrepancy being found is—if my math is right—in the range of 20 percent, which seems high, and certainly I think most Manitobans would think that that's high if they were wanting to find out that their chances were one in five of having a discrepancy in their test results.

Is there a standard that the minister believes there's an appropriate standard for discrepancies being found? Obviously, 20 was too high; it triggered a review, but what is an acceptable standard?

Ms. Oswald: We know, in fact, when we look at what's happened across the nation on the issue of pathology and pathology review, that the very creation of Diagnostic Services Manitoba was an effort, in fact, to move toward better standards for labs.

We know that all six hospitals now have standardized quality assurance policies and the preparation of biopsies has been consolidated at two locations for better quality. We're also working with the other provinces to standardize the language and forms that are used by pathologists to describe tissue samples so that there is, in fact, less room for error in the interpreting of these results.

We also know we heard Dr. Kakabani speaking on a radio program this morning that this whole national discourse that is going on now concerning pathology and pathology reports speaks to the fact that indeed there aren't existing national standards for what is a threshold that ought to be met for the uncovering of diagnostic errors.

We know that the processes that we have in place with DSM and with our internal quality assurance processes led us on a journey that showed that there may be a problem with an individual

pathologist. That journey led to the initial review. It led to an expanded review of randomly selected general cases, and we know that in 2004 it was cited in a newspaper article that a 0.5 error rate would be a laudable target perhaps for pathology results, and that certainly does remain our target.

At present, we do have more work to do in investing in technology and information gathering that will help to be able to capture results in a way that will enable the measuring results to achieve this small target. We do have information that Manitoba is in line with error rates in other provinces, but I am of the belief that, as we go forward in a national dialogue about these issues, there will be in place national standards, national terminology and, as best as possible, lessening the room for error in the interpretation of results that we will see emerging, perhaps, say a national target or a national standard for, you know, plus or minus interpretive results for tests.

* (16:30)

So we are working toward some developing better standards. Indeed, we believe the development of these standards is what has endeavoured to catch these discrepancies and these errors in the first place, which is a good thing. The fact that the errors were made is not a good thing, and we need to continue to work together to ensure that we have a system that will catch these issues so that we can take swift action in ensuring that patients are getting the care that they need.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister indicated, Mr. Acting Chairperson, that of the seven or of the nine, I'm not sure which it was, the cases that were seen having a discrepancy, three of the individuals underwent surgery as a treatment. Is there any indication at this stage that the surgical procedure might have been an improper method of treatment, based on the diagnostic results they were given?

Ms. Oswald: I'm informed and have confirmed just now that the seven individuals in question, as I said to the member before, these were not cases of being diagnosed with cancer and finding out later that cancer did not exist. These patients all indeed have been diagnosed with cancer so we know that to be true. There is no evidence at this date that any surgery that was performed was inappropriate.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate how long this particular pathologist has worked at DSM and whether or not there have been any concerns raised

prior to this about the pathologist's work either within DSM or otherwise?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that this individual has worked in pathology for some 40 years and worked in Winnipeg hospitals and would have become a member of DSM when it was created. That would be in 2002. I'm also informed that there is no evidence of complaints or errors concerning this pathologist to date.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Just one short question. I wonder if the minister could indicate whether—I think, of the three people that she indicated that had been misdiagnosed or had complications before, three of them underwent surgery. Just for clarification, could she indicate whether that surgery was a direct result of a change in the course of action or planning or treatment as a result of the misdiagnosis? Was, in fact, there a change that required surgery?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I can inform the member, just for clarification's sake, the diagnosis of cancer in these individuals was correct. This was not a case of, once again, somebody being told that they had cancer when they did not. It was correct, absolutely. They had surgery, as recommended by the experts, the doctors, to begin a course of treatment concerning their illness. What I understand to be true about the discrepancies is the question of whether or not a course of radiation would be appropriate as a result of an amended pathology report. That is the nature of the discussion that is going on, as we speak. Perhaps these people have been notified, but I have been informed from a number of fronts that there is no indication whatsoever that a surgery would not have occurred as a result of what was discovered in the pathology report. The surgery was absolutely appropriate for the nature of the diagnosis that was made. It's a question of interpretation of what was on that slide about the introduction of radiation into the treatment.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So I can provide comfort with the information I have at this time that there was not an incorrect surgery that was performed. That surgery was going to be performed, no matter what. Now the question concerns the introduction of radiation, and that's the work that's being done.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start by thanking the minister last year for her support in terms of The Apology Act. Now that it's being

implemented, the feedback I'm getting has been positive and that it is helping. Interestingly, there are additional provinces looking to implement a similar legislation.

There's been a little bit of confusion about the extent to which the government—I think it's really the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—has moved toward a program which has been developed and used in other centres called Sorry Works!, which can lead under some circumstances to bringing people together and, in some instances, to compensation without necessarily having legal action.

What I'm asking the minister is whether she can provide any clarification on WRHA policy or province-wide policy, whichever may be the case, with regard to this.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chairperson, I thank the member for the question. I agree that the general discussion in the community, the medical community, among patients, constituents that we speak to is quite positive about the introduction of The Apology Act. I can commend, once again, the member for his efforts in this regard.

I know, like any new piece of legislation, we need to concern ourselves with the details and its application. There have been some questions raised about how this may affect apologies across professions. We sometimes in this conversation tend to be focussed on the medical profession. We have seen some questions get raised in the Family Services and Housing area and, I think, there'll be conversations ongoing about some of the legal implications of The Apology Act and, potentially, any small amendments we may need to discuss going forward to ensure that its intent and its function actually achieve those things that we want to achieve.

Together, I believe, we had many legal minds looking at the implications of this, and all of them together didn't necessarily pick up on this one issue that is hanging out there that we may need to address. By and large, I can say to the member that I do think it's an important step forward in Manitoba's overall efforts to ensure that patients are getting the safest care they can and that they are getting the most compassionate care they can.

* (16:40)

We just had a fairly extended conversation about pathology in Manitoba, and, I think, there will be no more important a time than to be discussing when,

let's say with an abundance of optimism, we find everything that we need to find, we learn that every possible treatment is done in the best possible manner, and that all outcomes are very positive, that that will be a time where the very existence of this act will be very important for families in Manitoba.

So, again, I wish to commend the member. We know that in the area of Sorry Works! we have been aware that there have been some overarching feelings that it's a program that tends to function more effectively in a more litigious society like the United States, perhaps not in Canada. There have been some beliefs about that, correct or incorrect. The member and I can debate.

We know, of course, that they advocate a three-step disclosure program: the initial disclosure, which is about empathy and re-establishing trust; investigation, which is about learning the truth and whether or not any standards were breached; and step 3, the resolution, the sharing of results with families.

We also know that with some of the work that has been done in Manitoba—the existence of the Manitoba patient safety institute, amendments that we've made to the RHA act, the formation of patient safety teams within the WRHA, and the development of disclosure booklets, which includes the process for identifying cases of harm in which a full apology of responsibility and openness is included—we know that there are many parts of the infrastructure of Sorry Works! that already exist and, with the inclusion of The Apology Act, indeed exist. So any confusion or concerns that the member may have about how the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority or other regional health authorities for that matter are approaching The Apology Act, I would be more than interested to learn more about and work towards finding a speedy resolution so that the intent of that program, the infrastructure of which I believe has been built here in Manitoba, is built and secured to its fullest possible ability so that patients are getting the safest care and the most compassionate care that they can.

Mr. Gerrard: My second question concerns the introduction of the legal principle of accountability in the delivery of health care. As the minister is well aware, I've been persistent in pushing for this recognition based on careful study of this issue by the commission which was set up under Jean Chrétien called the Romanow commission and the recommendations that came from that and from my

own looking carefully at the situation. My understanding is that the minister has been involved in looking at some due diligence of this, and I would just get an update from the minister on her perspective on having the legal principle of accountability accepted for the delivery of health care in Manitoba.

Ms. Oswald: I'm presuming that the member is specifically referring to Bill 202 that he has on the order paper—

An Honourable Member: That's correct.

Ms. Oswald: —and, of course, inside of this context and outside of it, the member and I have had a number of discussions about the importance of accountability. I actually don't believe that we are that far afield from one another in terms of what we believe to be important for the health-care system.

I think the point at which we may part company is, and I say this truly with the greatest of respect, and that is whether or not Bill 202 would achieve something that isn't already in place. We know that the First Ministers agreed in 2004 to the health-care accord, which was a 10-year plan to strengthen health care, and this agreement back then contained accountability requirements for the \$155 million that we received for the Wait Times Reduction Fund. We know, for example, that there are accountability provisions in the RHA act including the requirement for regional health plans and the requirement for the reporting as requested by the department. Issues of accountability are, indeed, already legally accommodated and entrenched in The Regional Health Authority Act.

We know that we're already accountable for all of our decisions. We know that we have to take further steps to improve accountability, which is why we put our information about wait times on-line, why we amended The Medical Act to allow the College of Physicians and Surgeons to put physician profiles on the Web, why we put in place a medical errors reporting and review system following the recommendations of Sinclair on the infant deaths in the pediatric cardiac program in the '90s. It's why we require all the RHAs to sign performance deliverable agreements which are designated to provide greater accountability to Manitoba's health system.

I would say, with the greatest of respect to the member, we don't disagree for an instant that our citizens expect our health-care system to be accountable and to be open and transparent.

We believe that we have in our existing legislation, in our existing policies and regulations, those kinds of accountabilities that perhaps are being suggested in Bill 202, in fact maybe even more. We are going to continue to press forward and being accountable to Manitobans every single day as best we can.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Chairperson, I think we'll continue to disagree at least for the foreseeable future, for this session anyway, in terms of the need for adopting the principle of accountability. I won't take this further because I've got limited time, but I would like to bring up one question for you.

This deals with orthopedics. As the minister knows, I have raised on a number of issues the question of what is happening with Alberta Bone and Joint Health. I had the opportunity early in April to go out and visit with people in Alberta to learn more. One of the things that Alberta Bone and Joint Health has done is to look at the delivery of orthopedic services province-wide, and I believe they now have moving forward an arrangement with the Northern Lights health region, which is a large health region in northern Alberta.

Now, it would have some similarities to the region that's served by or through Thompson, for example. This seems to be a positive development, and Alberta Bone and Joint Health has played a significant role in bringing parties together and to taking this forward. I'm sure that the minister is concerned about, as an example, orthopedic care delivered through Thompson, and I wonder if she's had a chance to look at what's happening in Alberta and to look at whether it may be a helpful model for moving things forward in Manitoba.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, certainly, the member and I have had this conversation about the program that exists in Alberta. I can say to the member that we have not made an immediate plan to commit to have an orthopedic surgeon in Thompson, let's say, at this time. We do know that we have expanded our program and, of course, had really incredible success at Concordia Hospital. By we, of course, I mean the doctors and the nurses and the clinical assists and the people that are working in the pre-hab program. We've had terrific success in using an innovative two-room operating model that I've spoken about before and will spare the member speaking about it again, despite my excitement about it.

* (16:50)

We also know that we have surgeons also working in Winnipeg, of course, Brandon, and Boundary Trails, that have a collaborative, professional relationship, that speak with one another about what they can be doing to not only achieve better outcomes on the patient side, not only to work together to bring down wait times which we know has been dramatic for patients waiting for hip and knee surgeries, down by over 56 percent since 2005. We know that the number of patients waiting in Winnipeg has decreased by 57 percent, but also on the pre-hab side, learning everything that we can learn about ensuring that patients are as fit and ready as possible for that surgery which, I know the member knows better than I do, leads to better outcomes.

So we have made, I believe, incredible strides, particularly since 2005 when there was an infusion of funds specifically to those quality-of-life surgeries. We have expanded places where these surgeries are done in this very effective way but, as always, I will say to the member, that programs that exist not only in Alberta but in all provinces of Canada and, indeed, in jurisdictions around the world have good ideas about what it is that we can be doing to augment our good program. We want to bring those wait times down even further—an even more dramatic reduction, and how we can service populations that are generally under-served, I think, is indeed a responsibility for all of us that have the privilege of working in one way or another in the health-care system.

So I certainly do commit to the member that we would be interested in life-long learning on the subject of improving our orthopedic outcomes and whether we learn that from Alberta or elsewhere in the world, we are committed to do that.

