



Second Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

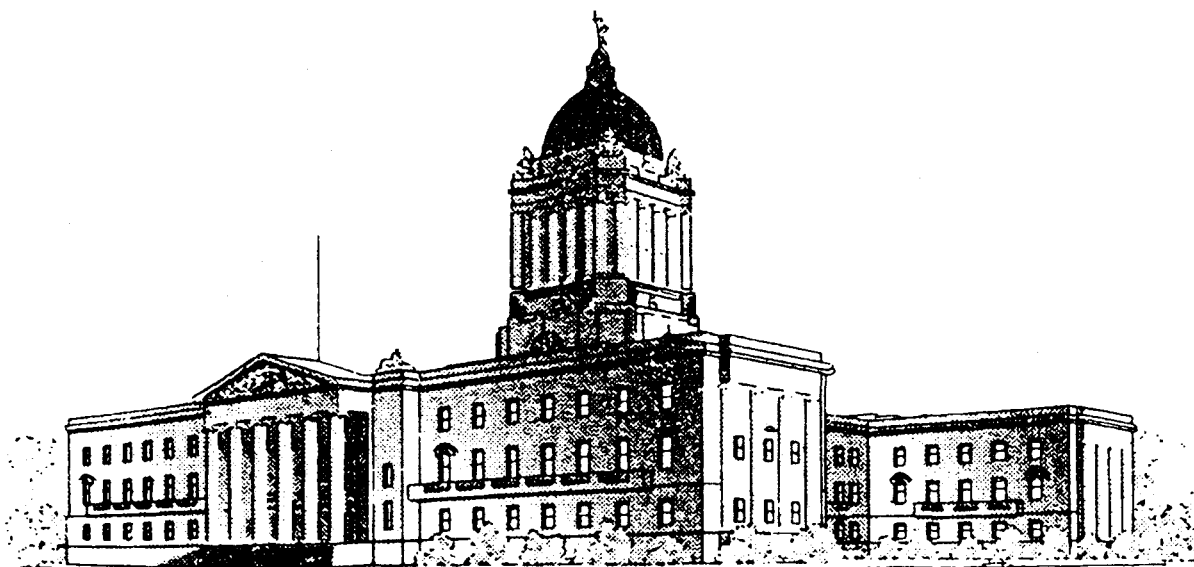
of the

**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**

**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report  
(Hansard)**

*Published under the  
authority of  
The Honourable George Hickes  
Speaker*



Vol. LI No. 48 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, June 18, 2001

ISSN 0542-5492

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Seventh Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	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.
ENNS, Harry	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean, Hon.	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Joy	Fort Garry	P.C.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Monday, June 18, 2001**

**The House met at 1:30 p.m.**

**PTH 9 Upgrade**

**PRAYERS**

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden):** Mr. Speaker, I seek leave to present a petition on behalf of the Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer).

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

**Mr. Speaker:** Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

**Kenaston Underpass**

**Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of G. Misko, H. Janzen, Colin Anderson and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

**Mr. Maguire:** I beg to present the petition of M. Houde, Philip Houde, Clifford Kurbis and others, praying that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) consider upgrading Provincial Trunk Highway No. 9 and the Selkirk Corridor thoroughfares immediately.

**Manitoba Hydro Lines Routes**

**READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS**

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of David Oster, Marguerite Grela, Jim Bennett and others, praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro (Mr. Selinger) consider alternative routes for the additional 230kV and 500kV lines proposed for the R.M. of East St. Paul.

**Manitoba Hydro Line Routes**

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

**Kenaston Underpass**

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Diane Johnson, Fred Boulette, Cy MacDonald and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Clerk, please read.

**Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk):** The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of K. T. Craig, L. Craig, K. Bourke and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

THAT the R.M. of East St. Paul has the highest concentration of high voltage power lines in a residential area in Manitoba; and

THAT the R.M. of East St. Paul is the only jurisdiction in Manitoba that has both a 500kV and a 230kV line directly behind residences; and

THAT numerous studies have linked cancer, in particular childhood leukemia, to the proximity of power lines.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba requests that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro consider alternative routes for the additional 230kV and 500kV lines proposed for the R.M. of East St. Paul.

\* (13:35)

#### **Kenaston Underpass**

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Clerk, please read.

**Madam Clerk:** The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT the intersection at Wilkes and Kenaston has grown to become the largest unseparated crossing in Canada; and

THAT the volume of traffic for this railroad crossing is twelve times the acceptable limit as set out by Transport Canada; and

THAT vehicles which have to wait for trains at this intersection burn up approximately \$1.4 million in fuel, pollute the environment with over 8 tons of emissions and cause approximately \$7.3 million in motorist delays every year.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

#### **PTH 9 Upgrade**

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden):** I seek leave to present the petition on behalf of the Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer).

**Mr. Speaker:** Does the honourable member have leave? [*Agreed*]

I have reviewed the petition, and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Clerk please read.

**Madam Clerk:** To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

These are the reasons for this petition:

1. The Provincial Trunk Highway No. 9 and the Selkirk Corridor are widely used thoroughfares in the constituency of Gimli and the province of Manitoba.

2. These thoroughfares have consistently recorded traffic counts in excess of 10 000 vehicles (both automobiles and trucks) daily, according to statistics provided by the University of Manitoba/Manitoba Highways and Transportation.

3. These thoroughfares are in dire need of improvement and upgrade.

4. Adequate safety considerations and conditions must be maintained on these thoroughfares at all times and in all places.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

We request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton) to consider upgrading Provincial Trunk Highway No. 9 and the Selkirk Corridor thoroughfares immediately.

\* (13:40)

#### **Kenaston Underpass**

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), I have reviewed the petition, and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Speaker:** The Clerk please read.

**Madam Clerk:** The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT the intersection at Wilkes and Kenaston has grown to become the largest unseparated crossing in Canada; and

THAT the volume of traffic for this railroad crossing is twelve times the acceptable limit as set out by Transport Canada; and

THAT vehicles which have to wait for trains at this intersection burn up approximately \$1.4 million in fuel, pollute the environment with over 8 tons of emissions and cause approximately \$7.3 million in motorist delays every year.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Annual Report for the Manitoba Civil Service Superannuation Board, and I would also like to table the 2000 Annual Report for the Crown Corporations Council.

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Speaker, shortly before the sitting I was asked to table, and I committed to tabling, a petition of about 2000 Manitobans asking the Government to amend Bill 41 to include amendments to The Adoption Act, and I do so now.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Speaker:** May I remind all guests in the gallery that there is to be no participation by members who are observing proceedings in this House. I would ask for your full co-operation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us the St. Croix Valley Boys Choir from Minnesota and Wisconsin, 34 Grades 3 to 12 students under the direction of Mr. Tom Ferry.

Also in the public gallery we have, from Minto School, 25 Grades 6 to 8 students under the direction of Mr. Bruce Lyons. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer).

Also in the public gallery we have, from Munroe Junior High, 40 Grade 9 students under the direction of Madam Daisy Pastrick. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway).

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

### ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

#### The Maples Surgical Centre Government Contract

**Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, we heard the Finance Minister (Mr. Selinger) admit that the NDP's promise to end hallway medicine was irresponsible. The Premier did not have the courage to do the same, and instead he chose to blame Manitobans because they misinterpreted what he said during the election.

We have also heard the Finance Minister say we cannot wait a year and a half for the Roy Romanow report, for him to deliver his report on the future of health care, yet the Premier continues to turn a deaf ear to him and instead muddles along with no grand scheme, no plan to improve our health care system. Action is needed now, and The Maples Surgical Centre is one way to accomplish that.

Will the Premier today put aside his ideology and take action to reduce waiting lists by entering into a contract with this facility?

\* (13:45)

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** I believe today there is one patient in the hallway. When we compare that to previous years when there was a cultural management acceptance of patients in the hallways day after day, we have certainly made great progress.

On Thursday, I said to the Leader of the Opposition that Victoria Hospital was causing some challenges for us in terms of meeting our commitment. We did review the fact that they in government had refused to authorize capital expenditures that had been recommended to them three years ago. We reviewed that in our first year in office. The Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) has authorized that capital investment, along with a new CAT scanner and renovations to the area that is going to have the CAT scanner located.

We have now more young people and people enrolled in the nursing program as part of our health care strategy. We have increased the number of spots at our medical schools. We have made the correct decision on accreditation of foreign doctors, something members opposite did not do. We have announced lab technician courses at the community colleges and the sonographer situation, we also are making an announcement shortly.

**Mr. Murray:** Despite the rhetoric, waiting lists continue to grow and grow. We should be spending scarce health care dollars to reduce waiting lists and improve patient care. The status quo is not working. New and innovative ideas are needed to improve patient health care safety and reduce waiting lists.

The Maples Surgical Centre is a first-class facility. It is a world-class facility, but this Premier is blocking them from operating. If the Government would enter into a collaboration with the private sector, waiting lists would be reduced, health patient safety would be increased. Why is the Premier not allowing them to do so?

**Mr. Doer:** I think the premise of the question is totally wrong.

**Mr. Murray:** Clearly, waiting lists are longer. Clearly, under this Government they are. *[interjection]* Well, they want to say something different. It is a fact that waiting lists are longer. Nursing shortages have doubled under this Government. The safety of patients is in question from time to time under this Government.

All we are asking, very simply, is if this Government would enter into a collaboration with the private sector, there would be an opportunity to reduce these waiting lists and improve patient care. Why is it that the Premier puts his ideology before patient safety and reducing health care waiting lists?

**Mr. Doer:** The only ideology we see in this House is the surrogate presentation from the member opposite for the one private, profit clinic. There are other clinics in Manitoba that are available to the public. Some in the public sector; some in private sector.

It is noteworthy that we are trying to plug a loophole dealing with profit health care. We had some grand experiments from members opposite. It was called the home care privatization, the ultimate collaboration to have a massive privatization and profit becoming part of the home care initiative in Manitoba. Regrettably, patients had to go through that ideological initiative of members opposite when they were in government, and thankfully the people spoke and stopped the former government from that so-called collaboration.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

### **Children's Dental Surgery Waiting Lists**

**Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear, and it has been admitted by the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), that they have no plan for health care. Manitobans recognize that if we are to save and improve our health care system we must have the courage to be innovative. We must have the courage to move forward. I understand the Premier's ideology is preventing him from

embracing change, but for the good of all Manitobans change is needed.

We know that there are some 1500 young Manitobans on the dental surgery waiting list. These young Manitobans are suffering. Why is the Premier denying these 1500 young Manitobans proper access to their dental care?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** It is passing strange that members opposite would eliminate dental nurses across Manitoba, dental nurses that used to go into communities and do some of the work now that is being required in terms of dental surgeries, and then, later on, they would have the gall to come back to this Chamber and deal with the waiting list. It is too bad they did not think about that when they were in government.

\* (13:50)

**Mr. Murray:** Well, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, they are in government and they should be doing something about it. That is what leadership is about. There are nearly 1500 young Manitobans in our province waiting for dental care surgery. The average wait is 14 months. Since about 80 percent of these children are Aboriginal, the federal government would be responsible for paying for the surgery, with Manitoba Health only required to pay the facility fee. As Robert Diamond from Western Surgery Centre has stated, and I quote: These kids are our future. They are Canadian. It is disgusting we can go off to Third World countries and do things and we cannot take care of our own.

Why will the Premier not for once put his ideology aside and do what is in the best interests of our children by allowing and entering into a collaboration with private health care to allow these young Manitobans, the very young Manitobans that are suffering, why will he not allow those young Manitobans access to proper care?

**Mr. Doer:** I am advised there are 35 percent more procedures in place today than there were 18 months ago in terms of those young people.

Secondly, again the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition totally contradicts his previous

set of questions. Western Surgery Centre is a private centre. He is totally contradicting his first set of questions. It is obviously having operations in place.

Thirdly, we always argue with members opposite that it was more cost-effective to send one dental nurse into an Aboriginal community in northern Manitoba, rather than having the whole community that required surgical and care of their teeth to be shipped out of that community and shipped into Winnipeg. We are looking at putting more resources in northern Manitoba adjacent to those Aboriginal kids and in those communities, something the members opposite forgot.

**Mr. Murray:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is small comfort for those 1500 young Manitobans who are suffering because of lack of leadership on this Government's part. Our public facilities are not able to keep up with the growing demand. A collaboration between the private sector and the public sector could reduce waiting lists and improve patient safety.

How can this Premier deny Manitobans improved access to health care by refusing to enter into contracts with private facilities?

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, again the Leader of the Opposition is factually inaccurate. We are doing more of these surgeries than when members opposite were government, firstly. Secondly, two thirds of the surgeries are already done in private sector facilities, and a cap was put on those numbers of services by members opposite. We increased the number of procedures and, in addition, we are looking at options of doing some of the procedures up north where most of the children are located, to try to provide those services.

It is not a new issue. It has been an issue now for five or six years, particularly since members opposite stopped the preventative program. It had been a long-standing issue. When the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik) was Minister of Health, he entered into increased surgeries. We took those, and we increased them even more. Two thirds are done in the private sector, and there are going to be

more done this year than last year, which was more done than the year before.

### **Children's Dental Surgery Waiting Lists**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, I have received a plea from a parent whose son needs dental surgery, but he cannot access it, so the little boy, who is autistic, has somehow dealt with his own pain by pulling out two of his teeth on his own. When we are looking at cases of dental surgery that are needed, I think these pictures clearly outline what these pictures look like, and I am prepared to table—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

### **Point of Order**

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member knows full well that exhibits are not allowed in this House. If she does have information, she could certainly table that for the members.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader):** On the same point of order, the honourable member was prepared to table the document which she was holding.

\* (13:55)

**Mr. Speaker:** On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, I would ask the honourable Member for Charleswood to table.

\* \* \*

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, as I had been indicating, I was prepared to table the pictures. I am sure that the Minister of Health would be interested in seeing them.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health why he is forcing 1500 children to wait for much-needed dental surgery when he could

easily access the new Maples clinic and have these children treated starting tomorrow.