Mr. Gerrard: My understanding is it's not necessarily a matter of hiring an orthopedic surgeon to live and work in Thompson, but to have an approach which provides services. My understanding is that the plan has some similarities to delivery of dental care in Thompson which, I understand, is working—maybe dental surgery—which I understand is working reasonably well. But I thought I would, at least, pass that on to the minister.

There has been concern, talking about northern Manitoba, in Flin Flon about the exposure to toxic metals and other contaminants. The company involved has undertaken a health survey which is a matter of looking at the levels in the environment, in

the soil, in rabbits—what have you—to make, then, a decision as to whether they believe there would be any health risk. But they will not be undertaking a survey of the actual health of people, to look at the health of people in Flin Flon to see if there are any changes in health which might be a result of the exposure to toxic metals. My understanding is the company basically is not going to do this because they feel that's not their jurisdiction, that it would have to be done through the Manitoba Health and the regional health authority because, of course, they would have access to personal health records in a way that could be looked at statistically as the Manitoba Centre for Policy and Health Evaluation is doing perhaps. In order to understand, in a situation like Flin Flon, whether, in fact, there have been health impacts on the health of people, it's important to look at the health of people.

My question is, is the minister going to actually look at the health or make sure that the health of people in Flin Flon is looked at?

Ms. Oswald: I think I can say to the member quite clearly that, certainly, the whole goal of those people working in Manitoba Health would be to ensure that we're doing whatever it is that we can to be assisting in the promotion of the health of individuals.

We know that the community advisory group is looking at a range of health data and the regional health authority will be releasing their community health assessments next year, every five years as prescribed by legislation.

I think the member is also, again, acutely aware that measurements of health statistics and cancer rates certainly are complex and could be representative of past exposures, perhaps not necessarily representative of the current risk. We know some cancers take years and years to develop and cancer rates posted today could represent exposures from 20 or 30 years ago.

We also know, when we're talking about testing in the here and now, that we can have individual parents for example, who want to have their children tested for something like lead. One doctor may have a patient tested for elevated urinary arsenic, likely from exposure. We will have to be working through these very complex issues. Whether it's children that are being tested at the request of parents and physicians, whether it's results of tests that come forward from exposures that may have existed long ago.

We note that physicians in Flin Flon have indicated that they've not seen any patients whom they would have considered to have conditions related to heavy metal exposure. One of these physicians has worked in Flin Flon for over 32 years. All of that being said, of course, we know that we want to work with the region and work with the advisory committee who is assessing information about people's health in a collaborative way.

We know that we want to find out what resources exist already, what kinds of resources may need augmenting in their pursuit of information about people's health. But the most important voices, I believe, in this dialogue, are going to be the voices of individual people that live in the region, that live in Flin Flon, of parents who may or may not be concerned about the health of children, and of course, the voices of those people that have really been dedicating their time and their lives to the pursuit of information about any contaminants that might exist, any findings in the soil. They have, of course, as their goal, their pursuit of protecting people against harmful contaminants and preserving their health. That's what they're going to endeavour to do.

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

WATER STEWARDSHIP

* (15:20)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Water Stewardship. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): At the end of the last session of Estimates, I had asked the minister about Kississing Lake and Lake Winnipegosis. The minister didn't have time to reply, so the question—let's start with Kississing Lake. It's known to have a problem with toxic metals contaminating the waters. It's known that there are decreased invertebrates along the shore or inside the shore or close to the shore for quite a long distance. There's evidence that this is impacting species of wildlife, birds, and so on which feed on invertebrates and small fish.

So my question to the minister is: Can the minister provide an update in terms of what's being done and whether there's any evidence that the situation is improving or, indeed, getting worse?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): This is certainly a long-standing issue. There is work going on. The lead department in our government would be STEM through the Manitoba Mines branch. While we would be providing technical support, questions really should be best placed to the Minister of STEM.

Mr. Gerrard: Just one comment since it is in the minister's purview to ensure that the fish are doing well. I would ask whether the minister and her department have ever looked at the levels in, for example, lake trout which are fairly long-lived and high up in the food chain, whether there's any evidence of high levels of substances of mercury, for example, which could be problematic?

Ms. Melnick: This lake has a very profitable lodging and outfitters industry and so fish are sampled regularly in the lake. There is no indication that metal levels in the lake trout, which, of course, is at the top of the food chain, are suffering from any concerns. So, yes, there is regular testing that goes on. There is a healthy industry there, and we'll continue to sample.

Mr. Gerrard: The other part of the question from last time had to do with an update on the pickerel fishery in Lake Winnipegosis and what the department is doing and what the situation is.

Ms. Melnick: Of course, this is an area that the department has been focussing on. There was a broad group of stakeholders put together that formed the management board. There were appointments from the department as well as chiefs for local First Nations to advise on the Lake Winnipegosis walleye, walleye stock, which, I think, is the area really in question here.

The plan called for various actions in and around the lake. One of the actions was to consider a buyout. There is still discussion going on around that fishery and how best to deal with the walleye stocks and the return and the rehabilitation of the walleye stocks.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): My question is in regard to the quota request or increase in quota requests for the commercial pickerel fisheries for Grand Rapids Fishermen Co-op, the Norway House Fishermen's Co-op, and the Misipawistik Cree Nation and the Norway House Cree Nation. There

appear to be some questions regarding process and transparency in that process. Can the minister give me some background on the actions taken to date and what communications have been shared with the co-operatives and communities that have been asking for some feedback and actually some assistance in trying to get through this process?

Ms. Melnick: Well, this is a very complex and important issue. When I became minister of fisheries, there were a number of requests coming from various different groups around the lake. There are the various zones, 12 different zones, and there were requests coming for quota increase and various other concerns, and what we did was we went to the Lake Winnipeg advisory board last November 9, met with them for a whole day and talked about working together in a very co-operative fashion which would see the fishers around the table year-round and see the department working with them and talking about consensus building on decision making. That was very, very well received. Shortly after, the chair of the Lake Winnipeg advisory board did have to step down from the position and, unfortunately, no one has been able to step in since.

A couple of weekends ago I was out at the Manitoba Commercial Inland Fishers Federation and had some good discussion with the then-acting chair, who was very much in favour of a new model of communication. The next day Sam Murdock was elected as the president of the Inland Fishers Federation. I called Sam shortly after to congratulate him on his electoral victory and to express my desire to continue to work with the Lake Winnipeg advisory board around the issue of quotas and around any of the other issues that are around the lake, and he is very, very supportive of this.

* (15:30)

In fact, there will be a meeting very soon, which will be attended by Sam Murdock. It'll be attended by representatives of the Lake Winnipeg advisory board and our deputy. We will continue to have open and transparent discussion and work on those issues one by one, so I was very, very pleased with the response that I got. Other members have been expressing the desire to continue the discussion that was begun in November and we will do that.

Mrs. Rowat: I do know that the minister has met with some of the community representatives, but what I've been hearing from the communities is that they're looking for some transparency on this issue. They're looking for a meaningful process to examine

the proposals of the commercial fishers to increase the pickerel quotas, including the examination of the Manitoba buy-back and transfer of pickerel quotas.

There seems to be a need for some clarification on the buy-back system. It's confusing. There doesn't seem to be the clarity there required. I'm hearing from the stakeholders that they're concerned about questions such as who is buying back and those types of things. So if the minister can give me some clarification on the buy-back system and how that will work or how it is working or will work for the best interests of the stakeholders who are very concerned about this process.

Ms. Melnick: Again, I go to the meeting on November 9 where we talked about a new way of discussing fisheries issues where there is representation year-round by the fishers to discuss not only the issues that the member is raising but all other issues. We believe this is an open and transparent way to do things, that issues are put on the table, that there's open discussion, that there are representatives around the board chosen by the fishers themselves, that we listen to the traditional knowledge, that we look at areas that are working well, that we look at areas of concern, that we try to come to common consensus around what the improvements would be for all the fishers on the lakes.

You know, it's very important that we look at the fishers through all the seasons and through all the areas of the lake from which they fish and that we are understanding what their concerns are and that there is consensus being built about how to move forward in the fishery in Manitoba.

This is what I committed to in November. Again, the meeting is set—we hope will take place next Friday, which I think is the 16th of May, and I'd like to commend Sam Murdock for his very open and welcome reception to this idea. I also want to commend the Lake Winnipeg advisory board for the good work that they've done in the past, and I believe that working through this method, we will be able to deal with the issues. It's going to take time. There's not going to be one meeting and all the issues will be resolved all at once, but we can certainly look at what the fishers want to prioritize as their issues and go with that prioritization.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister then explain to me the buy-back process, or the buy-back system that is being proposed, and if she can indicate to me who is buying back? I need some clarification on that

process so that I can go back to my community people and indicate that I've got a clear understanding of what the department's role is in this process and confirm to them that the government is providing a transparent guideline in the buy-back system.

Ms. Melnick: Are you referring to Lake Winnipeg?

Mrs. Rowat: Yes.

Ms. Melnick: There is no buy-back process on Lake Winnipeg. You might be confusing it with Lake Manitoba or Lake Winnipegosis. Sorry, is that the question? Are you speaking of Lake Winnipegosis or Lake Winnipeg?

Mrs. Rowat: It's the Lake Winnipeg—[interjection] Lake Winnipegosis, sorry.

Ms. Melnick: Okay, that is a process that is in place. That is a process that is under discussion for Lake Winnipegosis, just so we're all clear.

Mrs. Rowat: If the minister can then share with me the buy-back system that is presently being presented to the fisheries individuals in that area.

Ms. Melnick: The process that's in place right now is one of continuing discussion with the community. This began as a recommendation by the board that I had referred to earlier in my discussions. There is a community meeting being planned in June. I think they're still working on the date that would be best to bring in the most number of participants. It's the Fisheries branch working in partnership with the community, in particular, Grand Chief Billyjo De La Ronde, who has been working very closely with both the community as well as the department. We look forward to continuing that discussion.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me who this invitation has been sent out to? Who will be invited to attend this meeting and the role that they will play at this meeting?

Ms. Melnick: The meeting will actually be hosted by the Pine Creek First Nation. They will be sending out invitations. I don't believe any invitations have been sent out as of yet. Details are still being worked out.

Mrs. Rowat: The invitation will be sent out by the Pine Creek First Nation. Can the minister indicate to me what role the government will have at this meeting, what type of mandate they have at this meeting and what type of guidelines or discussion points will be shared by this government?

Ms. Melnick: This is going to be a community event so we will be invited to be there on their behest. There is a vision that they are expressing around economic development, sustainable development with Pine Creek community members. We believe they'll be looking at various options that day. The particular role that we will be playing will be one of technical support, providing any history on the lake they may need, any information that they may be requesting.

* (15:40)

We also believe that INAC will be invited and will hopefully be involved in the event because, as I had opened my comments with, there will be a focus on economic development. Again, Grand Chief Billyjo De La Ronde is the one who is really looking at organizing the day. He's invited us to be a partner. We will be very happy to be there, and we will be very interested in what suggestions the community will be coming up with.

Mrs. Rowat: One question that has come up, and I look forward to hearing more about this meeting based on the fact that there seem to be a number of questions regarding boundaries and quotas and obviously the buy-back system. So I'm looking forward to the minister being able to provide the communities with the much-needed and wanted information and background on these very important issues.

I just have one final question and then I'll turn the floor over to my colleague, but the question's regarding licences and how they're controlled. Are they set by quotas or is the market key to the determinant of them?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister's requesting a brief five-minute recess. Is that acceptable to all involved? *[Agreed]* Okay, we will adjourn for five minutes. Thank you.

The committee recessed at 3:43 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:51 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee will now resume.

Ms. Melnick: Thank you for that break. Would you mind repeating your question?

Mrs. Rowat: My question, quickly, was: How are licences controlled, are they set by quotas and is the market the key determinant?

Ms. Melnick: The quotas are not set by marketability. They're set by sustainability, and that's the overriding focus of any decision that's made in the fishery.

There are two types of quotas. On Lake Winnipegosis for the summer and on Lake Winnipeg year-round there are individual quotas. On other lakes, there's a lake quota. So licences would be issued on an annual basis. They would talk about the amount of fish in weight. They would talk about other conditions such as mesh size, the time of year when the season opens, when the season closes.

For example, on Lake Winnipeg, where there are various zones, they would talk about the area in which the fisher could go.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wanted to move on to a few questions that I have with respect to Lake Winnipeg and some of the research that is being done there. What is the science that the department uses in order to gauge the health of the lake?

Ms. Melnick: When we look at the science around Lake Winnipeg, it's not sort of a one-stop shop; it's a pretty complex process, actually, so there's more than one measurement used. We work in partnership with the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium also providing them with, I think this year it was \$100,000 we provide every year for the *Namao* itself. I believe it was \$50,000 for research as well, this year.

There are a hundred different water quality variables and conditions that are researched throughout the time when the ice is off the lake. I'll just go quickly through at a very high level. The algal communities: so, type of algae that is found, where it's found, you know, where it is found in different parts of the lake, is it moving, et cetera? Vertebrates at the bottom of the lake, trace metals in the bottom sediments, and then the fish community. So we take the research that's done again through the time of year when ice is off the lake and do various testing and various analysis throughout the whole year.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is that all done by the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium, or are there other organizations involved with gathering the scientific evidence, research?

Ms. Melnick: The research consortium is actually the main organizer for research around the lake. I know that the consortium will bring in different

groups, perhaps on an individual basis or a group basis to do any sort of research that they're wanting to do. So, beyond what we do here, as I just outlined on an annual basis, there could be other groups that would go out with the consortium, arrangements would be made for the type of research and certainly research would be shared at the end of the day.

I think one of the exciting things that will be happening this summer, the first event of its kind, will be the Manitoba-Israel water experts symposium and we will be bringing in 10 of the top minds from the state of Israel here to Manitoba and we will be matching with local scientists as well. The first two days will be spent the scientists talking to each other and talking about the areas of algal blooms, wetlands, the purpose of wetlands and wetland reconstruction and also talking about—the Israelis were very interested in talking about water shortages, and we all understand why. On the third day, we will be bringing in the community and having various groups from around Manitoba, people who are interested in water as well and talking about the lake, talking about water in general in Manitoba.

I think there could be some very positive outcomes from that. We know that the Israelis have already defeated algal blooms on the Sea of Galilee which, of course, is very important. They're also doing a lot of good work around wetland reconstruction, particularly in the Negev. I know they have a major project for the Jewish National Fund. Certainly, we've done some very good work around wetlands as well when we look at the ALUS project and various other projects around Manitoba. So I think it'll be a very fruitful three days here in Manitoba, and knowledge that will be gathered there, hopefully, can be applied to the health of the lake.

*(16:00)

It was a couple of weeks ago that I announced the first-ever chair of water science with the president of the University of Manitoba. A very positive announcement, it was very well-received. We went out to the University of Manitoba, and that adds another piece of the research that is already going on.

Certainly, the science committee—which will be reporting to the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, the new board—we've got representatives from the Province, representatives from various federal departments at a high enough level to actually really

make decisions. So I want to thank very much Minister Baird for his co-operation in that.

We've also got the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, the new board that was created by myself after I received their final report to look at areas around the lake, within the lake and beyond the lake. Again, I want to thank every member of the Lake Winnipeg Water Stewardship Board in the work that they have done and in the good work that they know will happen in the future.

It's also very interesting to see more and more students doing work around the lake. I know we had, just up in the Interlake a few weeks ago, a young student who had rallied some of her other students to do some work around water. So water is, as Manitobans know, very important, and it will take all of us to help to clean up this lake, and certainly the scientific community has an awful lot to contribute.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just wanted to move on to, and talk a little bit about, Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board. I know that was set up, I believe, was it February of 2007, or in there.

I'm wondering if the minister could update us on to what type of—I guess, what type of funding is going toward the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board was, in fact, formed on February 27, 2007. It consists of 14 members: Gordon Goldsborough, who runs the Netley Marsh Creek, Delta Marsh Field Station on Netley Marsh, is the chair; Allan Gaudry, from MMF, is a member; as is Gary Morlock, vice-president of angling with the Manitoba Wildlife Federation; Rae Trimbel-Olson is a grain and special crops producer; Dan Coyle is a retired civil servant who has a cottage out at Laurentia Beach; Norman Travers is a commercial fisher, president of Dauphin River Fisherman's Advisory Board; Randy Helgason is a councillor of the Municipality of Siglunes and works on several of the Lake Manitoba committees relating to fishing, wildlife, farming and hunting; Don Smith is a councillor for the Municipality of Lakeview; Bill Finney is a cattle rancher and commercial fisher; Harold Fleming is also a cattle rancher, commercial fisher and member of the Meadow Portage Community Council, which is one of the NACC communities; Linda Schroedter is a holistic farmer and owns agriculture and recreational properties; Tracy Fillion is a cattle rancher, commercial fisher and operates a small

business in the area; David Milani is a fisheries biologist from DFO; and Bob Harrison is manager of the surface water management section in the Department of Water Stewardship.

These folks have been working hard. They are putting together a work plan. They are actually going to be holding a workshop in May, and they are beginning to co-ordinate the knowledge, the scientific knowledge, around the lake that currently exists. The question of funding is roughly \$125,000 annually, so it's in the ballpark of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board funding.

Mrs. Stefanson: So have there been ongoing meetings then over the last while? Has there been a plan that they have developed, and would it be possible to see a copy of that plan?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, they have been meetings. They're in the process of developing a work plan.

Mrs. Stefanson: When does the minister expect that a plan will come out? I mean, this was, I guess, started up back, you know, February of last year, and just sort of—is there a deadline or anything that they're supposed to come out with a plan?

Ms. Melnick: I think one of the purposes of the workshop in May is to put together more pieces of that plan as they put together the body of scientific knowledge. They have identified areas where more scientific knowledge is needed. It is certainly my understanding that a plan will be presented to myself by early fall.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that.

I just wanted to go back to Lake Winnipeg for a few moments. With respect to the science and the data that is being gathered, specifically in the area of blue-green algae, for how many years, or how often is it tested? Is it done on a sort of a weekly basis throughout the summer months? Is it also done in the winter months as well or is it seasonal?

Ms. Melnick: We, again, work with the research consortium on the *Namao*. So there are three annual cruises that focus specifically on going out on the lake. They are June, August, late September—early October, depending on the weather. There is continual monitoring of the beaches from Victoria Day to Labour Day, and whenever there would be a sense that there would be a bloom happening or developing, we would respond to that. The monitoring is, again, at various levels. Again, it's kind of a complex issue to look at, various levels.

There is co-ordination through the department. It does take place in areas particularly where there is high usage of the beaches, say around the Gimli area, around the Grand Beach area, but, certainly, all the beaches that are used are monitored.

* (16:10)

It's kind of a neat program actually, the Clean Beaches Program, because it provides work experience for young Manitobans. It has certainly a very strong scientific component and there are also postings at beaches that are updated according to what is found in the water and around on the sands on the beach. So, again, kind of a complex response, I know, because the study is quite complex.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there any year-over-year analysis done on the algae blooms on the lake and could I get a copy of that, if there is that information?

Ms. Melnick: The year-over-year we contribute to, the University of Manitoba has it as far back as, we believe, the mid-'80s. So that might be a source for you to go to and, of course, DFO is involved in that.

We are preparing for later this year a state-of-the-lake report as was part of the commitment under the announcement of the second Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board. So that would come out under the board.

Mrs. Stefanson: Does the minister have that information, though, from the board and from the university? I was just—

Ms. Melnick: They haven't prepared the state-of-the-lake report yet. Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, that will be their report. It's part of their new mandate.

Mrs. Stefanson: When does that report come out?

Ms. Melnick: I believe it will be later this year. I haven't been given a date for it, but I certainly will be getting a report and it will be a public report. It'll be a public reporting. It'll probably be their—it won't be my report. It'll be their report.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is this the first year that this report is coming out?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, it is. When I received the final report of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board in March of last year, I created a new board and gave it an expanded mandate. One of the pieces of the expanded mandate is state-of-the-lake reports through that board.

Mrs. Stefanson: What are the criteria used for the state of the lake? Is it specific? Will it be broken down specifically into algae blooms, other minerals or you'd mentioned there are a number of things used for criteria in examining the health of the lake? Will there be specific breakdowns with respect to those individual areas within this report?

Ms. Melnick: Again, it will be the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board's report so they will determine what will be included and what the format will be. I feel quite confident stating that the areas that you've talked about, algal blooms, et cetera, will certainly form an important part of that report.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just wanted to ask because I have asked this in other government departments and I know I will be going to the Estimates for Intergovernmental Affairs to ask there as well. Is there any money coming from your government department with respect to the upgrade of the wastewater treatment facilities in the city of Winnipeg?

Ms. Melnick: No, there's not.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister could let us know, give us an update on boil-water orders in Manitoba, how many there are right now and how that would compare to the same time last year with respect to those—you know, whether or not they're going up or down or if there are various times of year that are worse than others.

Ms. Melnick: Since 1999, there have been some 89 advisories rescinded. Currently, there are 59 advisories: 34 surface-water sources and 25 ground-water sources. They have pretty much stabilized. Some of them are longstanding in areas where there are campgrounds, et cetera, where folks have—local communities have determined they would rather bring in their own water than invest in a system, and that would be the choice of the community.

In other areas where there are concerns, we bring forward advisories and work with communities to rescind them.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can the minister indicate in those areas that do have boil-water orders right now what the source contaminants are? Are they sort of human, livestock, et cetera?

Ms. Melnick: There are boiled-water advisories in most areas rather than orders, so there's an advisory, yes. The majority of them which are long-standing are biological contaminants which, of course, folks are made aware of. There could be inadequate

treatment standards according to today's standards, so, at one time, those standards were fine but with the work we've been doing around treatment standards, they do need to come up to speed. Local communities can decide how they would like to come up to speed. They can go to the Water Services Board, for example, and make application there. The department does work with individual communities, depending on how they'd like to move forward. There's no boiled-water advisory that is specific to any livestock contaminant. I think that was part of your question, yes?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just want to move on at this point in time. We've heard from a number of conservation districts with respect to the funding changes that are being expected over the next little while and, you know, under the Expected Results for this division within the Estimates book, it states that there will be, and I quote: An active and effective conservation districts program in Manitoba that provides watershed-based planning and programs.

* (16:20)

Earlier this winter, the government began circulating the Conservation Districts' *Framework for the Future Discussion Document*. I note with interest that on page 2 of the framework document it states, and I quote, "The current expectation that Manitoba should provide three times the funds CDs raise with annual levies is no longer sustainable." To me, this appears to sort of foreshadow what could potentially be a cut in provincial funding to conservation districts at a time when a number of the CDs in Manitoba are expanding, and at the same time the provincial government is expecting conservation districts to take on more responsibilities.

I'm wondering if the minister can provide assurances today that the government is not going to ask conservation districts to take on considerably more responsibilities without an accompanying funding commitment with those responsibilities.

Ms. Melnick: Well, I think we're engaged in a very interesting and productive process with the conservation districts. I would like to thank the MCDA and the CDs for all the work that they've done and all the valuable vision that they have put forward in their local areas and throughout this process.

The CD program was, of course, introduced under the Schreyer government in 1972, and this is

the first review that has happened since that time. So I think it's well time and I think we're looking for a lot of input. And so I was very pleased to announce this year that funding has risen since 1999 by 107 percent. In 1999 the funding was 2.58 million; this year's budget which, unfortunately, was voted against by members opposite, is 5.35 million. There has been a 90 percent increase in municipalities joining up to be partners in the CD program. In 1999 there were 78 municipalities; today we have 148, and I'd like to thank the pioneers for the work that they've done and certainly welcome in the new municipalities.

CDs have doubled in number since 1999, and we released this document in December at the MCDA annual convention, which I've been fortunate enough to get out to every year that I've been Minister of Water Stewardship. It was an extremely good convention with participation from, I think, close to 700 or 800 participants, so that shows you the kind of commitment these folks have to water and land in our province.

Over 450 stakeholders participated in over two and a half months of discussion. MCDA was there; the AMM executive was there; municipal councils were there at regional meetings in Brandon, Dauphin, and Winnipeg; 16 CD boards were there; PFRA was there; Ducks Unlimited; Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation; Manitoba Wildlands; Eco-Network; Mixedwood Forest Society; Tobacco Creek Model Watershed; members of the public; all commenting and all putting forward their vision and their thoughts. It is really essential that we continue this program and continue to build this program, and I want to assure folks that I will take the time as minister to get it right. So we're not setting an end date. We have a good agreement with MCDA and AMM as to move forward on our next steps and we're working with them on that.