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for these pictures. I saw them first when they were government, when they had delayed the number of surgeries. There was even a longer waiting list.

I would like to indicate that we have increased the number of procedures. It is not as cute as them working with their entrepreneur doctor friend from B.C., about one particular surgical centre. There is a variety of opinion amongst the doctors who provide the surgery about where the surgeries should be provided and how. What we do know is we have done 35 percent more, 35 percent more surgeries. We are looking at moving some of the surgeries up north where most of these children come from. There has been more done now than there was the past two years, and there will be more done this year in order to deal with the backlog that was initially started when members opposite stopped the preventative program in 1993, against public opposition.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health why he is not willing to pay these facility fees so that these 1500 children can receive their surgeries, because in Manitoba the waiting lists are more than double what they are in most parts of the country. In fact, in Alberta it is only 180 children waiting. In Manitoba, we have almost 1500.

**Mr. Chomiak:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite ought to know that this is an issue now for three or four years, and three or four years ago the former Minister of Health, the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik) took a number of surgeries and expanded them. The member recognizes that. We took those expanded surgeries and expanded them by 35 percent more.

In addition, we are discussing with both Burntwood and Norman, putting physician surgeons up north in order to provide the service. In addition, we have put some dentists on staff in terms of prevention. Yes, the waiting lists are long. We have done more than members opposite did. We will do more in the future.



While it is unfortunate, we cannot overnight do stuff that built up over the past decade.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I would like to ask the Minister of Health why he is not willing to put an end to the suffering for these children. He could start it tomorrow and allow them access to good care, instead of letting his rigid ideology get in the way of making some really sound health care decisions.

**Mr. Chomiak:** Mr. Speaker, that is why one third of the surgeries are undertaken at Children's Hospital. Two thirds are undertaken at private surgical centres. That is why we have taken the terrible waiting list that we found when the members came in office and expanded it by 35 percent, increased it by 35 percent, did more by 35 percent, increased the volume by 35 percent, and did most of it by necessity and private surgical facilities in order to provide service to these children.

Yes, it is a problem. It has been a problem for a number of years. At least we have taken action to work with it, similar to the action, Mr. Speaker, to follow up on this, we increased the number of surgeries. We will be doing more this year. The members ought not to take their ideology and their preoccupation with private, for-profit surgical facilities and try to meld that, that being the reason why there is a difficulty. There has been a difficulty with respect to operating time, and we are expanding the amount of operating time.

### **Health Care System Federal Funding**

**Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte):** Mr. Speaker, since coming into office the Doer government has increased the health budget by over \$500 million, over 22 percent. Manitobans are telling this Government that their health care service has not improved at all. Will the Doer government's Health Minister admit that he has no grand scheme, no plan, and yet we have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) pleading with the federal government for more funding?

Does the Doer government really expect the federal government to just hand over more money to this province, given that this Health

Minister does not have a plan on how to utilize more resources?

\* (14:00)

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance):** The Member for Fort Whyte will be aware, because I provided him with a copy of this report, that the federal government has rebased the cap on equalization back down to \$10 billion, costing Manitoba \$100 million that they would have gained if it would have been left at the level negotiated by the Premier and his fellow colleagues around the country last September here in Winnipeg.

There is no question that the federal government's contribution to health care, 14 percent on the dollar, is significantly lower than it was many years ago, 20 years ago, when they started the medicare program in Canada, and they paid 50 cents on the dollar.

**Mr. Loewen:** Mr. Speaker, why would this Minister of Finance expect the federal government to provide more money to this province to help improve the health care system when his own Minister of Health has been sitting on half of the \$36 million that was given by the federal government to buy more diagnostic equipment? Why would he expect more?

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to the fact that during the negotiations for the recent agreement between the provinces and the federal government, it was Manitoba that took the lead, that was able to obtain the equipment fund from the federal government for capital dollars. It was Manitoba that took the lead, and it was not because the years of the Brian Mulroney years and the years of the Chrétien Liberals that we just lobbied, criticized and criticized and criticized. We said: We have to work with the federal government. We have to work with everyone to try to improve the situation.

Mr. Speaker, we have the most extensive human resource plan in the country. More doctors now training than in any other time in the past decade. More nurses in training. Double what was existent under the Conservative government. New programs for lab technologists

and X-ray technologists, and most recently, an increased class of sonographers to provide for ultrasound, both in Winnipeg and around the province of Manitoba. The most comprehensive retraining of health care professionals, I daresay, in the history of the province.

**Mr. Loewen:** Mr. Speaker, the question remains: Why would they expect the federal government to provide more health care funding when this Health Minister is sitting on half of the \$36 million that the federal government gave him two years ago? The federal government is asking: What is the hidden agenda?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** In the usual manner in which the member opposite exaggerates, the agreement was negotiated less than a year ago with the federal government, not two years ago. The funding for diagnostic equipment will be fully expended as we proceed with proper renovations.

For example, in the community of Brandon, seven times the members opposite promised to renovate the Brandon general hospital. Seven times they broke the promise. The eighth promise will be kept because it will be kept by us. Part of the renovations will be for the diagnostic section. Part of that diagnostic section will be for the MRI. Part of also what we have to do, and this might be hard for members opposite to understand, the members opposite who fired a thousand nurses, you actually have to train staff to operate a lot of that equipment. That is also part of our plan.

#### **Private Hospitals Definition**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** In Bill 25, the Minister of Health's new definition of a private hospital is a house where a patient is lodged for care and treated for childbirth. Is it the minister's intent that if a woman has a baby, delivered by a midwife in her home or a birthing centre, that these are now considered private hospitals?

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health):** No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the member's relatively simple interpretation of the legislation has

caused a good deal of difficulty for the Member for Charleswood. We specifically, in terms of the definition, made certain the definition would not preclude home births or midwives from operating, and it has been specifically outlined in order to provide that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, the minister should read his own bill.

Will midwives be able to perform home births in situations where they treat the patient overnight and administer mild sedation? Because with all of the minister's definition changes, midwives now perform a surgical service in a private hospital.

**Mr. Chomiak:** Mr. Speaker, as is often the case, the member misinterprets the legislation. It does not preclude midwives from offering the service in their homes or in another location. The legislation was specifically designed to allow all services that we presently provide to be provided, with the exception of for-profit surgical centres from operating overnight services, which is a very narrow defined area. The rest of the definitions of all of those figures are outside of that. We specifically designed the legislation to ensure that we only targeted private, for-profit surgical facilities, something the members opposite have taken up as cause célèbre.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I would like to ask the minister: Can a midwife now be subjected to a \$30,000 fine when the midwife delivers a baby, which is now defined in his legislation as a surgical service, in a person's home, which is now defined as a private hospital in his new legislation? He should read his own legislation. He is putting midwifery back into the Dark Ages with this bill.

**Mr. Chomiak:** No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. That is not the case with respect to the legislation. The legislation was specifically designed to preclude that. The legislation was only designed to deal with private, for-profit facilities like the members champion, all those private, for-profit the members want us to bring into this province that have caused grave difficulties in Alberta, are causing difficulty in Ontario. It was specifically designed to prevent

things like Connie Curran incorporated from coming to Manitoba and offering to lay off nurses and to open surgical centres. It was specifically designed to prevent those private, for-profit facilities overnight stays, overnight stays in private hospitals, that profit private hospitals is what it was designed for, and very narrowly interpreted to deal with that. That is why this legislation was brought in. If the member is unclear, it is private, for-profit hospitals.

### Same-Sex Relationships Adoption Rights

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, there is considerable public interest in whether the Minister of Justice will change The Adoption Act to make Manitoba law similar to that in Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan with respect to the adoption of children by same-sex couples.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Why does the minister prefer to keep the same-sex partner in a gay or lesbian relationship hidden with respect to The Adoption Act when long-term partners do in fact share responsibilities for raising a child in their home?

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the member did not ask that question in second reading or put his remarks on the record, participate in the vote. Having said that, I am quite concerned if the member thinks that Ontario is a model in terms of adoptions. It has been roundly criticized as being discriminatory.

**Mr. Gerrard:** My supplementary to the Minister of Justice. I ask the minister why he is going to amend The Family Maintenance Act to provide a legal responsibility for the hidden partner in a same-sex relationship to contribute as a parent to child support but at the same time the minister is not going to provide the hidden same-sex partner any rights under The Adoption Act.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Mr. Speaker, the public hearings on this bill are on tonight. There are many presentations. We look forward to hearing them. We look forward to hearing the insights of

those Manitobans who are affected by this legislation. We will listen to those hearings, and I hope the member opposite does as well.

### Legal Registration

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** My supplementary to the minister. I ask the Minister of Justice's intention whether he is going to allow gay and lesbian partners to legally register their relationship under a variety of acts or just under The Civil Service Superannuation Act.

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** We accept that there are many statutes in this province where there are serious anomalies with regard to both the Charter and internal inconsistencies in terms of how regimes work. Out of respect for the fairness for all Manitobans, we have a policy whereby we bring in not only a bill dealing with *M. v. H.* and the financial obligations that were addressed by the Supreme Court but we are as well very interested in other statutes that are not fair in their application. Indeed, we introduced last session changes to The Income Tax Act, the victims' rights regime. There are amendments on The Highway Traffic Act before the session this year. This is an important evolution that we have to engage in as a province.

But I will, in conclusion, say this, that if the member opposite also believes that the Nova Scotia registration scheme is the right way to go, that is an issue that deserves careful consideration to ensure that it in itself does not also offend the Charter.

\* (14:10)

### Winnipeg Casinos Advertising Campaign

**Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale):** Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the Minister responsible for Lotteries to table or to send me the advertising rules of conduct for the casinos, and I thank her very much for sending these to me in a very prompt manner.

I would like to point out one area in the rules of advertisement, and it pertains to minors. I will just read one quotation. Advertising must not

appeal specifically to minors or be placed in any medium that is targeted specifically to minors.

My question to the Minister responsible for Lotteries: Is she aware or does she not agree that cartoons such as "King of the Hill," "The Simpsons," along with another program "Malcolm in the Middle," which are shown on Sunday nights between 6:30 and 8 are geared toward children or minors?

**Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act):** I thank the member opposite for the question because it gives me the opportunity to speak a little bit about the history of advertising Lotteries and casinos in this province. I have some documents to table, Mr. Speaker. It includes pictures of the member from River East's casino bus from 1993. I see a bus with words on it like video—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* 417: Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate.

This question was clearly about whether the advertising for her gambling casinos should be appearing with Homer Simpson and a number of other cartoon characters. We know that Homer Simpson sits with her now.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader):** The same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the member was getting up not on a point of order, but a point of embarrassment.

**Mr. Speaker:** On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does have a point of order. *Beauchesne's* Citation 417: Answers to questions should deal with the matter raised.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Advanced Education, to conclude her answer.

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did not realize how delicate the flowers opposite were. I guess their delicacy continues.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

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

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Laurendeau:** Mr. Speaker, not only does this minister not have any respect for the Chair, who has just ruled against her, but *Beauchesne's* 417 clearly states that she should deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate. We did not ask her for an apology.

**Mr. Speaker:** On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does have a point of order. *Beauchesne's* Citation 417: Answers to questions should deal with the matter raised.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Speaker:** I would ask the honourable minister to please answer the question.

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the shrinking-violet question from the member opposite, I would like to say that the advertisements for Lotteries are non-gambling advertisements. We do not have any buses. We are simply advertising the amenities, the restaurants and the entertainment in our casinos.

My information from Manitoba Lotteries Corporation is that the majority of media buys are on news broadcasts, sporting programs, game shows and soap operas.

**Mr. Reimer:** Mr. Speaker, I will table the TV Guide showing when these programs are aired, and I will also table a tape showing the ads during those programs.

I want to ask the minister one more time. If the ads are being played during the prime time for children to watch TV, which I know a lot of the members in this House have young people

who are watching television at that time, does she not feel that that is offensive, luring them, trying to get them to go to the gambling casinos? I think there is a problem there, and I wonder whether she would like to address it.

**Ms. McGifford:** Mr. Speaker, I think the greatest amount of alluring and luring took place in 1993 with the member from River East's bus.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Laurendeau:** With the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, this minister continues to challenge you in your rulings. *Beauchesne's* 417: Answers to questions should not provoke debate and should deal with the matter.

Could you please bring this minister to order and see if she can answer a question properly?

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer certainly was brief and dealt with the matter raised. The matter raised, again, just points out how silly a question sounds when the Opposition is giving a message: Do not do what we do.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

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

**Mr. Laurendeau:** With the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, this minister continues to challenge you and your rulings. *Beauchesne's* 417: Answers to questions should not provoke debate and should deal with the matter.

Could you please bring this minister to order and see if she can answer a question properly?

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Mr. Speaker, the answer certainly was brief and dealt with the matter raised, and the matter raised again just points out how silly a question sounds when the Opposition is giving a message: Do not do what we do.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

\* \* \*

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Reimer:** Mr. Speaker, will the minister not admit there is a problem there? We have seen it reported in the paper about the unfortunate incidence of suicides. We have seen reports saying that Manitoba has the highest per capita of gaming in Canada. There is a problem there. Advertising this problem is not going to cure the problem.

Will the minister not admit to at least re-evaluate the position of advertising gaming and gambling during prime time when young children are exposed to the media? At least look at it, Madam Minister.

**Ms. McGifford:** Mr. Speaker, of course the biggest problem in this province when it comes to Lotteries is the one we inherited from the previous government. I make specific reference to their two gambling palaces, huge in size, huge debts, huge overruns, huge problems. I point out—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Laurendeau:** Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* 417: Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and not provoke debate. Her so-called bingo palaces, which she is now in charge of, she bought the land.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Mr. Speaker, we understand why the—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Mackintosh:** Mr. Speaker, we understand why the Opposition feels provoked on the answer. The answer is simply putting the issue into context, and I understand why the Opposition are embarrassed by answering these questions.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Advanced Education, on the same point of order.