The member has asked about assurances about funding. Well, I think our record speaks for itself—a 107 percent increase since 1999. What I'll perhaps do is remind the member of the letter that I sent out to her on January 25, 2008, and I'll just table this document in case the member never received it or forgets receiving it. The key line in this, I really think is—and this letter also went out to MCDA and AMM—the key line in this is: The formula that is ultimately implemented will be phased in so as to ensure that the conservation district does not experience a cut in funding.

I think it's very important that this be recognized. It is being recognized by MCDA and AMM, and I hope members opposite will recognize it. I'll just say, again, the conservation district does not experience a cut in funding. I think there was a bit of fearmongering going on throughout the province by members opposite. I think there was an ability to throw what needs to be a very positive and progressive and achievement-oriented process into a bit of a state of upheaval. I'm glad to see that people are coming to the table and having very good and fruitful discussion. I know that we'll take the time to get it right, and in the end we will continue to have a strong Conservation Districts Association and conservation districts movement here in the province of Manitoba and that we will all be very much focussed on the watershed basis, which, I think, is quite logical. Again, I'd like to compliment MCDA and AMM for their recognizing that this is, in fact, the way to go.

So we have now I believe it's 13 watershed management plans on the go here in the province, which is 10 conservation districts involved in. I'd like to welcome to the table Rhonda McDougal, our director of Planning and Co-ordination. It's under her good leadership that we've seen a lot of increase in the conservation districts.

Again, I just want to say that the work that is being done on a watershed basis here in Manitoba is a model that we've seen in other areas that works very well and congratulate all the members for the good work that they have done and thank them very much for their input in this very important process.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's very important at this time that we correct the record here with respect to any kind of fearmongering, et cetera, out there.

The fact of the matter is that if the minister had been properly listening to AMM, as well as many of the conservation districts, then she would know full well that it's not us that are out there fearmongering or saying anything; it's us actually listening to the communities out there who have serious issues when it comes to the conservation districts and especially the funding. They felt very strongly that this was an inappropriate way to deal with the situation. I recall being there, as well, at the convention in Brandon, and the conservation districts were very concerned about this sort of top-down, heavy-handed approach to the way that this funding framework agreement came out.

I would suggest, very strongly, that the minister listen to these communities. AMM came forward to us. A number of conservation districts were very concerned about this. They were mostly concerned about the lack of consultation on the part of this minister.

So any kind of fearmongering that's happening out there is certainly not coming from us. It's a reality out there. People are very concerned about the funding of these conservation districts. We are very concerned about the funding of these conservation districts. We believe they're a very important part of Manitoba in terms of being able to take on various initiatives with respect to drainage issues, and so on, within the province of Manitoba. There has been a significant amount of increases in terms of what is expected of the conservation districts. Quite frankly, I don't really have a problem with that. I think it's wonderful. I think the more responsibility that's given to the conservation districts is a good thing because they are the ones that know what the issues are in their local communities. So we don't have a problem with that.

What we do have a problem with, though, is a minister that comes out and states that we're going to do all these things to clean up Lake Winnipeg, but she doesn't put her money where her mouth is. Quite frankly, what's happening is that these conservation districts, AMM, all they want to know is how are they expected to deliver real results, because, again, conservation districts, our party, AMM, all that Manitobans are concerned with is actually getting real results when it comes to cleaning up Lake Winnipeg.

It seems that the member opposite, the minister, her government, all they're concerned about is getting a headline in a newspaper saying that they're going forward with changing funding, et cetera, et cetera, that this is their idea of how they're going to clean up Lake Winnipeg. It's been almost nine years. We've seen no real results that have come out. I find it, actually, quite frankly deplorable that the minister would accuse us of any kind of fearmongering.

* (16:30)

I suggest strongly that she get out into the communities and talk to people about this. Talk to AMM. *[interjection]* Well, they're still coming to us on a regular basis. They're very concerned about how this report is going to come about. They were concerned about the lack of consultation in the first place.

My question for the minister is: Given the lack of consultation at the beginning, how can the conservation districts really believe that they have a say when this government has had this top-down, heavy-handed approach to dealing with environmental issues in this province?

Ms. Melnick: I see I've hit a nerve.

I think again we'll go back to the letter of January 25 when there was written confirmation that no conservation district would experience a cut in funding. Still, members from the party opposite sent out all sorts of information. I know letters appeared in the newspaper, et cetera. Anyway, I think we've all got this in writing, and there was a very good consultation process for round one. We'll continue to move forward in the consultation, continue to work with our partners.

On the topic of what we've done around Lake Winnipeg, comments are really interesting from the critic, considering they're the party that would remove all the water regs in the province. They have a leader who stands by that.

When we look at the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board's final report, the Province had taken action on or completed 94 percent of the report's recommendation.

In the 2008 budget, we announced resources for enhanced monitoring and inspection septic systems, particularly in the Capital Region north of Winnipeg and in cottage country. We are restricting the development of facilities such as sewage treatment plants and lagoons, manure storage facilities and septic fields in environmentally sensitive areas. We were the first in North America to pass The Manitoba Water Protection Act, the water protection areas. It's the only such regulation of its kind in North America where every single waterway will be protected through a water protection area, particularly highly sensitive areas of water which are used for drinking. Lakes will see a 19 metre buffer—lakes will see a 30 metre buffer. Rivers will see a 15 metre buffer. There will be a buffer along every waterway in Manitoba as of January 1, 2009.

We were the first legislation of its kind, second in North America, only to the state of Minnesota, who we look at as a leader in area of water conservation and water quality and cleaning up the waterways, to bring in lawn fertilizer restrictions. This will be enforced in January 2009.

We have new waste-water treatment standards. Again, members opposite don't agree; they think we should only go for phosphorus and leave the nitrogen there.

The question to members opposite is: Why should the people of Winnipeg have lesser treatment than the people in urban areas around western Canada?

There is a higher Environmental Act fines and more inspectors. I know they refer to the enforcement officers as the water police around drainage. Maybe they'll have a similar discussion around these inspectors too.

We were the first in Canada to introduce restrictions on phosphates and dishwasher detergents. We were very pleased to see Québec and the federal government following our lead. Again, I thank John Baird, the federal Minister of Environment for his good work there.

We've committed \$385 million for waste-water upgrades, \$235 million for Winnipeg, \$150 million for rural areas. Together with matching contributions from the federal and municipal governments, this will be a billion dollar clean-up plan for Lake Winnipeg.

We have new regional moratoriums. The member got up in the House just today and challenged the moratoriums and thereby challenged the future of Lake Winnipeg. Our government is the first government to invest significant dollars in science research which we just talked about for Lake Winnipeg. This, of course, includes funding the *Namao*.

We've worked in other areas as well, such as, for example, establishing the first Department of Water Stewardship in Manitoba and, in fact, in Canada. We're still the only one in Canada. I think that's an important statement of the importance that this government puts on water.

We brought in The Drinking Water Safety Act and reinstated a subsidy for well-water tests. We opened an Office of Drinking Water. We have 14 new staff in there. During the 1990s there was one person throughout the whole province. We brought in The Water Protection Act, and I went through some of the elements within The Water Protection Act. We've increased flood-fighting resources across Manitoba with new pumps, better forecasting equipment, diking and greater Amphibex ice-breaking resources to help prevent ice jams.

We have fought against the Devils Lake diversion in North Dakota. I don't know if the member opposite was here for her colleague's comments from Emerson last Friday. They were quite frightful comments, actually, where he was actually taking the position of North Dakota, which, I think, is not appropriate for a member of this House. Maybe that's why we are on the government side of the House and members opposite are on the other side of the House. For the good of Manitoba, I hope it remains that way for quite a while.

So those are just a few things that we've done since 1999, and I encourage the members opposite to stay tuned because we are not a government who will remove water regs across the province. We are a government who will move forward in co-operation with MCDA, individual CDs, individual foundations, AMM and folks in the southern basin. I've worked very well with the mayors and reeves in the southern basin of Lake Winnipeg. We will continue to work with all Manitobans so that we will ensure that there is plentiful water, that there is good water for all the generations to come, and I also encourage members to stay tuned because we will be rolling out a water conservation plan as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, members on our side of the House like to focus on real results when it comes to what we're getting in terms of how our lake is doing and how waterways are doing, et cetera.

There's a big difference between members opposite and ourselves in that they like to focus on inputs. We like to focus on outputs. Inputs are all about spending more and more money, and this is how much money we are putting into this project. This is how much money we are putting into this project. It's not about how much money goes into what project. It's not about how many new pieces of legislation that you want to bring in. It's been eight and a half years, and the lake is getting worse off than it was when you first came into power. Those are the real things that are happening out there. So it drives me absolutely crazy when members opposite sit and talk about how much more money they are putting into this. This is all about a spend more, get less government. It's absolutely ridiculous. I wish they would start focussing on real results out there, and then maybe we would actually be able to get somewhere.

I want to go back to the conservation district funding and ask the minister when we can expect to

have a final document in place so that conservation districts will know what they're up against.

Ms. Melnick: It's interesting. Ten minutes ago the member was saying, you're not spending enough on CDs. So I guess it's spend, don't spend, spend, don't spend. We believe, and we know for a fact, that to show the results—*[interjection]* If the member has a question, maybe she can wait. I'd like to answer her first one and then I'll get to her next one.

We believe that not only spending the amount that we need to spend but also building the partnerships that we need to build is how we will see success. Again, even the member's colleague in Ottawa is starting to see the wisdom of the work that we're doing here in Manitoba, and I applaud the federal Minister of Environment for looking at the lead that Manitoba is taking and for really working with us on that. I would hope to see that sort of co-operation continue at the federal level.

We've also seen unprecedented spending on Lake Winnipeg by the federal government, again following this government's lead on knowing we have to invest in scientific research, knowing that it's best to invest in local people who know what should be happening in their local communities, which is why we've increased funding in the conservation districts by over 107 percent.

Now, this is quite different than what happened in the 1990s, and I know members opposite don't really want to talk about the 1990s. In fact, most Manitobans want to forget about the 1990s, and I don't blame them. But there is a record and we do have to look at the record. We have to look if we want real results. We have to look at how are we going to get there. We will get there through co-operation. We will get there through working with front-line people. We will get there through partnering with the scientific community. We will get there by looking at what other jurisdictions such as Minnesota are doing.

* (16:40)

All of this takes money. It is a responsible spending of the money. It is money that does have to be spent to bring around the results that we know that we need. It's taken 30 to 40 years to get here. There's not going to be a quick fix overnight, but, in doing it right and in leading by example, we will be successful.

I think it's also important to know that some of our announcements, particularly the lawn fertilizer

announcement, was picked up in the U.K. as a model to use and I feel very proud of having announced that as well as the other announcements. Again, I say to members opposite, stay tuned. There's more to come.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the member talked about spending money wisely, and we believe that the best way to spend money in this area would be on the conservation districts because they're actually able to deliver the services in a much more efficient and effective way than this government will ever be able to do it. So they should be funding those types, conservation districts more. That's the way we can get more for our money which is exactly—it's all about managing a system and getting the best in the way of results.

So I hope that the minister will take that under advisement and will go and make sure that the conservation districts are appropriately funded for the offloading that is taking place with respect to increasing the number of areas that the conservation districts will be responsible for. So I hope she does take that advice and does, in fact, increase the funding to the conservation districts because they, again, will deliver the services much more efficiently and effectively than this government will.

The minister keeps talking about this 107 percent increase to the conservation districts. I wonder if she can explain to me—she says that the conservation districts have doubled since 1999. So, in terms of each conservation district, can you honestly say there's been 107 percent increase to the funding for each conservation district?

Ms. Melnick: Now, the member is saying spend more. So I guess we've gone another 10 minutes. So I guess in 10 minutes, it'll be spend less.

Again, a rise in funding of 107 percent from 1999, \$2.58 million to \$5.35 million in this budget and by the way, the member opposite has voted against every single one of these increases to the conservation districts. The funding has increased accordingly. No conservation district has ever experienced a cut under this government unlike, I think, if we look back in the '90s, there were cuts to the program. Also, we have increased the number, again 90 percent more municipalities are partners than were in previous to September 21, 1999.

Again, the member continues to fearmonger, continues to put that tempest in the teapot around funding. She just has to look at the numbers. She just has to look at the record. We're working with the

CDs. We're working with AMM. We're working with MCDA. They are recognizing that there have been increases. They are recognizing that this is an important process to go through, and I would encourage the member opposite instead of trying to fearmonger and get everybody all worked up, that there be real focus on how do we continue to grow the program. Where do we focus?

This is a government that listens very much to the people on the front line, and we are at the start of a process. The length of the process will be determined by MCDA, by AMM, by member CDs. We are taking the time to get it right because we really believe that the conservation districts are extremely important partners which is why we've increased them in number, which is why the municipalities have more than doubled and which is why funding has increased by over 100 percent.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, what's happened is that all the new funding is going towards setting up the new conservation districts, so none of the other conservation districts have had any kind of increase at all in their funding, or if it has been, it's been minimal. Certainly, their responsibilities are increasing, and they need to have the funding flow to them in order to be able to deliver the services that we need to be delivered within our province. So I caution the member from throwing numbers out like, they've increased 107 percent. That money has just gone towards setting up new conservation districts, and I think it's very misleading.

I do want to move on, however, because I know we're getting limited in time here. The Manitoba Ombudsman just came out with a report on licencing and enforcement practices of Manitoba Water Stewardship. There were a number of recommendations, I believe, 15 of them within the report. The minister's response, I believe, stated that some of these have been updated; some of these recommendations have already been taken; some have not. I'm wondering if the minister could indicate for this House, does she plan on accepting all 15 recommendations and, if so, of those 15, which ones have not yet been implemented?

Ms. Melnick: I just want to clarify that all CDs have increased funding, so the record is not as the member has stated, but, as the record shows, they have all received increases of funding.

On the drainage report, I would like to very much thank the Ombudsman for the very good work

that they did. We are very appreciative of the report that has come out.

On the question of the recommendations, I'll actually read from the Ombudsman's own release which was released on May 1, 2008—I believe that was last Friday—the department has accepted all 15 recommendations made by the Ombudsman. Where there were areas—I'm paraphrasing here—that we need to work on and having accepted the recommendations, we agree. At the same time, Hamilton, who is the Ombudsman, observed that the department has made specific recent improvements, including increased staff resources over the last two fiscal years, improvements made to the department's enforcement powers and new policies drafted that will be implemented immediately.

This is a quote from the Ombudsman: The government must be commended for providing the department with an unprecedented infusion of resources with which to address significant and long-standing problems.

She also notes that these problems go back to the mid-'80s in drainage and licencing enforcement. So we have taken action on the recommendations.

I don't know if the member wants me to go through each of the 15 recommendations, one by one.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think, just in general, I was wondering, of the 15, which ones will be the priorities. You said you're going to cover off all 15 of them, but which ones have not yet been implemented?

Ms. Melnick: We put out our news release in response to this report last week. I'm assuming that the member hasn't had a chance to read it, so I'll just read part of it into the record here.

I accepted all of the recommendations and thanked the Ombudsman for the work. Attached to that was a two-page backgrounder responding directly to all the recommendations, such as amending The Water Rights Act in 2005, so an appeal of a ministerial order to remove illegal water-control work does result in a stay of the order, pending appeal; amending the act further in 2006 to improve its enforceability, creating a new water control works and drainage licencing section, and more than doubling the number of staff positions in this section with an additional 14 new positions. These are the water resource officers that members opposite have referred to as the water police on a

number of occasions; establishing new positions in the Water Control Systems, Management branch to provide technical engineering assistance to conservation districts, municipalities and private landowners; establishing additional Manitoba Water Stewardship offices in Arborg, Stonewall, Shoal Lake, Swan River, Neepawa, Deloraine, Ste. Anne, St. Laurent, all staffed by water resource officers; strengthening senior management capacity with the addition of the new position of director, regulatory services; amending a regulation under The Summary Convictions Act in March 2008 to introduce set fines for offences under The Water Rights Act—now these folks can issue tickets immediately—upgrading equipment and software to facilitate licencing and enforcement activities; entering data on licence applications, complaints, enforcement activities and to the database to speed tracking performance measurement and reporting; expanding the Whitemud licensing model to—and these are conservation districts—Cooks Creek and Pembina Valley; assigning all water resource officers to a conservation district where one exists to further develop local knowledge and relationships; working to inform municipalities, conservation districts, agricultural producers and environmental groups of changes to the department's organization structure and goals through presentations to the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association annual convention.

* (16:50)

Areas that we are working on: developing a policy that clarifies how technical information required of drainage license applicants will be obtained and who is responsible for the cost; eliminating the existing drain maintenance exemption policy; developing a new definition of maintenance for minor water-control works and establishing a streamlined licensing process to authorize these activities, subject to best management practices; encouraging and supporting conservation districts to set up a licensing process similar to the Whitemud model; reviewing position descriptions to ensure they clearly distinguish between advisory and regulatory functions; reviewing The Water Rights Act and advancing amendments as necessary to further strengthen compliance and enforcement; refining plans to address the backlog in licensing enforcement complaint investigation and compliance checks; expanding an existing database to cover all of southern and central Manitoba, and implementing a

process to monitor progress toward addressing the backlog; continuing to assess staff levels and reassigning resources to most efficiently and effectively administer the licensing; continuing the development of an environmentally friendly drainage manual, planned to be released later this year; increasing the effort to inform municipalities, conservation districts, agricultural producers and environmental groups of program changes; releasing interim licensing and enforcement policy documents developed in consultation with representatives from conservation districts, municipalities, agriculture producers and environmental agencies, and reviewing these policies in light of the Ombudsman's reports and other comments.

So that was released on May 1. If the member doesn't have a copy, I'd be happy to provide a copy for her.

That was our response to the report and, again, the Ombudsman said, and I quote, on page 7: I am satisfied that the department has initiated action intended to address all issues of concern that have been identified.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now move to resolutions.

Resolution 25.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,271,500 for Water Stewardship, Ecological Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,384,900 for Water Stewardship, Regulatory and Operational Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,834,500 for Water Stewardship, Water Stewardship Initiatives, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$325,500 for Water Stewardship, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Consideration of the Minister's Salary. Last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 25.1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 25.1.

At this point, we request the minister's staff to leave the table for the consideration of this last item, and the floor is open for questions.

Thank you. Seeing no questions.

Resolution 25.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,544,400 for Water Stewardship, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Water Stewardship.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply will commence tomorrow.

Is it the will of the committee to call it 5 o'clock?
[Agreed]

The time now being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

* (15:20)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 139 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I think last time we were in Estimates, at the last session, I was asking for some information in regard to statistics on the number of FTEs across the sections of Workplace Safety and Health, Occupational Health, Mines Inspection and Worker Advisor Office.

I have got that information. I want to draw some attention here—first of all, I'm going to ask if the minister's staff are still able to provide that information.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes, we have information for the Labour and Immigration critic. We have pulled together information from the 1989-90 fiscal year to 2007-2008 fiscal year. We have the number of FTEs in the Workplace Safety and Health division over those years, the Worker Advisor Office and the totals. We have the WCB revenue. We have the number of inspections. We have the number of improvement orders and we have the corresponding injury rates for those years. We'd be more than happy to provide three copies to the member.

Mrs. Taillieu: I would appreciate those copies, thank you very much. I want to ask some questions in regard to—when I look at the comparisons from the estimate of expenditures from 1999-2000 and up until the present, this year's expenditures of '06—[interjection]—sorry, '08-09, I notice that the workplace safety and health officers have gone from 49 FTEs to 72.5 FTEs. At the same time, the Labour Management Services FTEs in 1999 were 24 FTEs, and in 2008-09 the Labour Programs, Management Services dropped to 17.25 FTEs. I'm wondering if there's a correlation between the number of increased FTEs in Workplace Safety and Health funded by the Workers Compensation Board and the drop, the concurrent drop, in the FTEs under the Labour Programs, Management Services, within the department.

Ms. Allan: The short answer is no. The long answer is the figures that the MLA is talking about reflects the government's efforts—a government-wide effort—that we made in regard to efficiencies in financial administration services and IT services. What happens now is departments are clustered with staff and the best way to explain it is Ken Taylor, who is our financial officer. He provides services as well to several other departments.

Mrs. Taillieu: I want some more clarification on that because I'm asking the question—there's an increase of just about 23 and a half FTEs in Workplace Safety and Health, and there's a decrease of not quite seven concurrently in Labour Management Services.

Can the minister confirm, were there any of the people that were employed in the Labour Programs, Management Services—are any of those same people moved into positions in Workplace Safety and Health?

Ms. Allan: No.

Mrs. Taillieu: We've already gone over this portion of—you know, with the whole Department of Labour, the number of FTEs around the 300 mark, and if you take out the Status of Women and Immigration, then the total employees in Labour are 215.25 and 97.5 of those are Workplace Safety and Health, Occupational Health—Mines, and a Worker Advisor, which pretty much is almost half of the employees in the Department of Labour paid for by the Workers Compensation Board. I'm wondering what kind of agreements are signed every year in this regard.

* (15:30)

Ms. Allan: The provisions for the transfer of funds from the WCB to the Department of Labour and Immigration are enshrined in the WCB act. Since we've come into power, we have had the opportunity to work much closer with the WCB in regard to our collective efforts, in regard to injury reduction and in regard to matters that affect both employers and workers here in the province of Manitoba.

We have discussions with them. I have meetings with the chair of the board and the executive director of the board several times a year. My deputy minister has gone over and met with the board. It is a tripartite board; it's a unique board and it has employer, worker and special interest reps on the board. In fact, the board has actually endorsed our strategy in regard to our enforcement initiatives, in regard to getting injuries down and endorsed hiring and focussing on more safety and health officers.

So there is a close relationship in regard to our strategic direction. As I said in committee on Friday morning, we now have a joint injury and illness prevention strategy. It's called SAFE Work in every province. It's a document that outlines in writing our strategy in co-operation and in consultation with the WCB.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chairperson, I'm wondering that each time the number of employees employed in the Department of Health and paid for through employer premiums paid to Workers Compensation, if every time there's an increase in those numbers, whether there's a yearly agreement to do so. Is this something that's recommended by the Workers Compensation Board, or is it something that's asked for by her department?

Ms. Allan: It is a dialogue.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then I'm assuming there's no such agreement in place. It's a just a conversation, verbal.

So there's no agreement with Workers Compensation Board.

Does the minister get an agreement from the Workers Compensation Board for them to actually pay for more employees every year, or is that just an arbitrary decision that she makes and tells them that they will be paying more this year?

Ms. Allan: No, it's a dialogue with them, and we are respectful in regard to that conversation. I don't direct anybody to do anything.

Mrs. Taillieu: Certainly, I would think that the Workers Compensation Board would have to have some kind of agreement in place, so that it could be recorded in their ledgers as to where the money's going and for what purpose. I'm wondering—we talk about just verbal agreements. We talked about issues around the Workers Compensation Board and hiring ChangeMakers as an advertising firm. They just had a verbal agreement with Viewpoints to second the work or sub the work to them, whereas that contravened their actual request for tender, Madam Chairperson.

I would think that the Workers Compensation Board would like to have on record some kind of agreement that they have with the Department of Labour so that the Department of Labour cannot just tell the Workers Compensation Board, we're going to hire so many people and you're going to pay for it.

Ms. Allan: The dialogue with the Workers Compensation Board staff happens every year in regard to how we're going to proceed in regard to our prevention initiatives. All of the arrangement is documented in board minutes because it's critical that the board basically approves the transfer of funds to the Department of Labour and Immigration. My understanding, in regard to the other matter that the MLA is raising, is in regard to the services provided to the WCB. There are policies in place in regard to the tendering of contracts. This is not something that's tendered. This is something that is worked out with the WCB board of directors and they, actually, in their board meetings, approve our budget. So we feel it's transparent and accountable.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is it a board decision, then, to pay for more workplace safety and health officers?

Ms. Allan: Yes.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is the minister saying that when the Workers Compensation Board sets out, they don't set out requests for proposals—it's not a competitive

process when they select advertising agencies? Is that what she said?

Ms. Allan: No. What I said to the MLA was that there were many, many conversations in regard to RFP process, and I think the CEO, Doug Sexsmith, and Alice Sayant answered those questions at the board level in the committee.