**Ms. McGifford:** On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was asked by the member opposite did I not think this was the biggest problem, and I said, no, I thought this was namely the casinos, et cetera. So it seemed to me quite a logical answer to the question.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, the question that was raised was would the minister consider the time slot the advertisement was on. That is the question I heard. So I would rule that the honourable Official Opposition House Leader has a point of order. I would ask the honourable minister to please deal with the matter that is raised.

\* \* \*

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned to the member in a previous question, my information from the Manitoba Lotteries Commission is that Lotteries ads, and this includes the responsible-use campaign, which is designed to alert persons to possible personal gambling problems, I would think members opposite would think that is a good idea. Anyway, my information is that Lotteries ads run most frequently on news shows, sports shows, gaming shows and soap operas.

Mr. Speaker, the whole premise of this question that we are attempting to lure children to casinos is so ridiculous—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. McGifford:** Mr. Speaker, that premise is utter rubbish. Children are not allowed in casinos.

### Point of Order

**Mr. Reimer:** The member is stating the themes are not appropriate. The rules of Manitoba Lotteries are that they must not appeal specifically to minors.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. May I remind all honourable members that a point of order should be raised to point to the Speaker breaking of the rule, a breach of the rules or unparliamentary language. Please do not turn points of order into debates. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

### Winnipeg Casinos Advertising Campaign

**Mrs. Louise Dacquay (Seine River):** Mr. Speaker, a number of reports profiling problem gamblers in Manitoba have recently been released. These reports suggest the Doer government is taking the wrong approach when it comes to advertising casinos to lure more Manitobans to gamble.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister responsible for Lotteries explain why she has unleashed a massive advertising campaign in order to lure Manitoba families into her casinos when, according to Stats Canada, Manitobans already spend the most per person on gambling in Canada?

**Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the member opposite that the study she is referring to is a 1999 study, so she really should ask the questions of members in her own caucus.

Now, I have time after time, Mr. Speaker, talked about why we decided to advertise at Lotteries, and there are two basic reasons. One of them is because of the competition. It is because there are 41 casinos within an eight-

hour drive of Winnipeg. It is because many outside casinos are advertising in Winnipeg, and also, as I have said time and time again, it is because of the huge casinos that were left us, because of the huge debts, because of the overruns, because of the complicated problems.

Mr. Speaker, we feel it is our responsibility as the overseers of the taxpayers' purse to pay the debts incurred by the casinos.

**Mrs. Dacquay:** Can the Minister responsible for the Status of Women explain why she has targeted Manitoba families with these ads when Doctor Cox's report states that almost 40 percent of problem gamblers in Manitoba are women?

**Ms. McGifford:** Mr. Speaker, there has been no attempt on the part of this Government to target Manitoba families or to lure families into the casinos. As I have said, time and time again, what we have done is advertise the amenities in our casinos, not advertise gambling in those magic mystery tour buses that the members opposite did.

### **Winnipeg Casinos Advertising Campaign**

**Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain):** We have heard the Minister responsible for Gaming talk about the advertising budget and the money that she is spending. I am just wondering if the Government or if she can answer if the Government is spending any other advertising dollars promoting any other restaurants in Manitoba.

**Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act):** No, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time for Oral Questions has expired.

## **MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

### **Fort Whyte Bio-Reserve**

**Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson):** Mr. Speaker, I want to draw attention to a couple of events in

my constituency over the past little while. First of all, on June 22 there was a tree planting by the community at the former Domtar contaminated site which is now the Fort Whyte Bio-reserve in Transcona. I want to congratulate the staff of the Fort Whyte Centre, the local committee of volunteers that have been advising the project and working with the Fort Whyte Centre to develop the plans for the trail and help to ensure that the tree planting went ahead. We are all looking forward to this coming September when the official opening of the new bio-reserve park will take place.

This past Thursday, I also went to the Winakwa Community Club for a night at the races. This was one of the most unique events that I have been to in a long time. It was the 49th year-end celebration at Winakwa recognizing the more than 200 volunteers that helped make this community club one of the best in the province. The Member for Southdale (Mr. Reimer) was there as well. I do not think he was as lucky as some of us were, but it was a great way for people to get together and celebrate, and I know that there are going to be many more good things to come from this community centre.

On June 10, I attended the Panthers Gymnastics 35th Anniversary Year-End Display and Awards Night at Rainbow Stage. This event also demonstrated the commitment and community spirit that members of our community have in developing programming for young people. It offers some of the finest gymnastics programs in the province, and there were hundreds of children and parents there for the celebration and the picnic afterwards. I want to congratulate all of them, Mr. Speaker.

### **Minnedosa Collegiate Chancellors**

**Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to congratulate the Minnedosa Collegiate Chancellors Rugby Team on winning the Manitoba Provincial High School Championship Division Two for the third straight year. The team attended the tournament the weekend of June 9 and 10 and went through an undefeated season. The Chancellors played two games in the championship tournament, defeating Grant Park in the first game by a score of 38-nothing, and then they met J. H. Bruns in a

hard-fought overtime victory. Again, this is after going seven-nothing in an undefeated season for this particular football team, and again it is their third consecutive provincial championship. Also six members of the team have been selected to the rural all-star team. Selected to the team were Sean Common, Sean Green, Tom Robson, Matt Saler, Mike Tuttle and David Sokoloski. Also, congratulations to the coaches of these teams. They worked with these boys for three years and certainly have proven their mettle in winning the provincial championship for three consecutive years. Thank you.

### **Special Needs After-School Program**

**Ms. Linda Asper (Riel):** A one-year pilot program in St. Vital School Division has made a world of difference in the lives of four high school students from Glenlawn and Dakota collegiates. The program, an after-school community care program for special needs adolescents with developmental and physical limitations, allows the four teenagers to participate in after-school activities for the first time.

The St. Vital Special Needs Network Initiative evolved from the need to provide age-appropriate after-school care for teenagers with disabilities. Because these teams cannot be alone, they must have continual support and supervision.

This program addressed the need for socialization and opportunities to participate in school life for special needs adolescents. Students have had opportunities to participate through attending band practice, drama club and mingling with other teens.

The program began in September 2000. Plans are underway to continue it in the fall. The enthusiasm and dedication of the staff and the parents' commitment have helped the four girls, Alison, Melanie, Jenna and Sonia, be with other teenagers and gain some independence.

\* (14:30)

This pilot program was developed with the co-operation of the Minister of Family Services

and Housing (Mr. Sale) and his staff, St. Vital School Division, Glenlawn Collegiate, the Association for Community Living, Winnipeg, the St. Vital YM-YWCA, the City of Winnipeg Community Services Division, Youville St. Vital Nurse Resource Centre, Saint Amant Centre, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, Manitoba Special Olympics and the local MLAs.

Thank you to all those involved, enriching the young women's lives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Boissevain Turtle Derby**

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words to the House today about an annual event that will take place for the last time in 2001. I am referring to the illustrious Boissevain Turtle Derby which has run each year for the past three decades. However, the last derby will be held, back where it all started, in downtown Boissevain and will be held July 13 to 15. Furthermore, the derby committee is making the last Turtle Derby absolutely free, thereby enhancing the participation and ensuring a greater success for this final event.

I would like to congratulate all the organizers and participants who over the years have made the Turtle Derby such a success. It was truly an event that helped boost the town's popularity by helping to put Boissevain on the map and attracting international media attention. Over the years it has expanded from simple turtle raising to include a flea market and craft sale to a summer curling bonspiel and a mini-triathlon.

It must also be remembered that Boissevain has won provincial and national awards as the most beautiful community of its size. Most notably, the town was the Communities in Bloom national winner of the 2100 to 5000 population category in 2000. The town is also well known for its many splendid murals which are displayed prominently. The Irvin Goodon International Wildlife Museum, where I had the opportunity of being involved in the official opening on Friday morning, is a must-see international attraction as well.



Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to invite all Manitobans who have enjoyed the Turtle Derby in the past as well as all those who wish to come to see it for the first or the last time to come to Boissevain this summer for a day of fun and excitement.

### Manitoba Marathon

**Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia):** It is a privilege to rise today to discuss the Manitoba Marathon. The 23rd running of the Manitoba Marathon was run on Sunday, and it is the largest event in its history. There were over 8000 people, 855 runners in the full marathon, 2174 in the half, 2631 in the super run, 617 in the 10K walk and there were 486 teams. It was a wonderful activity. It raises money for local groups. It also is great for exercises and individual challenge. It is also a wonderful community event. Teams from Assiniboia schools such as Crestview School, Lakewood School, Ness Middle School and Buchanan School all participated.

I would like to thank the coaches, the parents and all the volunteers who brought the kids out and helped make it a wonderful day. It is great because they all participate and they all set individual goals which they can accomplish. I would like to recognize all the spectators, organizers, volunteers and participants, including parents and friends. Of particular interest was the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) who streaked across the finish line in record time.

I would like to congratulate all those who participated and thank all the people who make it a wonderful Manitoba event where people from all over Canada, U.S. and the world attend.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### House Business

\* (14:30)

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could canvass the House to determine if there is leave to adjourn at 5 p.m. this Wednesday.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there leave of the House to adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Mackintosh:** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), that the House resolve into Committee of Supply.

*Motion agreed to.*

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

### Concurrence Motion

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos):** The Committee of Supply has before it for consideration the motion concerning all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002. The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry):** I would like to ask the Minister of Education a very important question. We touched on it in Question Period the other day.

Four schools divisions, Fort Garry, Morris-Macdonald, St. James-Assiniboia and Interlake, have amalgamated their resources and have developed an Internet-based alternative instructional environment called InForM Net. This program will offer 20 courses on line by September 2001 and is available to all students in Manitoba. Affordable access to these courses is especially important to rural school divisions.

I know, Mr. Chair, that we brought this question to Question Period. However, it was not clear at that time whether this minister and this Government was committed to allowing these four school divisions to maintain their courses and indeed to have brought forth these affordable courses to the students of Manitoba. It is my understanding that the NDP government's position to date is that this Government would prefer to buy the courses from InForM Net and the department would supply them to other school divisions. This minister has stated that he wants divisions to have local autonomy.

Apparently, it is my understanding that this Government has offered \$55,000 for 14 courses that in actual fact have cost \$230,000 to develop. I understand the Government justifies the costs by saying they will have to make adjustments to the courses. Even if the present government

supplies the courses, technical support and training free to divisions, it will still cost \$10,000 to operate one course. Small divisions cannot afford this cost, and their students will not have access to the service or may have access to a limited number of the courses.

Currently, 125 high school students, currently 125 have less than 125 courses available to them. It is significant, I understand, that the minister will be meeting with these shareholders in Fort Garry, Morris-Macdonald, St. James-Assiniboia and Interlake to further discuss this InForM Net course development.

Could the minister please update the members on this side of the House what the Government's position is regarding this InForM Net initiative? Is the minister going to allow these four school divisions to keep the courses and keep administering them, or is the minister going to endeavour to take over the courses and have them subsidized and delivered through Manitoba Education, Training and Youth? Could the minister please advise this House as to what this Government's intent is in this area?

**Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth):** Mr. Chairperson, we did discuss InForM Net in various technologically based course delivery during the Estimates process. We had quite a thorough discussion in Estimates with regard to the four partners of InForM Net, as well as, I believe, 17 was the number—I may be wrong. It may be 13 or 14 other divisions that are currently undertaking similar initiatives.

I have no plans to take over "InForM Net." I think that the leadership that the four divisions have shown in this regard is very laudable, and I thank them for their leadership in that endeavour. There is no intent to take over or consideration, frankly, to take over InForM Net.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, I want to commend the minister for doing this and approaching these four divisions in this manner. Since this was discussed in Estimates, there has been progress made, and I want to thank the minister for that. So I will go on to my next question.

Last year at this time the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba wrote to every MLA

with concerns about The Teachers' Pensions Act. The Government heard the concerns to a limited extent and retired teachers did receive a 2% pension adjustment retroactive to July 1, 2000. This was a one-year solution and this was greatly appreciated by the retired teachers, but there is a need to secure long-term provisions.

It has to be clearly outlined to this House how indexing actually affects a pension. It is difficult to project 10, 20 or 30 years into the future and to know how much teachers' pensions will be when they arrive in their 70s, 80s or 90s. To better understand how this works, imagine living on the salary you received 20 or 30 years ago, Mr. Chair. Retired teachers have had some years of adequate adjustments to their pensions. However, unless the pension adjustment account is improved those adjustments will now either be non-existent, as would have been the case last year without government intervention, or inadequate, as is the case this year. So continued attention to this particular aspect of the retired teachers' pension is very important.

In the late '70s, when the present pension legislation was written for both teachers and civil servants, the priorities of both groups were taken into consideration. I am saying this, Mr. Chair, to give some background because I do not want this to be a political discussion. I want the facts to speak for themselves and have members on the opposite side of the House and the present Minister of Education to analyze the facts in a way that will be both helpful to the retired teachers and to the teachers going into the profession at this time.

In the late '70s, teachers expressed their desire for a pension adjustment that would reflect the increase in the Canadian consumer price index each year. They were prepared to make higher contributions to their pension plan and to remove the disability coverage. Civil service employees had other priorities. Thus, the Civil Service Superannuation Plan was written to reflect these differences. To change the teachers' pension legislation so that it no longer reflects the possibility of a full pension adjustment based on Canada's consumer price index changes the basic premise under which this legislation was originally written.

\* (14:50)

Mr. Chair, the retired teachers believe this priority has not changed as far as teachers are concerned. They know full well what will happen to their standard of living if they consistently receive less than a full COLA. When the pension adjustment account was established, it was considered prudent that it should be allocated earnings on its funds on the basis of what is earned by only the fixed return portion of TRAF investments. At that time it was felt this would be more secure than basing them on the whole TRAF portfolio.

As we go into the year 2001, it is clear the situation has changed in that the overall fund is doing better than the so-called fixed return portion and that this portion is now being valued at its market value, instead of what those bonds or mortgages cost when purchased. Clearly then the game plan has changed because teachers who have spent years dedicated to the teaching profession and who have clearly tried to enter into the retired teachers' pension plan entered into it with the best of expectations and entered into it with a clear analysis of what they had to face in the '70s. However, as I reiterated a little earlier, Mr. Chair, times have changed. The return on the entire TRAF portfolio has been excellent. There is no longer any rationale for the original scheme, and retired teachers believe that the PAA should share in the overall gains.