Mrs. Taillieu: I just wanted to go back a little bit to, again, on the Workplace Safety and Health. We know that the people working in Workplace Safety and Health do a very good job; certainly want to recognize them for that. But I'm wondering—the Auditor General's report was quite critical of the lack of enforcement and the minister herself said that that was one of the prime areas that needed to be addressed in combatting workplace injury and that was enforcement.

I wonder if the minister can say after fines began to be levied in 2007, was that before or after accidents happened in the workplace. Were those fines levied before or after workplace injuries occurred?

Ms. Allan: Well, there have always been injuries in the workplace, so I'm not sure I understand the MLA's question.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, let me state it again then. After the Auditor General's critical report came out, there were no fines levied until that point and then in 2007, the Workplace Safety and Health division did levy some fines. My question is quite clear. Was the fine levelled to an individual workplace before or after there was a critical injury incident—I won't say critical but I'll say injury—in that particular workplace? When an injury occurred in a workplace, was there a fine levied after the incident occurred?

Ms. Allan: I'm going to try to walk through the process once again for the MLA for Morris in regard to how our workplace safety and health officers enforce around workplace injuries.

* (15:40)

The first thing that we do is inspections. That's their jobs; they go out to workplaces and they inspect, and, if they find that there is a problem in regard to someone doing something that could cause an injury, they write an improvement order. They have to write the improvement order. They can't just go straight to the fine and write a fine. They have to write an improvement order.

On Friday after we left committee, on Friday evening when I was going home at the end of my day, I was listening to the radio and I heard what happened on Main Street, with the demolition of the building on Main Street. Well, that was a very, very serious situation, so the workplace safety and health officer who was inspecting did not go straight to the improvement order, he went straight to a stop-work order because it was a serious, serious situation. Then what happens, if companies don't come into compliance, they're in non-compliance with the improvement order. Then there is an administrative penalty. Sometimes what happens is, depending on how serious the situation is, depending on the non-compliance of the incident, the matter can be referred to the Department of Justice and they can be prosecuted.

So the inspector just doesn't go in and immediately write a fine. It evolves after a practice, so I'm not exactly sure—we received the Auditor's report and we were very, very honest with what we saw as a problem in the Auditor's recommendation. We made a commitment to review our practices, and I have given the MLA for Morris the information in regard to the mid-penalties that we now have and the prosecutions that we now have, and I'm not exactly sure what more information she is looking for.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I'm looking for factual information, Madam Chair, always, and I hope that the minister will provide factual information. I'm simply wanting to know whether action taken before accidents occur could have prevented those accidents in the workplace, rather than seeing an accident happen and then levy the fine, perhaps action taken ahead of time could have prevented some serious workplace injuries.

But I would like to ask the minister: in the 2005 report, the review of the Workers Compensation Board, can the minister tell me a number—which recommendation number says that there should be a forced expansion of Workers Compensation Board?

Ms. Allan: Well, I just want to go back to the MLA's previous statement in regard to what action is taken to prevent an injury, and that action would be the improvement order that is written by the safety and health inspector that goes in, they see a problem in the workplace, and they write an improvement order with the expectation that the employer will get into compliance with that improvement order, that it'll change the way that they're doing their business in a safer way so that they can prevent that injury. That's

what we believe is helping us in regard to getting our injury reductions down. Obviously, more workplace safety and health officers doing more inspections and having the ability to write more improvement orders will prevent injuries.

In regard to a recommendation in the report that says that we should enforce expansion of coverage, there is no recommendation in the report that says that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister say what information or studies or evidence that she has been provided with that show that coverage, that Workers Compensation Board coverage is a factor in job selection?

Ms. Allan: Well, we believe as a government, our philosophy is as a government that, in a tight labour market shortage right now, we believe that workers should receive some basic rights as workers. That's one reason why we've reviewed the Employment Standards Code. We've also reviewed the WCB and made a lot of changes in regard to the provision of services at the WCB and actually rolled back some very regressive stuff that was happening at the WCB.

We believe that it's a good thing for our province economically when workers are paid good wages, when there are good safety and health programs in place, where there is, you know, a good system, workers compensation system, that can respond to people that are in the system. I don't think that we're in a good economic situation in Manitoba. We're not in the mainstream at all when we have the lowest coverage of WCB of any jurisdiction in Canada. I made it very, very clear when we reviewed the WCB and we passed the legislation, we made it very, very clear that what we were going to do as a government was we were going to start with the cousins. I mean over and over and over again, we talked about inside window washers who were not covered and outside window washers that were.

I think the other thing that is important to talk about here is employers. Of the 70 percent of the employers that are covered by WCB—obviously, one of the industry sectors that is covered is manufacturing industry; all of the manufacturers are covered by WCB. I think that we've actually had employers talk to us and say that they believe that it would level the playing field if there were more employers involved in the WCB because basically what it would do is it would lower the administrative costs for all of the employers in our province if there

were more employers involved in the coverage at WCB.

Mrs. Taillieu: I know the minister believes this, but I'm asking for some kind of evidence in a study that actually confirms what she's saying because we've been unable to find any such thing. I think we all agree that everybody that has a job has basic rights, and I think that we have a pretty good wage system here in Manitoba because, let's face it, we are in an economy that the workers are pretty much in demand and can pretty much get the wages that they desire because they're in demand. I also know that there are many, many industries in this province that have insurance policies in place and have had insurance policies in place for a long, long time. They're very low-risk-for-injury workplaces. They have submitted briefs to the Workers Compensation Board saying they do not want to be covered by the Workers Compensation Board. That's not anything to do in a negative way with the Workers Compensation Board; it's simply saying they already have insurance policies in place that they believe—and there are 24/7 policies that are actually protecting their workers more than they would achieve under Workers Compensation.

Another one of the recommendations in the report was that there be a vigorous attempt to get people to voluntarily join Workers Compensation Board. So I'm wondering if the minister can tell me what campaign the Workers Compensation Board undertook to voluntarily get people to opt in for coverage, and how many have opted in since January 1 of 2007?

* (15:50)

Ms. Allan: Well, the recommendation in the report is to expand coverage in three to five years. This is the second time we've consulted on the expansion of coverage. Actually, I don't know if the member's had an opportunity to read the document that was done by the WCB in regard to the expansion of coverage. It's an excellent document. On pages 6, 7 and 8, it outlines the benefits of belonging to the WCB system. It outlines the benefits that workers receive, what employers receive and the advantages of being involved in the Workers Compensation Board system. Obviously, one of the major advantages, and is the cornerstone of WCB legislation, is the protection from liability.

I just really want to comment in regard to industries that think that they have no risk. There is no such thing as an industry that has no risk.

Obviously, there are some industries that aren't as high a risk as some of the manufacturing sector, the construction sector, mines, agriculture. But one of the areas that WCB is really struggling with is the musculoskeletal injuries. They used to be 50 percent of all of the claims at WCB. They are now 62 percent. These kinds of claims are repetitive strain injury in nature. They're incidental injuries such as tripping and falling, coming in contact with hard surfaces or sharp objects. The ergonomics issues that are obvious: lifting, carrying, straining, repetitive strain, obviously occupational disease, exposure to airborne toxins, many of which are not known today but will be identified over time.

So I think it's important, when we look at a system and we want it to respond to the 21st century, that we look at this particular area, because it is a huge problem for us at WCB in regard to claims right now.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, not only have I read the report, I've spoken to some of the members that were on the committee that wrote that report, and they expressed their sincere, the sincere disrespect and disappointment that they have for the minister in cherry-picking some of the recommendations from that report and ignoring the others. .

I'm wondering if the minister will make public the consultative report from the Workers Compensation Board now that the consultation process is over on May 1, and she will get the results from Workers Compensation Board. Will she make those results public so that Manitobans can see for themselves whether this minister is forcing expansion or whether it's been specifically asked for and who asked for it?

Ms. Allan: Well, I just want to remind the member opposite that I'm so glad she's had an opportunity to speak to some people that are disappointed in how I proceeded with the legislation. I find it interesting that it was unanimous legislation, and it was voted on by your side of the House. I just wanted to remind her. I'm hoping that the people she talked to expressed their disappointment with her as well as with me.

Just in regard to the question about whether or not I will make the report public. Seeing as I haven't received anything, and I'm not exactly sure the nature of what the report is going to look like, I would like to have an opportunity to speak to the board about that prior to making any commitments about that.

Mrs. Taillieu: I wanted to go back to where we left off on Friday. I was starting to get into some questioning around fees charged for services. I'm wondering what kinds of fees are charged by the department under the mechanical and engineering coalition mediation of pay equity services—I'm sorry, mechanical and engineering. What kinds of fees are charged there and for what?

Ms. Allan: While my staff is looking for this information, I just want to say that I've received some information in regard to staying competitive in the labour market. Here's B.C.'s tourism industry offer, says that they offer employee benefits to stay competitive in the labour market; one of their benefits that they talk about is statutory benefits. They encourage their employers in that province to pay vacation pay, holidays and overtime, CPP, Employment Insurance and Workers Compensation premiums. So, obviously, there are other jurisdictions in Canada that believe that a healthy workers' compensation system is important to staying competitive in the labour market.

In regard to fees, the amusement ride, I'm the minister responsible for amusement rides. Some of the fees, for instance, are: the first inspection of a non-portable ride is \$40; and the first inspection of another ride is \$80; a re-inspection would be \$200; electrical inspections and/or approvals is for equipment inspection \$150 for the first item, \$50 for each similar item or \$140 per hour; electrician's examinations and licences are \$50, a renewal is \$30; power engineer's examinations and certificates, a certificate is \$50, a renewal is \$30; licences, exams and permits under The Gas and Oil Burner Act are set out in regs; elevator permits and initial permit range is from \$163 to \$675, a renewal is from \$110 to \$550, dependent on the type of elevator and the length of licence period; and the design registration for elevators, drawings and specifications range from \$75 to \$175 each.

Mrs. Taillieu: On page 78 of the Estimates book, under the Office of the Fire Commissioner, it says under Permits And Plan Revenue, "Permit revenue is projected to increase slightly from the 2007/08 fiscal year to the 2008/09 fiscal year. This is due to expected permit revenue for a large building project in 2008/09."

What is that project?

Ms. Allan: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is a special operating agency. So we would have to get that information for you.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, I submit that they are a special operating agency, but they are included in this Estimates book along with a lot of other figures. I would believe that, as a department under the direction of the Minister of Labour and Immigration, she would know this because they're talking about one large, single- building project, and it's expected to bring a lot of money into the department. I'm very, very surprised that she wouldn't know what project of this magnitude would be happening that would bring in this kind of money. I just find that extremely hard to believe.

I'd ask the minister, again, if she does not know what project this is.

* (16:00)

Ms. Allan: It's a building permit, obviously, and we will get that information for her.

Mrs. Taillieu: It's a building permit, and where is this building permit to be issued? And for what building?

Ms. Allan: Well, that's the information we're getting.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I'll just directly ask the question if this is for the Sobeys building in the R.M. of Headingley.

Ms. Allan: I don't know. We're getting the information for her.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the member tell me that when the Office of the Fire Commissioner does building inspections, what would be the largest amount that would be charged for a building inspection and how is the fee charged for building inspections?

Ms. Allan: All of that information we would be more than delighted to provide for the MLA in writing. We don't have that—we can get that information for her, but we don't have it available.

Mrs. Taillieu: I guess I'm a little disappointed that the minister comes to Estimates so unprepared. We're simply asking questions. We expect to get answers. We expect to get truthful answers and then we're getting stalled because the member doesn't want to put something on the record. She'll provide it in writing later, but she doesn't want it to go on the record. We know the tactics of this government and how they operate. We see it time and time again, so I'm quite disappointed actually.

Why is it that some municipalities are able to have their own building inspectors and some municipalities are not and they are covered by the

Province of Manitoba? Why is that? Why the discrepancies there?

Ms. Allan: There is a lot of liability that is transferred up from the special operating agency to individuals in the community. The regulation that—as the MLA knows because I have written her and the reeve for Headingley, Wilf Taillieu. We have written them and discussed with them the fact that the regulation that was passed by the previous government, there were no criteria that were applied. There was no documentation at that time so what we're doing right now is we're reviewing that, and we've been very, very clear with both the MLA for Morris, in writing, and the reeve from Headingley that this is something that we're having a look at.