This letter to the MLAs and the different delegations that have come in to see members on both sides of the House have asked that legislation be changed to reflect this economic change. Another possibility that was presented was to use some of the present actuarial surplus and perhaps any future surpluses to bolster the PAA.

Mr. Chair, the retired teachers have noted that more than 60 percent of these surplus monies are a result of retired teachers' contributions to the fund. Retired teachers in the year 2001 believe they should have a voice in how these fund monies are distributed because the times have changed; for example, whether to provide COLAs or to improve benefits in the basic plan.

The problem now, Mr. Chair, is that July is fast approaching, and the welfare of over 7000

retired teachers is presently at stake. We are now, I believe, the 18th of June, and so they have new challenges facing them into the summer months. The perceived preference of the present government seems to be to make the payment of adjustments similar to those in the superannuation pension for civil servants; for example, limited to two-thirds of the change in the CPI. The retired teachers would like to work with Government to find a way to establish an equitable formula to provide annually the possibility of a full COLA to the province's retired teachers.

Mr. Chair, what I am asking this Minister of Education is: Is his Government and is this minister willing to work in a timely fashion with the retired teachers to find a way to establish this equitable formula and to bring the legislation up to date to the year 2001, to meet with the concerns that the retired teachers have in terms of their request to receive a full COLA?

**Mr. Caldwell:** The department and myself have been working assiduously with the retired teachers since coming to office 20 months ago. The member makes reference to the progress we made last year. In fact, we have a bill before the Legislature right now that deals with some of the issues around teacher pensions in the province.

We will continue to work with the teachers and retired teachers to have a long-term solution to this issue which is of some concern to retired teachers. In fact, the middle of last week, I met with the Retired Teachers' Association's Peggy Prendergast, Murray Smith and others to discuss some of the very questions the member is raising right now.

We will continue to work with retired teachers and the Manitoba Teachers' Society, in particular, to achieve a long-term solution, but it is something that has been active on my desk for the 20 months since being appointed minister.

**Mrs. Smith:** It is noted that the bill, Bill 18, has been introduced, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act, and clearly, Mr. Chair, there are parts of it that are missing in relation to the COLA. I will note in this Chamber today that the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) promised in writing on June 21, 1999, that his Government

would assist TRAF in implementing a new governance structure.

This new governance structure has not been put in place. My question to the Minister of Education is: Do the Minister of Education and the present government intend to implement a new governance structure, as this minister's leader promised in writing on June 21, 1999?

**Mr. Caldwell:** That is one of the issues under active discussion right now.

**Mrs. Smith:** In all due respect, the First Minister (Mr. Doer) has stated quite clearly in this Chamber that "a promise made is a promise kept." This was an election promise that was made by the NDP government.

I know that clearly it is quite easy to say, well, it is a work in process and we will come at this in a timely manner. It seemed on June 21, 1999, that members opposite had already arrived at a decision. This was a promise made. As the present First Minister says, a promise made is a promise kept. It is not acceptable to hear on June 18, 2001, that nothing has happened and the work is in process. Could this minister be more concise in terms of whether or not this promise made by the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) and this promise made in writing June 21, 1999 will be carried through or are we going to get another vague answer?

**Mr. Caldwell:** I did not detect anything vague about the fact that we are working with the stakeholders to achieve success in that commitment, and we will continue to do so. I think the member is quite right. In stark contrast to members opposite during 12 years, this Government believes a commitment made is a commitment kept.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, could the member opposite, the Minister of Education, please outline what steps and what plan he has in putting a new governance structure together? Clearly, as I asked two times before, the minister had said that he and the members opposite were working to assist TRAF in implementing a new governance structure. This was a promise made. So is the minister now saying that this promise will be kept for the retired teachers, or is the

minister saying that they are looking at the situation?

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Caldwell:** The minister is saying that we are working to have a solution to this issue, which would mean a different government structure.

**Mrs. Smith:** Could the minister advise members on this side of the House when this new government structure is likely to be in place?

**Mr. Caldwell:** I expect that we will have a new government structure in place when we have consensus from the major stakeholders to TRAF. We wanted to ensure that we have concurrence between parties to this particular issue. We are very, very much further along in this process than we have been in the province of Manitoba at any other time in our history as a province, in the history of TRAF. I expect that we will be able to conclude this issue at some point in the not too distant future.

**Mrs. Smith:** Could the minister please advise the House, Mr. Chair, as to who the other stakeholders are? It was my understanding that it was the retired teachers, the Minister of Education and Manitoba Education and Training personnel, I would assume, but could he outline who the specific stakeholders are in this initiative?

**Mr. Caldwell:** In addition to those mentioned by the Member for Fort Garry, the Manitoba Teachers' Society has been in active consultation with this and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees has indicated an interest in the this issue as well.

I do not want to allow the issue to linger unresolved forever. I do not want to allow this issue to remain unresolved for much longer. I do, in addition, want to have this issue resolved in a way that fundamentally respects retired teachers, that fundamentally acknowledges their primary interest in this matter, above and beyond all other parties, I might add. We are working towards an expeditious resolution to the governance issue.

As I said earlier, there has been more progress made on this file in the last 20 months than there has been in the last 20 years.

**Mrs. Smith:** Could the minister give a more concise time line? It is good to hear that he is working on this promise. From what I am hearing him saying, the minister opposite is giving the impression that a new governance model will be in place that will allow for a full COLA to come to the retired teachers.

Mr. Chair, could the minister clarify this? Is this correct, or am I misreading his inferences?

**Mr. Caldwell:** We do want to be expeditious in resolving the governance issue and that is what we are working towards.

**Mrs. Smith:** Could this minister please outline the time line when we can expect some concrete information coming forward for the retired teachers?

**Mr. Caldwell:** If I were to issue edicts and directives, we could have a time line because it would be something that I dictated. This is not the case. We are engaged in a dialogue. Due to the dynamic of dialogue and consultation and seeking consensus, obviously firm time lines are not possible.

I know that all parties are working and thinking about this issue very carefully and with a degree of seriousness, I think, as befits an issue of such significance, particularly to retired teachers, as I mentioned earlier. The time line would be one that responds expeditiously within the context of dialogue and consultation. I have made it a practice not to hypothesize, I suppose, about such things, other than to say we are working on this issue assiduously. I know that retired teachers, in particular, are concerned that this file progress expeditiously.

**Mrs. Smith:** So I can assume, Mr. Chair, from the minister's answer that when the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) promised in writing on June 21, 1999 that his Government would assist TRAF in implementing a new governance structure, and when this minister has said quite clearly today that they are working on a new governance structure, it has been 1999, the year

2000, we are in 2001, there have been quite a number of months that have gone by that have given the minister with his staff time to take a very close look and work with the retired teachers, and I do not think it is unseemly to be asking the minister what the general time line would be. Does the minister expect this would be implemented before the next election? Within the next year? Within the next six months.

**Mr. Caldwell:** I think all parties to this want to deal with it expeditiously. We have been working assiduously on this file for the past 20 months. We have made some considerable progress regarding teacher pensions.

We do have a bill before the Legislature right now on this matter, so we are making active progress, but, like the Member for Fort Garry, I do want to act on this with both due diligence and in an expeditious manner.

**Mrs. Smith:** I will give the minister a few minutes. After those blusterous sneezes, he probably needs a bit of Kleenex. At least I hope he does.

In August of 2000, the present Government of Manitoba passed legislation to allow current and former public school teachers who are not already receiving a pension to purchase periods of maternity leave for pensionable service. Teachers who take maternity leave in the future will also have the option to purchase periods of that leave for pension purposes. However, Mr. Chair, teachers who retired on or before July 31, 2000, were not provided this option. Many of these retired teachers tell members on this side of the House that they were forced to take full-year leaves of absence or even resign their positions when they became pregnant because maternity leave was seen at that time as a disruption in the workplace.

To deprive these teachers, Mr. Chair, of the option to purchase maternity leave for pension purposes seems to these retired teachers to penalize them a second time. This concern came from a teacher who has spent a lot of time contributing to the teaching profession. This is from a teacher who has always been interested in the welfare of students and teachers, and I have heard this from other teachers, as well, who have

retired. It is not just this one individual. This is why I am bringing this issue up during concurrence for discussion with the Minister of Education.

Could the members opposite and, in particular, the Minister of Education please comment on this discrepancy, where teachers who have retired and have been in the profession for years have a concern about not being provided with the option to do this?

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Caldwell:** The Member for Fort Garry makes reference to a specific case. If she would provide me with information on the case, I will certainly have the department look into it.

**Mrs. Smith:** I will do that. This letter was forwarded to the First Minister (Mr. Doer), and I will make sure the Minister of Education has a copy.

In reference to this being one case, Mr. Chair, I have to reiterate that I have heard this concern on several occasions from different teachers who have been retired and have been in the profession for a number of years. I get many, many letters, but this one, in particular, I decided today in concurrence to bring it forward because of the different times I have heard this same concern. Some of these retired teachers are not meaning to take away from teachers who have the option to purchase periods of maternity leave for pensionable service. They just want to be able to have that same opportunity, and they feel quite honestly that it is an inequity. I have had calls on it. I have had personal meetings on it with different teachers. This particular teacher, I will provide a copy of the written concern for the minister's perusal, and if the minister could get back to me on this I would really appreciate it.

Mr. Chair, I also have another question on another matter. I have been waiting considerable days for a spreadsheet and a briefing note on Bill 18. The minister has reassured me that I will have that spreadsheet and the briefing note. The request was originally made to his office roughly three weeks ago and it was via phone call. Then I brought it up with the minister on several occasions since then. I believe the minister has

kept reassuring me that briefing note and that spreadsheet would arrive on Bill 18, which as we all know is the bill dealing with teachers' pensions.

Could the minister please update me as to when the spreadsheet and the briefing note will come regarding Bill 18, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act? Thank you.

**Mr. Caldwell:** I have staff preparing a spreadsheet on this for the member opposite, and I apologize that it has not come forth sooner. I did get a note from the member earlier today during Question Period, and I have sent that on to staff. So I am hopeful that something will arrive here shortly.

**Mrs. Smith:** I thank the minister for that. So I am hoping before concurrence ends today that we will be able to get that briefing note and that spreadsheet, so we can continue on with Bill 18.

There is another matter that I wanted to bring forward in concurrence. Well, there are several matters. The next one I will go to is the one, first of all, concerning Mountbatten School. It is my understanding the minister has received a letter from the Mountbatten parents. They have quite a concern for their school. This letter contains information for the Minister of Education. In this letter, just to give you a background, because this letter in fact was written June 13, and they were very careful to have the letter arrive immediately at the minister's office.

The parents of Mountbatten School have had a grave concern about losing their school and about this particular school closing. There have been public meetings. I was at a school board meeting last week with the Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) listening to parents' concerns about their school and about procedures that have taken place that have been less than what these parents perceive to be adequate. In this letter, the parents said that it was the intent of the St. Vital School Board of Trustees to appeal the PSFB's decision regarding the Mountbatten School facility, and they reiterated how the parents of Mountbatten School brought forward concerns with respect to comments the minister had made and statements

found in the June 4 Hansard. The board of trustees of St. Vital School Division reviewed the transcript and has requested clarification of a number of items found in this Hansard for them to fully understand the situation before submitting the formal appeal on this school. Based on the June 4 Hansard transcripts, the PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for the Mountbatten project over two years. Had that been done, Mountbatten School would not have been put under review.

With those funds, the St. Vital School Division would have maintained the Mountbatten School as a viable educational facility. However, the parents are in the situation now, and they have outlined this in a letter, where the parents have to respond to the questions of the Mountbatten community regarding the minister's comments made on June 4 in the Hansard transcript. Therefore, the minister was asked by the parents to clarify some of his answers.

I would like to bring forward at concurrence the concerns that came forward on the June 4 Hansard that the parents of that school district are troubled about. In the June 4 Hansard, the minister identified that \$350,000 was requested in the PSFB's 2000-2001 capital budget for the Mountbatten School. Furthermore, the Hansard indicated that sketch plans for the Mountbatten project were submitted to the PSFB by the St. Vital School Division.

The cost of repairs and replacement of portables were in the range of \$475,000. Replacing the 7214 square feet of the school was in the range of \$900,000. Also, on April 7, 2000, the St. Vital School Division received a letter from the PSFB which quoted the following motion, and I quote from the parents' letter, "that the St. Vital School Division No. 6 be authorized to hire a consultant to design the plans for an upgrading renovation project at the Mountbatten School as per the following terms and conditions."

As per the conditions outlined in the letter, our consultants developed sketch plans and related cost estimates that were then forwarded to the Public Schools Finance Board for consideration. Now the R Consultants were the

consultants the parents had put together, and the amount of the work identified was \$267,000. Now, according to the information in Hansard, the parents have advised me that the PSFB advised this minister that this amount was \$475,000 for repairs and replacements at Mountbatten School. It seems that neither the board of trustees nor administration were informed of that amount.

\* (15:20)

The parents would like to know how the \$475,000 estimate was determined. The parents respectfully requested that this minister ask the PSFB to provide the board of trustees with the documentation that would indicate how they arrived at the estimate of \$475,000. This is of grave concern to the parents of Mountbatten School, a school that they consider to be very viable and a school that they consider integral to the development of the community. Could the minister please comment on how the PSFB documented this estimate of \$475,000?

**Mr. Caldwell:** The Public Schools Finance Board, as the member knows, has analysts that conduct engineering and architectural reports for the Public Schools Finance Board to assist them in their deliberations about capital infrastructure expenditures undertaken in the schools of the province of Manitoba. That is a process that has been in place for some decades. It is a process that I respect, and it is a process that serves the public school system very well.

**Mrs. Smith:** I believe, Mr. Chair, that the minister has not even come close to answering the question. I would ask that the minister please describe the process to me so members on this side of the House are clear how that process occurs.

**Mr. Caldwell:** Well, Mr. Chairman, it occurs the same way it has occurred for decades. The individual school divisions make requests of the Public Schools Finance Board for capital projects within their school division. They are generally prioritized by school divisions when they go forth to the Public Schools Finance Board for that individual division. The Public Schools Finance Board then places the requests from the 54 school divisions and districts in the

province and prioritizes capital needs where they may exist from the entire list submitted by individual school divisions.

This year there were some \$76 million allocated to Public Schools Finance Board usage, \$45 million in new money for this year and \$31 million for projects underway, that represented the largest capital investment in the public school system in the province of Manitoba's history. Having said that, there are a great many stresses and strains on the system, a lot of deferred infrastructure repairs, about a quarter of a billion worth indeed left as a legacy by members opposite. So there is a pretty significant challenge in the allocation of resources, given the large capital deficits that exist. So the process is, and it is one I respect, school divisions make their priorities, they submit their request to the Public Schools Finance Board, the Public Schools Finance Board assesses those priorities against the capital needs in the entire system in Manitoba, and funds are distributed accordingly.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, my question to the minister, I was trying to give the minister the background, because I know the minister receives a lot of questions. Forgive me for taking the time to do that, but I felt it was unfair to ask the minister this question without reminding him of the contents of this letter.

My question to the minister is: The parents want to know the process for determining the \$475,000 estimate. They would like the PSFB and the minister's office to provide the St. Vital School Division with the documentation indicating how the estimate of \$475,000 was arrived at.

**Mr. Caldwell:** That task is charged to the Public Schools Finance Board. As I said earlier, the Public Schools Finance Board uses the services of a number of analysts, engineers, architects, technicians, and so forth, to evaluate projects before projects are either rejected or approved. Generally that is the process that has taken place for a number of decades.

**Mrs. Smith:** Clearly, Mr. Chair, the problem is that the parent group, the parents of Mountbatten School and the community got together and also identified the cost of the work with professionals

and came back with \$267,000 as opposed to the \$475,000 estimate that was determined by the PSFB. They carefully went over what was wrong with the structure of Mountbatten School, the kinds of improvements. They matched it with the kind of improvements that were required.

The quandary, the questions that these parents have are when the parents' consultants develop sketch plans and related cost estimates that were forwarded to the Public Schools Finance Board. Could the minister please inform this side of the House if, in fact, their estimate came back \$267,000? Could the minister please clarify why the estimate would be so much higher, \$475,000, from the PSFB?

**Mr. Caldwell:** I guess I should start my answer to say fundamentally that the process is between school divisions and the Public Schools Finance Board, not between parent groups and the Schools Finance Board. As I advised the parents I met with some weeks ago, the protocols in place are long established, they are respected, or previously were by all members of the House at least. They certainly have served the test of time in this province in terms of allocating precious resources to areas of the greatest need in the public education system.

I advised the parents to meet with the St. Vital School Division again to discuss the issues they had, the questions they had vis-à-vis the submission made to the Public Schools Finance Board and to work with their school division so that the school division itself, as is proper, could continue its discourse with the Public Schools Finance Board.

So it is important to not politicize these issues but to respect processes that have been of long-standing utility to the public school system in the province of Manitoba. That is a process that places these decisions and discussions between elected officials, that is, the school divisions in question and the Public Schools Finance Board, so that there is not this politicization that can often lead to very poor decisions being made.

Having said that, Mr. Chairperson, it is a very active parent group in Mountbatten which



is very, very good. I think having parents fundamentally and passionately interested in the health and well-being of the public school system is a real strength and a real asset. I certainly appreciate parental involvement in the public school system.

I have no, and I do not think I should have, information one way or the other as to why estimates are higher or lower, depending on contract. I know, as a city councillor for eight years in Brandon, I certainly had a lot of tender bids that were approved by my colleagues and myself in the Brandon City Council with wildly different numbers put forth.

So I think that is just the nature of the game. I think any of us who have ever tendered any project know that what comes in from that tender process is often very disparate.

\* (15:30)

**Mrs. Smith:** It should be pointed out that these wildly different numbers could cause a school to stay open or a school to close. The parent groups are not taking on themselves anything. I told the minister and members opposite, Mr. Chair, that on April 7, 2000, the St. Vital School Division received a letter from the PSFB which quoted the following motion: That the St. Vital School Division No. 6 be authorized to hire a consultant to design the plans for an upgrading renovation project at the Mountbatten School as per the following terms and conditions.

Now, as per the conditions outlined in the letter, the consultants developed sketch plans and related cost estimates that were forwarded to the Public Schools Finance Board for consideration. The amount of the work was \$267,000. So, clearly, Mr. Chair, the parents did not take anything on themselves. It was done in a very respectful way as outlined by the PSFB.

According to the information in Hansard, the PSFB advised the minister that the amount was not \$267,000, but it was \$475,000, thus causing the school to close.

Now, neither the board of trustees in St. Vital nor the administration were even informed of the \$475,000. Clearly, this Government has to

be accountable. Members opposite have to be accountable for the well-being of the students and accountable for misinformation given out. This is why the parents, Mr. Chair, are requesting to know how the \$475,000 estimate was determined. They are just respectfully requesting, because it means that their school will close, and the St. Vital School Board could not come up with an answer. I think that this minister and members opposite have always stated that they are very open and collaborative. So clearly, in a very respectful manner, I am asking the minister who is in charge of the education and the finances of the schools—

**An Honourable Member:** You embarrass me stalling like this, Joy.

**Mrs. Smith:**—all across Manitoba, and I think that clearly—excuse me, Mr.—

**An Honourable Member:** Why do you not get your act together so you can debate bills?

**Mrs. Smith:** Excuse me?

Mr. Chair, I am reluctant to say anything about the comment from the member from Fort Rouge. However, it is totally inappropriate. When asking questions concerning the education of the students in Manitoba, I am surprised.

I would like to disregard that rude comment, and I would like to go on with the Minister of Education asking him a very clear question. Having said that, I wish the Minister of Education and the member from Fort Rouge would stop their conversations and answer this very important question for community and people in St. Vital who are in fear of losing their schools. Could you answer the question why a \$475,000 estimate was determined, why the St. Vital School Division went ahead and hired a consultant to design the plans who came up with \$267,000 instead of the \$475,000? Could we have an answer to that question?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairperson, the process that should be followed here, as it has been followed for decades, is that the school division makes requests to the Public Schools Finance Board, and that is where the process begins and ends. I, obviously, made a sad error in judgment in

putting onto the record in an earlier session numbers that have obviously been used to great political purpose by the members for Fort Garry and Seine River in this regard.

I, too, have been hearing a lot of information coming out of St. Vital School Division on this particular matter, none of it very flattering. For the integrity of a process that is supposed to be above politics, a lot of it being highly politicized by the members for Seine River and Fort Garry, as is their right as politicians to undertake those sorts of shenanigans. But the process is one that has integrity. It is one that is of long standing. It involves the school division making priorities and then transmitting those priorities onto the Public Schools Finance Board. I believe that serves the best interest of the public school system.

With regard to many of the questions that the member raises, I understand that both the school board and the Public Schools Finance Board have made themselves available for further discussion on that matter. I respect that, and I believe that is the course that should be followed. I think the best solutions are ones that are driven from community discussion. Most of the material that gets raised in this House has very little purpose other than partisanship.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, clearly, this letter is from Bob Bruce, the chair, the board of trustees, asking the question. The school board is the one that made this letter available to the public and to members on this side of the House. Can the school board not ask and the parents not question why the cost of the repairs coming back from PSFB was \$475,000 instead of the \$267,000 that the school board received, and all the processes have been gone through very, very well. In fact, the request came from PSFB authorizing St. Vital School Division to hire a consultant to design the plans for the upgrading and renovation project at Mountbatten School.

Mr. Chair, these parents do not want their school to close. What I am hearing from across the House are rude remarks and questioning whether or not this is a political ploy. Can this House not be open enough and members opposite not be open enough to answer the question that the St. Vital School Board and the parents have?

This is a letter from both of those parties, the parents and the school board working together. They are concerned about the closing of the school. Does the minister know, Mr. Chair, why these estimates would be so far out, over a \$200,000 difference?

If he does not know, if members opposite do not know, I suggest that they give the answers in a public manner to the school board and to the parents asking the questions. This is what democracy is all about. Could the minister please answer the question?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chair, I had earlier answered—half an hour ago, I suppose, I referred to the fact that estimates for tendered projects often come in with wildly different numbers. That certainly has been my experience in the many years I have served in public office, so I expect that that is indeed what has occurred in this particular situation as well. Tenders are put out; assessments are done. Oftentimes they are very significant numbers.

In fact, at my own home in Brandon, I undertook some renovations a few years ago that were significantly less than the hundreds of thousands of dollars that we are talking here, but in terms of percentages, the variances were 25 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent. So we have a variance of 50 percent here. That is within the realm of my experience certainly.

So the short answer is I suppose when one undertakes to do renovations, it depends on the contractor. It depends on what is being bid upon, and there is usually a fairly good range. That is why we have a tender process when we undertake these projects.

\* (15:40)

With regard to the details of the specific project being Mountbatten School, I do respect the process that has served this province very well in terms of the sound delivery of capital dollars to infrastructure renewal, and that is a process whereby school divisions prioritize; they make requests to the Public Schools Finance Board, and the Public School Finance Board makes decisions within the limits of the funding available.

As I said, Mr. Chairperson, this year this Government made available \$76.6 million, the largest capital funding injection for the public school system in the history of the province. In 2000-2001, this Government put in \$51.2 million, the second largest capital investment in the history of the province.

In the last 20 months, Mr. Chairperson, this Government has put in \$127.8 million. If there is a reason for the capital deficit in the system, it has to do with the fact that in 1993-94 the members opposite put in \$18.5 million. In 1994-95, \$18.3; '95-96, \$23.7. One of our announcements in the last number of months dwarfs those figures.

So, in fact, people in the province of Manitoba are investing at historic levels in the capital infrastructure of our schools, and the longer that we talk about this and the more we talk about it, the more opportunity I have to place into contrast the record of this Government, a record of investment, a record of support for the public school system in the province, and the sorry legacy of ruin left by members opposite.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, clearly this minister is making all the political statements. This is a letter before me written by the St. Vital School Board in collaboration with the parents of St. Vital who are concerned about their school closing.

They have gone through the whole process, Mr. Chair. They have done everything they can. The PSFB asked them, authorized the St. Vital School Division, to hire a consultant to design plans for the upgrading and renovation project at Mountbatten School; then, all of a sudden, they find out that their consultants in St. Vital came back with a number that was \$267,000—much different than the \$475,000 that originally came from PSFB.

This board, these parents are asking the minister how the \$475,000 estimate was determined. Instead of the minister calling down members on this side of the House because we have got this public letter that has been distributed to all trustees and all parents and the district because members on this side of the

House are bringing it to concurrence, clearly what is this minister hiding? Does this minister know the answers? The same thing, a process is in place.

Well, ladies and gentlemen and members of this Legislature, the parents and St. Vital School Division have gone through that process, and now they are going back to the Minister of Education to ask the question. The Minister of Education is saying: I do not have the answers. The parents of St. Vital School Division have gone through the process. This is a letter from those people, and I am asking in concurrence, in lieu of rude remarks from members across the House, why can the minister not answer the question? They respectfully request, and I would say that these parents and school board deserve the same kind of respect. They say, quote: we respectfully request that you ask the PSFB to provide our board of trustees with documentation that would indicate how they arrived at the estimate of \$475,000. As a result of this estimate, their school closes. Can the minister answer this question? Does he know?

**Mr. Caldwell:** You know, it is an interesting issue that we have here before us. We have a situation obviously in an individual school that is causing a lot of grief for citizens and parents in particular, a lot of frustration. The issue has been politicized by members opposite by bringing it to the floor. I do not choose to enter those waters because it would cause the integrity of the system to be undermined. I understand the political points to be garnered by this issue. It is not something that I particularly enjoy. In fact, I find it quite distasteful that this is occurring, but I do understand why it is occurring because I understand politics.

The question about the Estimates I believe I have answered a number of times, in terms of how engineers, architects, technicians evaluate things. Oftentimes you get widely differing views in Estimates when you ask the same question of a number of contractors. That is, frankly, common sense. The school board will be meeting with the Public Schools Finance Board on this matter. The member opposite probably knows that. I expect she does. In fact, the letter that is being quoted from, I have no knowledge of. The member has not seen fit to

table it, so I do not know exactly what she is referring to in terms of a joint letter from a parent group and the school board. I certainly would be interested in seeing this joint letter, but that is for curiosity, frankly, more than anything else. I suppose, if it is addressed to me, I will reply in kind, but the purview of this matter is and has been and will remain in the future one that involves school divisions making priorities and making those requests based upon those priorities to the Public Schools Finance Board for the allocation of funds.

System-wide, not just in Mountbatten School but system-wide, there is a huge capital deficit that was inherited by this Government due to the cutbacks by the members opposite for operating, for capital, indeed system-wide for the public school system. This Government is investing at historic rates, the largest in Manitoba's history, to rectify this deficit in the public school system, both capital deficit and operating deficit. We will continue to do so. We do believe in investing in education. We also believe in the integrity of a process that does not politicize these issues but rather places them within the context of locally elected officials at the school division level making requests to the Public Schools Finance Board for prioritized investment for capital infrastructure. That is the long and the short of it.

It is certainly the message that I transmitted to the parents at Mountbatten School. I empathized with the challenges that they are facing right now in this particular issue. I did give them some advice in terms of the process, in terms of what they could do to involve themselves more fully in the process, that is, discussing this matter with their school division, with their trustees. I did advise them that the process for school closure is a process that involves 20 months, as members opposite know.

There are a litany of schools that were closed down during the 12-year reign of members opposite using exactly the same process that we are using in this instance. I do appreciate, as I said, the politicization of the issue. As a politician myself, I understand how that game is played. I do find it distasteful, however, Mr. Chair.