I've received a letter from the reeve in Headingley and we're going to have the Office of the Fire Commissioner, the chief fire commissioner, sit down with him and explain to him what we're looking at. We will consult with him in regard to providing what we believe are criteria around this so that, you know, when—because at the end of the day we want to make sure that this is a system that works for everyone, and we need to provide some clarification around this regulation.

Mrs. Taillieu: Just in regard to building inspections, there must be a lot of building inspections that need to be done throughout the province and through the city.

I'm just wondering if these are ever subbed out to other building inspectors. Do the provincial building inspectors ever sub out to other inspectors?

Ms. Allan: The City of Winnipeg has their own inspectors. We are aware of that. We don't believe that we do any sub-contracting.

Just in regard to the review of the part 3 of the Manitoba Building Code, I just wanted to make sure the member knew that the Association of Manitoba Municipalities is aware of the work that we're doing and is supportive of it.

Mrs. Taillieu: I was just curious as to what steps a municipality would need to take once they have a building inspector who's been fully qualified and in fact has done inspections in past. What further steps would they need to take to have their own building inspector? Is the Province open to that?

Ms. Allan: As I said before, the matter is under review. All of those particular kinds of issues would be set out in the regulation.

Mrs. Taillieu: I have a question. It's in regard to people that run steam engines as a hobby. I raise this because I've been contacted by some people from the Agricultural Museum in Austin. It just so happens I'm from there. I'm just raising this question because they are having a lot of difficulty getting approvals for their boiler inspections for their antique equipment that they run at certain times of the year. It's a historical museum of old agricultural equipment. They seem to have run into a variety of inspections, and then, according to what they tell me, the rules change, then they have to proceed with other inspections, and it's costing them a lot of money.

I'm just wondering if the minister can't—if I provide her with the background here, whether she wouldn't mind having a look at something like this because it doesn't seem, I know there's safety involved and I totally understand that, and I would not want to put anybody at risk, but certainly there seems to be just a lack of co-operation here.

I'm wondering if I might provide this information to the minister, whether she would have a look at this and see if there's some way to streamline this process with these people at the Agricultural Museum in Austin.

Ms. Allan: No one has spoken to my office. I've never seen a letter that I can recall in regard to this particular matter, so, if the member would like to forward that to my office, we'd be more than happy to have a look at it and see what the situation is.

*(16:10)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Madam Chair, I thank the Member for Morris for allowing me a question or two.

Your department brought out some regulations in regard to the fire services. There are certainly a lot of changes there forthcoming and a lot of obviously very important safety issues that the department feels has to be addressed. But bringing forward those particular regulations has made life difficult for some of the smaller communities and the rural municipalities because they are now forced to replace equipment on a more regular basis, and those types of things. As you may be aware or may not be aware, in the fire services area, this equipment is very, very expensive, because it meets certain specifications and what-not, and it's a very, very expensive proposition to have a fire department operational and functional up to the current regulations.

I'm just wondering, in view of the regulations that the department has brought forward, and in view of the financial stress that various departments, in fact, pretty well all departments across the province are finding themselves in, is the Province looking at any type of financial assistance for those various departments and, in a lot of cases, the smaller departments that really don't have the financial capacity such as, maybe, the City of Winnipeg, or the City of Brandon to meet those particular regulations? So I'm just wondering what the minister has to comment on that particular situation.

Ms. Allan: Well, the Office of the Fire Commissioner works with the Manitoba Association of Fire Chiefs and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities in regard to the municipalities and the rural fire-fighting capacity. Our people are on the ground in rural Manitoba all the time and there's, I think, a real good rapport and dialogue with those two organizations and with the people on the ground throughout rural Manitoba, so you know, I think that—and I know that both of those organizations were supportive of the changes that we've made and I meet with both of the organizations from time to time, and so we'll continue to work with them as we increase safety all across the province and build capacity in our rural communities.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I appreciate the minister's comments and I'm all for safety as well. Obviously, safety is very important to us, and I think it's important that we work together with these municipal jurisdictions across the province. The complicating factor is when we get an onerous burden on the volunteers. What happens is, we just don't have the volunteers coming forward. And we've noticed this in the EMS services and we're starting to see the same sort of thing in the fire service, so it's a very important concern and it's probably going to become a bigger issue moving forward, so I want to bring this to the minister's attention.

Ms. Allan: Well, we had two firefighter captains die in Winnipeg last year, and we have people going into structures alone and I really think that we need to learn from some of the tragedies that we've had here in the province. In regard to the regulation that the MLA's talking about, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has had some discussion and some dialogue with some of the individuals in communities across Manitoba that are concerned about this regulation, and I think there are ways to—in regard to dealing with it, with the existing resources that are there. I certainly don't think, though, that we

would want—if someone died going into a structure on their own without a backup plan and without a personnel on the ground outside, I think we would—you know, I think you would have every right to be concerned about that, so we're trying to implement the new rules and, at the same time, make sure that people in the rural areas are able to deal with this reg.

We also have a mutual aid system here in Manitoba. We provide a financial grant to support that mutual aid training of \$70,000. So we're going to continue to work with our stakeholders as we move forward with this reg.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'd like to ask some questions now around immigration.

I notice on page 50 in the Estimates book, just in talking about the activity identification, that the Province is an active recruiter overseas, co-ordinates overseas promotion and recruitment missions. Does the minister know the number of recruiters that would—okay, let me phrase this properly. When it says co-ordinate overseas promotion and recruitment missions, how many recruiters does the province have that would be promoting overseas recruitment and going on missions for recruitment?

Ms. Allan: Well, there aren't official people that are called recruiters in our department. We rely on our staff department. We don't have people designated as recruiters, but what happens is our department makes contacts in other countries and quite often will organize trade fairs. That's what we've found is very, very successful, and that's what they have found really works well. It's accountable and transparent, and that's what we have decided really has enhanced our immigration strategy.

Mrs. Taillieu: I wonder if the minister can say how many private recruitment agencies there are in the province of Manitoba that would be actively recruiting overseas for people to come to Manitoba.

Ms. Allan: We don't keep track of that as a department. We certainly will have a better handle on that when we pass the legislation that we've introduced into the House where we'll be licensing all recruitment agencies here in Manitoba that are recruiting newcomers to Manitoba. So we will have a better handle on that when we have that legislation passed.

Mrs. Taillieu: When people are accepted into the Provincial Nominee Program, and we recognize that

as a very beneficial program to the province, very visionary I have to say, when the Filmon government introduced that in 1998, and the present government has built on it. But I'm wondering, when people come through the PNP program, what does it cost them?

Ms. Allan: There's no fee. There is just the federal processing cost and their travel costs. There's no application fee. We don't charge people.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is there a requirement for newcomers to have a particular amount of money that they would bring with them to Canada?

Ms. Allan: The federal government requires them to meet a low-income cutoff. The Provincial Nominee Program is a shared responsibility with the federal government, and our program is a bilateral agreement with the federal government, so the federal government does have some rules and some expectations. In regard to the individual Provincial Nominee Program, there's a low-income cutoff. The low-income cutoff is \$10,000 for the principal applicant and then \$2,000 per dependant, and it's an average. It's not a hard and firm number. There is some flexibility around that.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Taillieu: So, for example, then a family of four would be \$10,000 for one person and then \$2,000 for the spouse and \$2,000 for each child in the family of four—I'm just using this as an example—which, for \$16,000—now, what happens to that? Is that money that's just put up as needs to be proof of that money or is any of that money directed to the Province?

Ms. Allan: No. The applicant just has to show proof. There's no exchange of funds.

Mrs. Taillieu: If a person is coming through another stream, and if they're trying to start a business here in Manitoba, is there a requirement there for a dollar amount to be posted?

Ms. Allan: That's the business immigration program in the CTT department, and they have to have a net worth of \$75,000—[interjection]—deposit, I'm sorry, deposit of \$75,000 through the business immigration program.

I just have some new information for the MLA for Morris in regard to the building permit that she was curious about. It is not a Sobeys plant in Headingley; it is a biodiesel plant in Russell worth \$1 million.

Mrs. Taillieu: Just a point of clarification. Is that \$1 million in fees or a \$1-million building?

Ms. Allan: We believe it's the actual amount of the permit revenue.

Mrs. Taillieu: So the revenue from one building permit is \$1 million.

Ms. Allan: That's what we think. We're getting clarification.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just a little speechless because I'm assuming, and maybe I'm wrong, but if you charge \$1 million for a building permit, how do you arrive at \$1 million for one building permit? It just seems a little high. Is there a formula that's used?

Ms. Allan: Yes, there is a formula.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I guess I have to ask. What is the formula?

Ms. Allan: We'll get that information for the MLA.

Mrs. Taillieu: Does the minister, when she got that information provided to her, was there also information on the total cost of that building?

Ms. Allan: The building permit fees are: the first \$500,000 is 1 percent of the construction costs and anything over \$500,000 is 0.6 percent. The minimum fee is \$90. For a one- or two-family dwelling up to \$100,000 is 1 percent. Of anything over \$100,000 is 0.6 percent, and the minimum charge for a single-family home is \$60.

Mrs. Taillieu: For building permits fees range between \$60 and a million dollars. So, Madam Chair, what is worth a million dollars for one building permit that's worth 60 for another? I can certainly see why the minister does not want certain people to get that revenue. I mean, if the Province is getting a million dollars for doing one building inspection, they certainly would not be in the business of allowing people to hire their own building inspectors where they could do it in their own municipality. Is that correct?

Ms. Allan: Well, it's not one inspection. It depends on the size and the complexity of the structure and it is a formula; I will get information for the minister in regard to how long that formula's been in place, you know. But it depends exactly what the nature of that project is.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, I'm just going to go back to Immigration. We'll look forward for that information. I notice in the Estimates book there is a

co-operation with the Competitiveness, Training and Trade Department. I'm wondering if there's anybody in Competitiveness, Training and Trade that is actually paid for by the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Ms. Allan: Well, we actually have a joint initiative with the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade and it is the Labour Market Strategy for Immigrants. We have two staff that are seconded to the Department of CTT. That actually is part of our relationship, our partnership with the federal government with HRSDC. Minister Monte Solberg was in to town a couple of weeks ago and announced \$110 million over four years for a labour market strategy for immigrants to provide training and skill development for new immigrants. So that is an initiative that we work intersectorally with CTT and the federal government on.

Oh, excuse me. The actual secondment is the staff of CTT in the Department of Labour, sorry.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, just for clarification, first of all, \$110 million over four years from the federal government, that's great. What is the minister planning to spend the \$110 million on over four years? Is there a plan for that or is it just going into general revenues?

Ms. Allan: Well, it's actually not my money. It's the minister responsible for CTT's money and it's actually project related. It's funding to provide projects for, and it was signed off on by—the last time I checked, I think, Monte Solberg's a Tory—it was signed off on by Minister Andrew Swan and Minister Solberg. We can certainly get information for you on what the projects will be for that particular fund of money. It may be over five years, not four—oh, three, there we go. No, I think it's a four-year for the LMSI.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, there has been—I'm actually on page 54 of the Estimates book—and there has been a significant increase in the number of professional/technical employees within the Department of Immigration. Can the minister tell me what their duties are?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, there have been some new officers put in place to manage PNP applications. Then there have been more staff put in place to handle our settlement and language training services.

* (16:30)

Mrs. Taillieu: We've heard it from people that the settlement services in language training and child care have been sorely lacking, that people who come here and are in need of taking English courses to gain employment, or even to get into training opportunities, the lack of services in regard to child care have actually prohibited people from joining the workforce.

So I'm wondering how much money has been put into settlement services, and specifically where.

Ms. Allan: Well, our settlement services funding has grown tremendously over the last couple of years. We've been very fortunate that the federal government has been very, very supportive of an increase in funding for settlement services, because they understand that that is so critically important to newcomers being successful and fully participating in our economy.

We have contribution agreements with many of our industry partners in regard to the delivery of those settlement services. I don't know if there are too many to list here, but I could try. All of the money, it's an in and an out. Our settlement strategy has identified service gaps in regard to—we did a review of our settlement services about a year ago and we did some major consultation with community stakeholders, with immigrants and refugees, and community organizations and agencies. The money goes into—one of the most important areas that it has gone into is the increased pre-arrival information at key points in the immigration process to help newcomers settle. We've expanded a centralized orientation through the entry program.