As the Minister responsible for Education I will say that we will, as a government, continue

to invest in the public school system of the province. We will continue to place faith in school divisions and the locally elected trustees in their decision making as to their priorities for their local divisions. We will continue to place faith in the Public Schools Finance Board in allocating resources province-wide with the best interests of Manitoba's children in the school system in Manitoba placed first.

\* (15:50)

**Mrs. Smith:** It is a travesty what is happening this afternoon when the minister cannot answer the questions put to him and members opposite support his lack of knowledge in this area. To clarify the record, the minister did not seem to understand that I was saying that this was a letter written by Bob Bruce, the chair of the board of trustees, following a public meeting and much consultation with the parents.

We believe on this side of the House that the St. Vital School Board is trying very hard to work in very close collaboration both with the parents and with the members of the community and with this minister. This is a letter given to the minister, who says he has not seen. It is dated June 13. I assumed the minister had seen it. I would be very, very happy to table it here in the House. I will get him some copies and personally make sure it is in his office. That is why I went through the first part of the letter, to make sure the honourable minister knew the contents of the letter, because I know he does get a lot of letters in his daily duties.

It is regrettable that, when this minister does not have the answers, he cannot come clean and just say: I do not have the answers; I will check it out. It is regrettable that he has to blame members on this other side of the House for asking questions. These questions came from a letter that is very important to St. Vital School Division.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. A point of order being raised.

#### Point of Order

**Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing):** Mr. Chair, according to our

rules, when a member quotes from a letter, the date of the letter has been quoted, the subject of the letter has been quoted, she must table it at this time. So I would like to ask you if you would instruct her to comply with our rules and to table a letter forthwith.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Our Rule 37 says: "Where in a debate a Member quotes from a private letter, any other Member may require the Member who quoted from the letter to table the letter from which the Member quoted but this rule does not alter any rule or practice of the House relating to the tabling of documents other than private letters." If the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) had quoted from the letter, she has the obligation to table it. If she has not quoted from the letter, but merely made reference to the existence of the letter and has not quoted from the letter, she is not obligated to table it. That is the rule.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, I would be very happy to table it. This was not a personal letter. This was a letter to the Honourable Drew Caldwell, Minister of Education, and this was a letter that was written to the honourable minister. I received a copy of it through people wanting me to have a copy of it. I would be very happy to table it. I ask that the appropriate copies be made.

**Mr. Chairperson:** So is it the decision of the Member for Fort Garry to table the letter?

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, I would be very happy to give a new copy of the letter to the Minister of Education that was written to him, to the members opposite, so the minister is well aware of the information in the letter.

\* \* \*

**Mrs. Smith:** Having said that, I will continue with the questioning.

Could the minister please advise this House as to why there was such a difference in the estimates? Will the parents and the school board be provided with the documentation of the estimates that the PSFB prepared?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairperson, five contractors asked to tender or asked to estimate on a project,

in my experience, tends to have five different estimates. I have said this in response to this question a number of times. My expectation is that, when an analysis is done on any capital project, the technicians, engineers, architects involved in making that estimation have differing views and differing understandings of work required. Therefore, you generally end up with tender bids or estimates that have some differences between them. I have never seen in my life where tender bids or estimates come in and the same number. If you have five different people providing valuations, you generally have five different valuations presented. In my experience, there has been wildly differing amounts for different projects that I have seen cross over my desk in the last 10 years as a publicly elected official.

So to suggest that there is something sinister or to have the innuendo that somehow something is being valued out of the park for some hypothetical conspiracy is the height of absurdity. My expectation is that the estimates that were made involved exactly the same processes that estimates involve whenever there is a project in any area, whether it is my roof on my house in Brandon or whether it is a particular school project. I would be shocked, frankly, if you had the same number between two different estimators, Mr. Chairperson. So that is my expectation; that is my belief as to what occurred in this matter. It certainly is one that is borne out by my experience in the past, and I think common sense would suggest the same.

Mr. Chairperson, I do have this letter that the member referred to. It is not a joint letter from a parent or a school division. It is a letter to me by Bob Bruce, the chair of the board of trustees of St. Vital School Division, copied to Mr. Ben Zaidman of the Public Schools Finance Board, Diane Whitley of the Mountbatten School parents' association and Sheila Lopushniuk, the Mountbatten School parents' association co-president. I guess Sheila and Diane are co-presidents of the school association, which I suppose begs the question as to how the member opposite got the letter, given that it was addressed to me and only cc'd to three people. Perhaps that is why the member was reticent to table it. Again, this speaks to the politicization, again, of this particular issue and

the undermining of the integrity of the process that does provide for fairness in the allocation of capital resources in the public school system.

Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the member tabling it. I understand her reticence in doing so, but it is clear to me now that this is not a letter, a joint letter by the parent council and the school division. Indeed, it is a letter directly to me from the chair of the board of trustees and not something that involves a number of groups and a publicly circulated letter, as the member indicated. This was a letter directly to me with three cc's, three copies distributed. I do not know why the member would mislead the House in this manner.

\* (16:00)

Again, I will reiterate my distaste for this particular politicization here. It is not one that serves the people of Manitoba or indeed the public school system, indeed the integrity of the public school system very well.

Mr. Chair, the Public Schools Finance Board will continue to meet with the St. Vital School Board and discuss this particular matter with the St. Vital School Board, as is appropriate. I will respect and do respect a process that has had long-standing support from those who inhabit this Chamber. It is a process that provides for fairness. It is a process that provides for responsibility, and it is a process that fundamentally respects the priorities of local school divisions and the priorities of the province as a whole.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, I see the members opposite are very, very upset because there are no answers forthcoming. Clearly, I said quite clearly that at a public meeting the parents and the school board are working in partnership to get some answers. At the public meeting, the joint letter was discussed, saying that the school board said quite clearly in St. Vital that they would pose the questions that the parents had—

**An Honourable Member:** This is a hypothetical letter.

**Mrs. Smith:** —to the Minister of Education, and members opposite are saying these are high-

political letters and high-political issues. These are not—

**An Honourable Member:** Hypothetical.

**Mrs. Smith:** —high-political issues. This is almost—it is unconscionable how governing bodies cannot answer questions.

Let us get back to the letter. This was a letter written by Bob Bruce, the chair of the board of trustees. It was written in collaboration with the Mountbatten School parents' association. It was talked about at the public meeting.

Mr. Chair, it is regrettable that the governing members of this province are shouting across the House, making public comments about the parents, laughing at the letter, stating publicly that it is not a letter written jointly by the parents and the school board. This minister is insinuating and stating quite clearly—

**Mr. Chairperson:** A point of order being raised.

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Caldwell:** The member indicates that members on this side were somehow undermining the parents. There is nothing further from the truth. The member tabled a letter that was written to me by the chair of the St. Vital School Division, from the school division to me, no one else. This is not a joint letter. There is no reflection in the content of this letter whatsoever that says that there has been any divergence from the process that involves the school division to the Public Schools Finance Board with some clarification written to me.

For the member to put on record some of the comments that she is putting on for political partisan purposes is the height of irresponsibility.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith). Would that be on the point of order? I have to rule on the point of order.

Disputes as to facts are not points of order.

\* \* \*

**Mrs. Smith:** Now that the minister knows it was written by the chair of the board, that the letter

was discussed at a public meeting, everybody knew what the questions were. It is our belief on this side of the House that the members of the board in St. Vital and the parents were working in partnership discussing this. Now let us get to the question.

Can the minister assure the school board that you asked the PSFB to provide the board of trustees in St. Vital with the documentation that would indicate how they arrived at the estimate of \$475,000?

**Mr. Caldwell:** It is my understanding the Public Schools Finance Board and the St. Vital School Division will be meeting to discuss this issue. I expect at that time the discussion will lead to the questions that the member asked. That is the proper process that should be followed. This is fundamentally an issue that involves locally elected officials prioritizing their capital needs and making a request to the Public Schools Finance Board, who are charged with distributing resources to meet those needs.

**Mrs. Smith:** The letter also states, and I quote from the letter that has been tabled: It is imperative that we have answers to these questions so that we have a thorough understanding of all the facts pertaining to Mountbatten School in order to prepare our appeal of PSFB's decision. The problem is here it is not as easy as renovating a house, Mr. Chair. We are talking about a school. We are talking about a community. We are talking about parents who are fighting to keep their school open. We are talking about a school board that is trying very hard to work very closely with the parents and the community, are centred around Mountbatten School. They are trying to get the dollars and cents solidified so they can get the proper estimate recorded so they can save their school.

Now, given that PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for the Mountbatten project, would the minister please provide this Assembly with an explanation as to why the \$267,000 the St. Vital School Division requested for repairs and upgrade to the school was denied, or are we just going to get another vague answer?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chair, I am loath to further the politicization of this issue that the member

opposite seems so intent on achieving. We have, in Manitoba, a process that is time honoured, a process that members opposite followed in their time in government, a process that does support the public school system with integrity and not political interference but integrity. I stand by that process. The members opposite stood by it for 12 years when they were in government. It seems convenient in opposition to be pursuing this sort of questioning. With this school, it would never stop.

Every single school would be just determined on political whim. That does not serve the public interest. It does not serve the children of the province of Manitoba. It certainly does not support the taxpayer of the province of Manitoba or serve the taxpayer of the province of Manitoba. Holus-bolus, we would be making decisions based upon who the strongest Cabinet minister was. This is appalling, that that is even to be suggested in this sort of line of questioning. So this minister will not politicize a process that provides for responsible expenditure of resources, provides for responsibility to the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba, responsibility to the children of Manitoba and responsibility in respect for the elected officials in our school divisions. Mr. Chair, we support on this side of the House as members opposite did when they were government. Now that they are in opposition they seem to want political interference, holus-bolus, for pet projects now that they are in opposition, but that is not the way this Government operates. This Government operates with fiscal responsibility, educational responsibility, and will continue to do so.

\* (16:10)

**Mrs. Smith:** The beauty of concurrence is that we can be here a long time. It is not the wish of members on this side of the House to prolong, but what we are going to do is get some answers, and so far we have not got any. The question again, and this is what the school board in St. Vital wants to know and the parents want to know; they are very upset. They also want to know it before summer, because the parents do not know where their kids are going to be bussed too.

It was a very emotional public evening, because the school board is trying to

accommodate and trying to do the best they can to provide in the best possible way for the St. Vital community. Now this letter that we have brought forward in concurrence was a letter that was sent, and I do say it was in collaboration, because I see the school board very open with the parents. I see the parents very open with the school board. I see the school board and the parents trying to work out a conclusion, so the students have some place to go to or the school is kept open, and they dearly want to have the school kept open.

So, given that the PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for Mountbatten project, why was the \$267,000 the St. Vital School Board requested for repair and upgrade denied?

**Mr. Caldwell:** The member opposite outlines a number of things that she sees, but I see the Member for Fort Garry fearmongering. She talks about parents wanting a resolution to this before the summer comes up because there is some fear of where the kids are going to be bussed to next year when the member knows full well that the process for school closure is 20 months, which is a school year and a half.

I have not on my desk as of yet a resolution beginning that 20-month process. There may be, in fact, some decision in that regard from the St. Vital School Division, as is their right, but the member knows that school closures, even if there was a motion passed today requesting the closure of Mountbatten, it is a 20-month process. There is no merit, no truth whatsoever in the comment that the member makes or the innuendo perhaps that the member makes that somehow in September children attending Mountbatten School are going to be going elsewhere. It is a 20-month process.

The member does see a lot, as do I, and what I see is a politicization of a process which I find highly distasteful, and I do see a member frankly putting us all in this House through a process that involves a lot of error, a lot of rhetoric, not much substance. If the member threatens that she will have us here in concurrence for as long as it takes, well so be it. We sat here till the end of August last year, and I did not have any qualms with that. I was back hard at it for the beginning of the school year. Some of my colleagues might disagree. I expect they do.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Caldwell:** Oh no. My colleagues on this side of the House are with me, and I thank my colleagues on this side of the House for that. Perhaps the Member for Fort Garry should talk to some of her colleagues and see if they would like to be out of here for a summer holiday this year. *[interjection]*

One of my colleagues has suggested that they do not feel obliged to be here anyway. I know that we have important bills with substance to deal with in this House, and I note that we have not been doing that. We have been sitting around filibustering in concurrence for the last number of weeks, which is fine. It is a very ironic situation where the Opposition are filibustering so that they can get positions determined in caucus on a bill. We are ready to move forward, and the bills that we put forward on this side of the House, I expect that members opposite may be, sooner or later, ready to do the same thing.

**Mrs. Smith:** The St. Vital School Board and the parents of Mountbatten School need to know answers to these questions. I would like to ask the minister very clearly, given that the PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for the Mountbatten project, could the minister please provide this side of the House with an explanation as to why the \$267,000 the St. Vital School Division requested for repair and upgrade was denied?

**Mr. Caldwell:** As I indicated earlier, I am not going to politicize a process that has some long-standing public support in this province. I know members opposite have been itching to do so. I know in fact some of my remarks made in Hansard have been coming back on this issue to further politicize it. I am not going to engage in that sorry game. I think that we have in Manitoba a process that respects locally elected officials, respects fiscal responsibility, respects educational responsibility. I know that the St. Vital School Division will be meeting with the Public Schools Finance Board to discuss this particular matter. That is the proper place for this discussion to occur, and that is the place where it should occur.

**Mrs. Smith:** It has to be noted, put on record, that parents, when they are notified that a school



will be closed, become very worried exactly about what is going to happen to their community, what is going to happen to their school, what is going to happen to their children. It is not so easy when parents have taken all this time to prepare documentation to work with their local school board, and their local school board is working with them very closely.

It is now the responsibility of the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) to answer questions. That is what concurrence is for. There have been two questions put forward to the minister. The minister has refused to answer them. A third question will be put forward.

If PSFB was prepared to commit \$350,000 to the Mountbatten School project, why was there not direct communication and consultation with the administrative staff at the St. Vital School Board? Because this put the school board in a very bad position.

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairperson, given the erroneous statements by the member opposite with regard to this letter that was tabled earlier today, I am not prepared to take anything the member says with accuracy right now.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, regrettably, the minister is trying to sidestep this issue. I am quoting directly from the letter. If PSFB was prepared to commit \$350,000 to the Mountbatten School project, the St. Vital School Division is requesting and telling the minister it would be helpful for them to know why there was not direct consultation with their administrative staff regarding this possibility. This is not erroneous information. It is directly from the letter, taken from the letter that was written to the Minister of Education (Mr. Caldwell) on June 13. Could the minister please answer this question?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairperson, as this letter was tabled today and as I have seen it today and as it is addressed to me and as I have not responded to Mr. Bruce yet, nor have I had a chance to deliberate over the letter which the member tabled today, portraying it as a joint letter from parents and St. Vital School Division, portraying it as a letter that was made widely public when there was three circulated copies, there has been a number of portrayals. I do not

know where the member quotes from. Looking at the letter as she was speaking, certainly there was a number of points that she touched upon within this letter, but there is certainly no direct quotation that relates to her statements.

I will respond in a reply to Mr. Bruce, the chair of the St. Vital School Division, in due course.

\* (16:20)

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, the quote was taken from the second point on the second page of the letter to the honourable minister. Clearly the minister, without his staff here, does not have answers. I can understand that, I suppose, but when the parents have met with this minister, when we brought this information during Question Period, I would think that the minister would do some homework and get some factual information.

The next factual question I will have which I will draw the minister's attention to is point No. 3. If the PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for over two years for the Mountbatten project, will it now commit to this expenditure?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Well, we continue down the road, Mr. Chairperson, to politicize the deliberations of the Public Schools Finance Board, which is the height of irresponsibility, but not surprising, given the tone of the discussion that we have had in concurrence here. The Public Schools Finance Board will meet with the St. Vital School Division, as is standard process that has taken place over the last number of decades in regard to the allocation of funds for capital infrastructure support to our public school system, and The Public Schools Finance Board in dialogue with the St. Vital School Division will reach some conclusion on this particular matter.

Mr. Chair, it is not a matter that the member opposite is wont to quip about my not doing my homework or not having staff here to discuss this issue. Really, what lies at the root of this particular issue is the Member for Seine River (Mrs. Dacquay) and the Member for Fort Garry wanting to politicize what is a very, very sensitive issue for parents in the St. Vital School

Division, particularly parents in the Mountbatten School area. It is very regrettable that members have decided to undertake this. It is not surprising; I understand the political game and the political reality as faced by the Member for Fort Garry on this matter. She has been my critic for the last 20 months and has achieved quite a record as my critic, so I understand the context within which this discussion is taking place.

But I am not, for the sake of the Member for Fort Garry's desire to further politicize this issue, going to embark upon a further politicization of a process that has integrity, that has respect and that we on this side of the House believe is important and members opposite when they were in government believed was important. So, not to put too fine a point on it, Mr. Chair, I refuse to politicize the expenditures of public school dollars for the sake of the Member for Fort Garry's political agenda. I will repeat my support for a process that removes politics from the decision making for the establishment of new schools and the reconstruction of schools, the infrastructure renewal of the public school system, an infrastructure renewal that we will be engaged in, in government, for eight, twelve, sixteen years, given the mess that was left by members opposite in terms of electrical systems, in terms of heating systems, in terms of plumbing systems, in terms of roofs, in terms of footprints, in terms of separation of walls, in terms of blue mould and mould in walls, in terms of leaking windows, in terms of, generally, a huge infrastructure deficit that exists system-wide.

I am not going to politicize that process. I am going to place my confidence in the wisdom of school divisions to make priority lists for their individual divisions, and I am going to place my confidence in the Public Schools Finance Board to make the appropriate decisions system-wide in what is the best interests of the public school system. So, in terms of the ongoing discussions between the St. Vital School Division and the Public Schools Finance Board, not only on Mountbatten School but other priorities that the St. Vital School Division may have for capital infrastructure renewal, I am going to place my confidence in the processes that have been established and have a long-standing support in this Chamber, and that is one that does not politically interfere with expenditures for

schools. We are not, on this side of the House, going to be developing pet projects for caucus and Cabinet members depending upon the political whims of members of government. We are going to put our faith in and show respect for a process that expends funds in a fiscally responsible manner, in an educationally responsible manner, and one that respects the priorities of this province and not the priorities of individual MLAs.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, this is an issue that has to do with the closing of a school in a community where parents and trustees are taking a second look at what is happening here. It has nothing to do with the PSFB. It has to do with the minister's comments made on June 4 in the Hansard. At the June 5 board meeting trustees received a copy of the June 4 Hansard and, quoting from the letter, at that same meeting parents of Mountbatten School brought forward concerns with respect to the minister's comments and statements found in the June 4 Hansard regarding the position of the Public Schools Finance Board on the matter of Mountbatten School. I am quoting from the chair of the board's letter: The board of trustees of the St. Vital School Division has reviewed these transcripts and at this time requests clarification of a number of items found therein in order for the St. Vital School Division to fully understand the situation before submitting the formal appeal on the PSFB's decision regarding the closing of the Mountbatten School.

So, Mr. Chair, it was this minister's comments made and it was these comments found in the June 4 Hansard that the school division chair, the school board chair, and the parents are requesting clarification on. Based on this June 4 Hansard and the Minister of Education's comments, the PSFB was prepared to set aside \$350,000 for the Mountbatten project over two years. This is putting the St. Vital board in a terrible position, because, had that been done, Mountbatten School would not have been put under review. Now the board and the parents are asking for clarification from this minister to get some answers to those questions. I am taking the questions directly from the letter to get clarification.

Earlier we had talked about the fact that the PSFB had generously sent a letter to the St. Vital

School Division and authorized them to hire a consultant to design the plans for an upgrading renovation project at Mountbatten School. Now, in view of the fact, Mr. Chair, that the St. Vital School Division received that letter directly from the PSFB, the PSFB must have had a lot of respect for the capabilities of St. Vital School Division to come back with a reasonable estimate. The St. Vital School Division did do that and developed sketch plans and related cost estimates and forwarded them to the Public Schools Finance Board for consideration. The amount of work identified was \$267,000.

Now, according to the information found in Hansard, the PSFB advised this minister that this amount was \$475,000 instead of the \$267,000. Neither the board of trustees nor the administration were informed of that amount. I believe the St. Vital School Division board. They are very credible people. They just want to know from this minister how the \$475,000 estimate was determined and are respectfully asking this minister to provide the board of trustees with a documentation from the PSFB to indicate how they arrived at the estimate of \$475,000.

Can the minister answer the question?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Caldwell:** Well, Mr. Chairperson, I think I have answered this question half a dozen times this afternoon. I expect that as is the case when Estimates are undertaken, there are discrepancies between estimators. That has been my experience in every project I have ever been involved with. I expect that was the case here. I will obviously be responding to Mr. Bruce's letter when I get it.

I note that the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) was not copied on this. I wonder if she has had permission from the school board to make this such a highly politicized issue here this afternoon. I do not expect that they would look too favourably on that sort of attack taken by the Member for Fort Garry, but she has elected to do so, as is her prerogative.

I will be responding to Mr. Bruce's letter, as I respond to similar letters on a daily basis. I will

be advising Mr. Bruce, as I have advised the House here today, that I respect a process which basically takes the politics out of this sort of decision making and values the priorities established by individual school divisions and values the determination of the Public Schools Finance Board to address those priorities on a province-wide basis.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr. Chair, I want to reiterate that the process the parents went through and the school board was a very open process. At the public meeting that was held, there was dialogue between the St. Vital School Division board and the parents, and questions were publicly asked. These were the questions that had come up during that discussion and very respectfully the board of trustees and the parents are trying to get an answer because the estimate cost does impact on the closing of the school.

Would this minister acknowledge that when there is a discrepancy in the estimates, that is certainly fair for school divisions and parents—and they do not work outside of each other—that school board works very closely with the parents at Mountbatten School, and I commend the school board for that. Having said that, does the minister not think it is very reasonable when the school closing is at risk to be able to come forth with these kinds of answers for the public?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Yes, I think it is reasonable, and I think that is what the school division and the Public Schools Finance Board will be doing.

**Mrs. Smith:** Now, understanding the emotion that the parents feel around the Mountbatten School and all the time and consideration they have put into the education of their children, and considering that the school board is trying to work very closely with the parents—at the public meeting the other night there were direct questions centred around the questions outlined in this letter, it definitely was publicly talked about, and it was agreed that the board of trustees and the parents would try to get these answers.

Now can the minister understand that, because a community is very fearful of losing their school, these are very crucial questions to be answered because of the gap in the Estimates

and the gap numbers, the \$475,000 as opposed to the \$267,000 are very widely known throughout the community, very publicly known. Could the minister commit to getting clear answers for the school board and for the parents so this district will not be in jeopardy?

**Mr. Caldwell:** I fully expect that the Public Schools Finance Board will respond and consider the requests of the St. Vital School Division, as they respond and consider the requests of every school division in this province with equality, without favour or prejudice and respecting the rights of all school divisions, the rights of all Manitobans, respecting the integrity of a process that removes from politics the closures of schools and puts into place a process that involves community involvement, a process that respects the prioritizations of projects put forth by individual school divisions, respects locally elected trustees, respects parents and respects the public school system as a whole.

There are many schools in this province that have challenges in terms of their ongoing viability. In 1996, Sinclair School was closed in Fort La Bosse. David Livingston School was closed in my home constituency of Brandon East. Baker School was closed in Pine Creek. St. Alphonse Elementary School was closed in Mountain School Division. Marsh River School was closed in Red River School Division. The Jameswood was closed in St. James Assiniboia. In 1997, under members opposite again, Kelwood School was closed in Turtle River. Edmund Partridge Junior High School was closed in Seven Oaks. Centennial School was closed in Seven Oaks. McLeod School was closed in River East. In 1998, continuing under members opposite, the Gnadenthal was closed in Garden Valley. Co-operative education programs were closed in Seine River. The Knowles Centre was closed in River East. École H. L. Softley was closed in Norwood.

School closures are something that occurs on a yearly basis. We will not, as a government, politicize the opening and closing of schools for the member opposite's entertainment or her desire to continue speaking through concurrences weeks on end. I have said, and I continue to reiterate right now, I have respect, Mr. Chair, for a process that involves

fundamentally communities and school divisions working with the Public Schools Finance Board for the responsible disposition of funds and the responsible maintenance of capital infrastructure for our public school system. This seeming desire to make political the closures of schools, I frankly find reprehensible.

I said in the House here repeatedly today and when we discussed this earlier in Estimates some weeks ago, I have confidence in the system that has served this province and the taxpayers in this province well over the last number of governments. I understand the politicization of issues for political gain and partisan gain. I find it very distasteful because there are real children and real families who have a considerable stake in this particular school, as do the families and children of the 10 or so schools I just read into the record that were closed under members opposite during the mid to late '90s.

\* (16:40)

I will respond to Mr. Bruce's letter as it was addressed to me. I am sure the member opposite, the member from Fort Garry, if she had such success in getting this letter that was not sent to her, nor did it have a broad distribution, although she did acquire it before I did, which gives me some concern and some pause about the politicization of this particular school closure, but I do understand that political game that is being played by the Member for Fort Garry. I do not have anything to add to it.

I do not think that we should be making political such issues of fundamental community importance. I think we should have a dialogue that is sober, a dialogue that is respectful and a dialogue that does respect a process that has some years of active operation in this House, some years of active operation in the public school system. It is a process that does permit for a 20-month period to elapse between a decision to close a school and that actual closure to take place, as I mentioned in Estimates. Oftentimes schools do not close over that 20-month period. Oftentimes the community rallies around the school or numbers change, and whether it is the Estimates numbers or enrollment trends or so forth, as the analysis proceeds through that 20-month period.

This is a very difficult issue for parents and children of Mountbatten School as school closures are a difficult issue for the parents and children of David Livingston School in my home constituency a number of years ago when it was closed. I do not think it serves any good purpose, however, to politicize these issues. I think it does a far greater disservice in fact to politicize them. I think the process that is in place that provides for prioritization at the local school division level and ongoing discussion with the Public Schools Finance Board around those priorities is a good one.

Mr. Chairperson, that is the process that will continue in this particular project. I will respond to Mr. Bruce's letter in due course. I think that now that I have it in my hand, it is a reasonably well-thought-out letter. I regret that my comments in the June 4 Hansard seem to have caused so much concern. I regret that very much. Once burned, twice shy. I will be thinking twice about articulating such things in the future, when it does lead to a situation in this House that really tends to diminish a process that, as I said, has had long-standing respect in this Chamber and does ensure the integrity of the public school system, the integrity of locally elected officials to prioritize in their school division and is fiscally and educationally responsible.

As I said, I do understand the politics of this particular issue and why it is being politicized; I just do not like it.

**Mrs. Smith:** Mr Chair, this minister is fully aware of the Mountbatten situation. At one point, this minister refused to meet with the parents, and to this minister's credit, the day that we had Question Period here in the House, he graciously did meet with the parents at the parents' request and at the request from members on this side of the House.

I do understand, Mr. Chair, there are situations and times when schools have to close, and, indeed, this situation has caused a lot of heartbreak, both for the parents and for the school board. These questions were publicly asked. People were exchanging ideas at the public meeting that was held. It is gratifying to hear that the minister regrets some of the comments he has made, but I must say that with

the answers he need not be regretting any answers he made, because all the parents and the school board need right now are the answers about the discrepancy in the estimate, because it did turn the course of events for that school, and now the school is up for possible closure. In fact, it looks as if that might happen.

Having said that, it has been a very emotional process for the school parents. It has been a very emotional process for the school board. I have to put on the record again that the school board has worked very, very closely, very openly, and the parents have worked very, very closely and very openly with the school board. The public meeting did discuss all these issues outlined to the Minister of Education, and it is dated June 13. Today is June 18. I thought the minister would have access to this letter that was sent to him, and that is why it was tabled in this House.