We have individualized information assessment and referrals at a new central point of contact co-located with the offsite language assessment centre. We have continued specialized refugee settlement support. We've increased capacities within neighbourhood community groups to actively reach out and connect new families with settlement information and community resources like libraries, schools and community centres. We've increased the ability to provide information and orientation sessions closer to the newcomers' homes where they live. We've improved accessibility and effectiveness of the funded programming, such as host and volunteer programs, employment readiness, workplace exposure, employment experience, and specialized workshops such as driver's education and consumer advice.

We've expanded a broad range of settlement programs outside of Winnipeg because of our very successful regional immigration strategy outside of Winnipeg. We're very involved in our qualifications recognition activities. We have increased training to develop skills, resources and capacities in the settlement field. A number of our language training programs provide child-minding services, and are offered at night and weekends as well as in the workplace, so that we can accommodate newcomers who have children.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, a lot of rhetoric there, but I don't think it's translating to services.

I notice that, under Financial Assistance and Grants, there are \$20 million for Financial Assistance and Grants. What is the formal grant application process?

Ms. Allan: These are the contribution agreements that we have with the settlement and community support stakeholders who provide the services to the immigrants. Every settlement agency, we sign off on a contribution agreement with them in regard to where the money is going and exactly what their program is.

An example would be the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, the Société franco-manitobaine, the Citizenship Council of Manitoba, the Jewish Child and Family Service. We also have regional and strategic program initiatives and neighbourhood settlement supports, and we have arrangements with some of the support groups that provide programming for children and youth.

Mrs. Taillieu: I wonder if the minister can provide the service purchase agreements.

Ms. Allan: I'd like to clarify the question.

Mrs. Taillieu: I first of all asked if there was a formal grant application process, and the minister said that there were agreements in place for funding for a variety of organizations. Now, I'm specifically asking, I think, when you have monies in the amount of \$20 million going out on one line and financial assistance and grants, I'm just specifically asking for the service purchase agreements that would be in place for every organization that is a recipient of money from the Labour and Immigration Department.

Ms. Allan: Well, we would have to report back to the federal government in regard to exactly how the money is spent. It's very, very important that there's

transparency and accountability with our partners in the community that are providing the supports. That's why we have an official agreement in place with the community agencies.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, and I'm just asking for copies of those specific service purchase agreements with those agencies in the communities. I wonder if the minister can provide those.

Ms. Allan: There actually are guidelines in place in regard to how those agreements are drafted and drawn up. But I don't think we have the authority to make those documents public.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think we've been down this road before with Hydra House and with Aiyawin, where we don't have service purchase agreements in place and then we ask for information and we're told, oh, we can't give you that information. I don't necessarily need to see the figures or the names. I'm asking: Is there a service purchase agreement with any of the organizations that receive any amount of the \$20 million?

Ms. Allan: Yes, I think I've already told you that, that there is a contribution agreement with every one of the organizations that we give money to because we have to be able to be accountable to the federal government. There are guidelines in place in regard to how those contribution agreements should be drawn up, and we have every intention of spending this money wisely. We have an excellent relationship with the service providers in the community, and they expect this money to be spent just as wisely as we do. That's built on trust and respect with the federal government. We have agreements with every one of them. I don't know how much clearer I can make it to the member that there are agreements in place.

Mrs. Taillieu: If there are agreements in place, then the member will not have any difficulty in providing me with copies. She can blank out the specific names.

Ms. Allan: You know what? I would have to seek some advice from my departmental officials in regard to whether or not I would do that.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Taillieu: Again, we go down this path of non-transparency. Simple accountability and transparency would demand that you would be able to supply agreements that you have with people that receive money from you. It's simply, if I'm going to give you

money, I want to know what you're going to spend it on, what you are going to use it for. Fine, it's just an agreement that allows some transparency and accountability to the taxpayers of Manitoba whose money this is. It doesn't belong to the provincial government. It belongs to the taxpayers. They want to know, how's my money being spent? It's just simply, is there an agreement or do I just give money out to everybody that asks for it? There should be an agreement, and it should be a written agreement. I'm simply asking for a copy just to show that there is accountability and transparency with this minister.

Ms. Allan: Well, everything the member's talking about is well established and well documented, and we'll put together a package of information for the MLA that outlines the criteria that we have to meet in regard to developing the contribution agreements with our partners in the community. We'll put together a little package of information for her so that she can understand the accountability around this very important area.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Thank you, Madam Chairperson and Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu). I just have a few questions that I was wanting just to get on the record. First off, at times I do like to acknowledge when the minister does something that I'm very supportive of. I must say that she has had a fairly consistent record in terms of indicating very clearly that she doesn't do individual cases with the PNP, that she likes to keep that arm's-length distance, and I do applaud her on that. I think that's very important. I think that she realizes the sensitivity. She's talked about it in the past.

I do also want to provide a compliment to the staff. Last year when we were going through the Estimates I was expressing some frustration in terms of the waiting times, and people approaching my office. Ultimately, I think, primarily because of the Estimates process, we were able to resolve that where now I have just been informing the department, and the department has been very good in terms of ensuring that there is some sort of a follow-up so that my office doesn't have to be directly involved or become a middle person. I think that's significant, and I trust that that principle does apply for all.

The specific question I have for the minister is: One of the petitions that I'm tabling in the House is suggesting that we set a target. I'm not necessarily looking for the minister to say, oh, what it is today. What I'm more interested in knowing is that in the

petition I make the statement that it would be good to have a 90-day guarantee for 80 percent of those that are applying for a provincial nominee certificate from the day that they apply to the day that one would be issued. That 80 percent would be based on the family support stream. I'm wondering if the minister could indicate whether or not she would support that as an objective. Whether they have it today or not, we'll leave that for another day, but does she support the idea of giving that 90-day guarantee?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I'd like to thank the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) for complimenting the staff in my department in regard to our immigration strategy because, as he well knows, Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program is the most successful program in Canada with almost 70 percent of all PNPs coming to Canada, coming to Manitoba. I always give credit to the staff in my department because that's who really deserves the recognition. It's a very dedicated team of people.

We have had many conversations, the MLA for Inkster and I, about the Provincial Nominee Program. The Provincial Nominee Program is an economic program that is linked to labour market demand, so because of the nature of that program—and that is a bilateral agreement with the federal government—because of the nature of the program, the economic program, it processes the strongest applicants first by selecting those with confirmed employment, job-ready English, training and work experience, indicating potential for employability and/or strong family connections in Manitoba.

We are having a lot of success with our program. We are meeting our annual landing targets and, in 2007, we processed more than 50 percent within four months, so we are very, very pleased with that. You know, our processing times can vary from time to time. It depends on the applications and exactly which streams that they're going to, but we are very, very pleased with the growth in our program year over year. We are meeting the levels that we want to meet. What also is important is not just meeting those levels, but having an increase in settlement support funding from the federal government so that we can provide services to our newest newcomers. That's been our strategy. We're comfortable with our processing times, and we want to make sure that we get newcomers into the province as quickly as possible so that we can meet the labour market shortage.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Chairperson, to the minister. The department does make presentations, goes out into the communities. I'm wondering if the minister could indicate whether or not it's feasible, whether it's on the PNP Web site or some other mechanisms in which there is a recording of where these presentations are made in a year. I would think that there would be some strategic value in terms of having it on a Web site so anyone could click in to find out when the next one's going to be. I think that they're very advantageous for all of the different ethnic communities.

Ms. Allan: We're actually reviewing our Web site right now. We have an incredibly successful Web site. It gets something like 1.2 million hits a year, so we are looking at the Web site in regard to the information that is available on it, and we're going to be doing some redesign of that Web site.

We're also doing a redesign, or, no, I shouldn't say redesign. I should say an update of our application kit so that we can provide clear and concise information to all applicants. We're also looking at some other, we've got some other stuff that's going to be cooking in the next little while that we're quite excited about in regard to making it easier for newcomers that come to the province of Manitoba that I think the MLA will be supportive of.

Mr. Lamoureux: Whatever could be done in terms of recognizing publicly the presentations that are up-and-coming, I think, would be a positive thing.

There's one area of policy that I was hoping, and our staff, Mr. Rempel, in particular, could always write to me. I don't necessarily need an immediate response. The minister might want to talk to the staff in regard to it, and that is in regard to the individual—let's say a family application where there are four individuals, a spouse and two children. One of the children, for whatever reasons, because of the processing time, is not attending a public school so loses that dependency factor. As a result, according to Government of Canada, would be disqualified at the time of issuing a visa. My rudimentary or basic understanding of it is that, if that does occur and someone does come to the Province, the Province is prepared to get another nominee certificate out so that we can try to keep that family unit together.

Having a response in terms of, you know, what sort of a time lag are we talking? Is it a six-month thing? Is it a two-month thing or just to reaffirm what it is that I believe to be the case based on a discussion that I've had in the past?

* (16:50)

Ms. Allan: We can deal with that particular issue that the MLA has raised. We will issue a separate certificate for the ineligible dependants, and that's the federal criteria that say that we have to do that. We just need to know and then we can deal with it as quickly as we can because obviously our goal with our Provincial Nominee Program is to unite families. We are able to deal with that particular situation.

Mr. Lamoureux: Finally, in regard to this particular issue, I'm still not 100 percent comfortable, and we talked about the idea of misrepresentation and what happens, whether it's in India, the Philippines or other countries where there's accusations at how a nominee certificate would be automatically voided. I'm still not quite comfortable with that, that particular issue. I do think from a policy perspective that there does need to be some more dialogue in terms of providing a clarity on that.

The minister can comment on that. Otherwise, I'm just going to go on to the next area.

Ms. Allan: Well, the problem is the policy says we have to consult, but it is a federal law. We have to follow the federal laws. They issue the visas; we don't. We don't have any legal jurisdiction.

Mr. Lamoureux: It's still one of those concerned areas. I do know that there is an opportunity for the Province to be involved in certain situations. I just encourage that there is a need, that there's a need there. I'll leave it for the minister, and I'm more than happy to sit down with her or staff to continue the dialogue on that particular area. I'm just suggesting that there is a need.

Given the time, I understand that there's a will to try to pass through some of the line by line, Madam Chairperson, so I think I'll surrender the floor.

I thank the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and the minister for her answers.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, we're prepared to go line by line now.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 11.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$20,602,500 for Labour and Immigration, Labour Programs, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$26,940,900 for Labour and Immigration, Immigration and Multiculturalism, for the fiscal year ending the 31st of March, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$710,600 for Labour and Immigration, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st of March, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary contained in Resolution 11.1.

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

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, just as the staff are taking their leave, I just want to thank them for their very good work and providing the information that they did for me in the last couple of days of Estimates. Thanks very much.

Madam Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, just a couple more questions in immigration, if that's acceptable here. When people are processed through the PNP program, and I'm understanding that they would be accepted into the program when they come to Manitoba, are there any other steps that they have to do to get their final approval through the Provincial Nominee Program? Are there any other steps?

Ms. Allan: Well, because our Provincial Nominee Program is a bilateral agreement with the federal government, the final security checks and the final medical checks are the responsibility of the federal government. They have a final approval on all of our applications.

Mrs. Taillieu: I know that that occurs after they've been accepted in the PNP. Is there any way that some files are expedited over other files?

Ms. Allan: No, but just I think it's very important to go back to what the MLA for Morris just said. They aren't accepted into the Provincial Nominee Program. They can't be accepted until the federal government signs off.

We have a transparent process in place; not just one individual in the Department of Immigration

looks at the files. We have a process where files are worked on by more than one individual to make sure that we are meeting the transparency and the accountability of all of those applications, that they're being looked at fairly.

Mrs. Taillieu: What, if anything, would delay a person that's already been accepted into the PNP program for final registration?

Ms. Allan: Well, I don't know if they've already been accepted. I don't know what would delay them. I don't manage the files. I don't manage the program. I'm not exactly sure, other than the final security and the final medical check, what would delay them.

Mrs. Taillieu: Just one final question. If someone is not accepted, once they—is there someone that arrives in Manitoba and is accepted, or is under the understanding that they're accepted into the PNP, is there any reason, then, that they would be—are there any other requirements that would be afforded to them to allow them to expedite their file?

Ms. Allan: Well, they can't come to Manitoba. They have to be approved before they get here.

Mrs. Taillieu: We'll proceed.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any further questions?

Resolution 11.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$792,400 for Labour and Immigration, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the committee is the Estimates of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

The time being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The time being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 5, 2008

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>