I think the concern that has to be augmented is the uncertainty of knowing what is going to happen in that school district. It has caused parents to take time off work. It has caused parents to come to this House to listen to Question Period. It has caused parents to meet. It has caused the school board the same kind of regrettable worry. So with the questions brought forth here, it would have been better if the minister had said that he would take it under advisement and bring it back on another day in concurrence, instead of going through this business of, oh, this is a political issue.

We are talking about homes and families and parents and schools. There is no intent at all to do anything but get the correct answers. I know when anyone speaks in the House, there are times when you make statements you wish you had not made, and I can appreciate the Minister of Education having that happen from time to time. It can happen to anybody, but more importantly, what is needed right now are the answers, so that the parents and the school board can assess what is happening with Mountbatten School and have the correct estimate numbers to take back, to be able to carefully analyze what should be done with the school.

Can this minister assure this House that that can be done at the earliest possible time?

Members on this side of the House would hate to see this drag out over the summer, because the parents have expressed worry that this is going to happen. They want to know where they stand, so they can get to work, if they have to, on the next step. It has been a very highly emotional experience for both the school board and the parents, and, I daresay, it would be for the teachers and the principal as well.

Having said that, it is regrettable that the minister looks on this only as a political ploy. I taught in St. Vital for 22 years and know some of those parents who are involved. I can reassure this House and this minister that this is not a political ploy; it is a community caring about their school. I can say that the St. Vital School Board is doing the best that they can to assess the situation and to make the best possible decisions. To do that, all parties involved need the support and the input from this Minister of Education.

So I respectfully ask this minister to not get sidetracked but to be able to come forth and answer the questions in a very timely manner, so this can be resolved before the summer break is upon us.

**Mr. Caldwell:** I did not detect a question in that series of remarks, so I will just let my answer stand, as to previous questions.

**Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell):** I have a few questions of the Minister of Education with regard to school closure as well. I am going to focus my attention on a particular issue.

I happen to have met with a parent advisory committee this morning regarding a school closure in the Pelly Trail School Division, namely Oakburn. Now, just for the minister's information, the Oakburn School is a small school on the west side of the province with approximately 24 students from kindergarten to Grade 6. This year there are no Grade 6 students, but it is a K to 6 school.

\* (16:50)

The Pelly Trail board has given notice that they intend to close the school in two years, and for this next year they will be removing the

Grades 5 and 6 students. This means that when that school closes, little children who are five and six years old will be on the bus for anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half, one way. Needless to say, this has parents really concerned. The community is concerned about losing its tiny school.

Now, I know the minister has launched the school boundaries initiative. Certainly I have no issue with that. I have some issues with process but not with the issue itself in principle.

But my understanding is that although there was notice given back in 1994 on this same school, the population went up in the school, and so the board did not proceed with the intended closure. So the school continues to stay open. However, in April when they gave notice to the community that the school would close, I think, if I read the guidelines correctly, and I should know them, there is a demand on the school board, I guess, by the guidelines that have been approved that the school division does have to have a meeting with the community in the community within a two-month period or within a reasonable length of time.

The community has asked for that meeting and the board has not complied. I have not talked to the board, so I am not trying to preempt them or anything of that nature. I am just, I guess, asking the minister whether, in fact, it is within his jurisdiction to encourage the school board to follow the procedure. I am not asking the minister whether it is right or not that the school close. I think that is a local matter, and I understand it, but I do think it is important that process be followed so that parents, community and people within that little hamlet can express their views to the board and perhaps have the board change its mind.

They have met with a liaison of the board. They have met with, I think, the superintendent, but the entire board has not acquiesced, I guess, to the demand to have a public meeting at this time.

**Mr. Caldwell:** I appreciate the Member for Russell's comments and particularly about the process, and perhaps he could chat with the Member for Fort Garry on that, in terms of

process of the relationship between the school division and the Public Schools Finance Board.

I do believe, like the member, that it is incumbent upon school boards to have community meetings in this regard. These are very, very important issues that profoundly affect families, in particular, and communities more broadly. It is not my desire to issue anything. I do talk to the Pelly Trail School Board on a fairly regular basis, and I will pass along the member's—I expect he will pass along to the school board his desire that they have a formal meeting in the community to discuss this particular issue, and I will do the same.

**Mr. Derkach:** Just in reference to the Mountbatten situation, the Mountbatten situation is not the same as the one I am talking about, so I do not want the minister to make a parallel between the two issues. They are entirely different, and the circumstances surrounding them are entirely different. In Oakburn, we have an existing building, which is in fine shape. As a matter of fact, I was in it today. Although small in numbers, I would have to say that the quality of education that those students are receiving is as good as you are going to find in larger schools.

I know the resources sometimes are limited in little schools like that. I was pleased today to spend a little time with several of students as they were working on their computers and doing their assignments on computer, so the students are tied into the Internet. They have e-mail. They have all of the programs that you would find in any other elementary school, perhaps not the enrichment side, but indeed I think it is important to note that students there are receiving a quality education and compete very favourably when they move from that school on to Grades 7 and 8 in the larger schools.

What is at issue for me are the guidelines that have been mandated to be followed by school divisions. Although the parents advisory committee and the parents have written to the school board asking for that meeting, they have received no response. I know that they wrote to the minister as well, and I think the minister responded that he received the letter from them. I am not sure what other elements he discussed

in his letter because I did not see it. The parents did tell me that they were grateful that they had received a response from the minister to their letter, but they still had a question with regard to the community meeting that they requested that they have not had a response from the board for.

Because school closures are such an important issue, especially in the light of the realignment of school boundaries, I would ask the minister whether or not he would consider very seriously to communicate with the Pelly Trail School Division and encourage them to carry out their responsibilities as it relates to the community dialogue that is spelled out fairly clearly, I believe, in the school guideline closures.

**Mr. Caldwell:** The Member for Russell notes that there has been an ongoing dialogue around the issue of the Oakburn school with the community since 1994. It was on an agenda for closure at one time and then was removed and so forth, and the enrolment numbers, the member has already put onto the record. I will contact the Pelly Trail Division to encourage them to have a community meeting specifically around this latest proposal.

**Mr. Derkach:** I am wondering just to make sure that everybody is getting the same message, whether the minister would also send a copy of this same letter that he will be writing to Pelly Trail, whether it is a letter or a memo, advising the community that this is what his recommendation to the board is, so then all the players can be on the same wavelength. I think that the entire issue can be sort of watered down or toned down in terms of the emotional reaction and responses if in fact everyone has got the same information and is dealing with those issues at the same level.

**Mr. Caldwell:** Well, Mr. Chairperson, I am reticent broadly to involve myself in matters of local jurisdiction as this says, as the Member for Russell acknowledged earlier, in his earlier remarks, and in this particular case, there has been some ongoing dialogue with the Oakburn community since 1994 around this particular issue. So there has been discussion for at least seven years around the Oakburn School. Having said that, the member expresses a concern as

related to him during his visit to Oakburn today, and I expect maybe before this meeting as well that the member attended in Oakburn that there has not been a more formal community meeting take place in Oakburn around the school closure. I will, as I have undertaken, suggest to the Pelly Trail School Division that this was raised today and that it would be advisable for them to conduct a community meeting to allay the member's concern.

\* (17:00)

**Mr. Derkach:** I thank the minister for that, and I encourage him just to send a copy of that same correspondence to the parent advisory committee because they indeed are an important element in that community for the school. They want to work, I think, co-operatively with the board in trying to resolve the issue, and I found them to be very co-operative and very willing to discuss the issue, but in fairness, I have to tell the minister I have not had the opportunity to talk to the superintendent of the school division at this point in time. I will be contacting her. The superintendent is on maternity leave, and there is an interim superintendent who I will be contacting and discussing the issue so that the school board does not feel that it has been blind-sided on this issue as well. I will undertake to do that, so I accept the minister's response to this, and I thank him for it.

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairman, I thank the Member for Russell. We are a fraternity of two in this Chamber, being former ministers of education. I do appreciate the insight that he brings to this portfolio. Certainly I have benefited from some of his comments in the past, and I appreciate his concern here.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I have a question for the Minister of Education and Training, and the question concerns what is called the Rose report in southwestern Manitoba. A significant proportion of the recommendations dealt with education and training, and I just would ask the minister what actions have been taken so far.

**Mr. Caldwell:** The Rose report, of course, some years ago was undertaken. Certainly it was not a report of this Government. I can say to the

Member for River Heights that we have been engaged as a government with the field, with teachers, trustees, parents, students, community groups, superintendents, business officials, independent schools, home schoolers in an extensive series of consultations over the past 20 months regarding the creation of an education agenda for the province of Manitoba with which to focus and prioritize both our operational focus and our expenditure focus, investment focus.

The Rose report itself, I think, was a useful document, but it is not guiding in any fundamental way, Mr. Chairperson, the activities of this Government.

**Mr. Gerrard:** In the context of the activities of the Minister of Education and Training, the Rose report dealt with areas that were relevant to people in southwestern Manitoba. I would ask: What sorts of activities have been undertaken relevant for people in southwestern Manitoba?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Well, I suppose members on this side of the House and certainly the philosophy in the Department of Education is to serve the province as a whole and not subdivide the province into regions for activity other than where we have requests from divisions for special consideration as the case may be. In Duck Mountain, for example, Duck Mountain School Division gets a special grant right now to help offset the reality of having a very low tax base. So we do support divisions in different circumstances but in the main, school division activities and activities around the support to school divisions and support for the public education system broadly is one that has a provincial focus and not a regional focus.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I would like to follow up a little bit in the context of the Rose report. My understanding from the minister is basically you have moved beyond the Rose report and are doing other things, feeling that the Rose report is not a significant factor in policy decisions made by your department.

**Mr. Caldwell:** In terms of southwestern Manitoba, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen) advises me that her department has been meeting with some sectors, particularly in the agriculture farm population



around supports as were alluded to in the Rose report.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Member for Fort Garry.

**Mr. Gerrard:** For River Heights. I have not moved. In essence, what you are saying is that your focus has not been to implement the Rose report, but to do other things in a broader context in terms of the province.

**Mr. Caldwell:** That is essentially right. There are I think some important issues around the support of property tax support coming from farmlands and so forth that are of broader interest and not so much educational interest specifically, but they are of interest in terms of providing support and relief for the agricultural sector.

I should say that in terms of education and training, Intergovernmental Affairs officials have indicated that the Province would provide human resources necessary to hold a regional planning session to examine issues and prepare a strategic plan to address options, particularly in the farm community. As well, IGA is involved in dealing with education and training and infrastructure issues as they are identified throughout the province. We do have, as the member knows, in Manitoba a considerable degree of concern with the agricultural economy and property taxation, generally. There are a number of measures that the Government has put into place over the last 20 months. Perhaps the most significant is the extension of the Education Property Tax Credit by \$150 per resident of the province of Manitoba.

I do not know if that is exactly where the member is headed with this or if this is what he wants to discuss, but I am cognizant of needs. Being from southwestern Manitoba myself, Mr. Chairperson, I am cognizant of the stresses that the agriculture community is under. Certainly from the education perspective, we are cognizant of that, as well.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Just to what extent in the minister's responsibility for education and training has the minister done any needs assessment in areas like Melita, Deloraine,

Minnedosa? *[interjection]* An assessment of needs in relationship to education and training. Have you been involved in any needs assessment?

\* (17:10)

**Mr. Caldwell:** Mr. Chairperson, in terms of Deloraine and Melita, that is fundamentally the responsibility of the Antler River School Division, and to the degree that Antler River School Division is in constant communication with the Department of Education and Training we are cognizant of the needs in that region. In terms of Minnedosa's Rolling River School Division, the same would apply. The fundamental authority in that regard is the local authority, the local elected trustees of the Antler River and the Rolling River school divisions. They, in turn, make the department aware of any issues that they determine of being worthy of special consideration, of special need. In fact, I find that school divisions are not shy of making us aware of the concerns that they have.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I would like now to move to ask some questions of the Minister of Conservation. My first question to the Minister of Conservation. I have raised the issue on I think more than one occasion in this House of the status of the provincial drains. When we have talked and the minister has provided a flood report, I have urged the minister to provide an overview of the status of the provincial drains in the province, and I wonder if the minister has been able to do that.

*Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation):** Mr. Chair, while the member was putting his question forth, I was busy trying to get my ear machine here so I had a hard time hearing him.

I believe the member was asking the status of drains. I thank the member for that question. The issue of drainage has been, since I have been minister anyway, a particularly frustrating file in that I find that there is a great deal of work that is required in order to fully address that issue, the one of drainage. We know, and we recognize

that drainage is a very important concern for producers, for residents, agriculture people and municipalities throughout this province. We know that their concerns are valid. As I said earlier, they have been there for several years.

For us to remedy the situation, however, in my humble opinion as a layperson looking at that issue, I think it will take some time for us to fully address the issue. By that I mean at least bringing it up to the level where it maintains existing requirements.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

I do not want to get political here, but I remember, for example, during Estimates last year, and I believe during one of our public hearings on legislation, some members of the former government agreed that we have a very serious situation in Conservation with respect to drainage. Some of them agree that perhaps the former government may have gone too far in removing some of the much-needed resources that were there to begin with, both financial and human, because I am advised that the amount of reduction that took place in the area of drainage was something like 43 percent over an 11-year period. I just want to mention that to the member because I think it will give him some perspective as to where we are coming from today.

However, I am pleased to report to the member this year our Government allocated an additional \$1 million to the drainage budget. Half a million was done through the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. Half a million was done by our department under the drainage line. In the normal existing budget, after you take off all of the non-drainage budget items, you are left with about \$500,000. So, with the \$500,000 existing money that was there, plus an additional new \$500,000, as well as what is allocated to Intergovernmental Affairs, I think we will probably go quite a ways, you know, not far enough, but it will go quite a ways toward addressing some of the more serious areas in Manitoba.

The first eight or nine months of my term in office as Conservation Minister, I do not think there was a week that went by without either somebody calling us or somebody writing us a

letter, getting invited out to a community to come and talk about the drainage issue, and we did. I visited quite a few communities at the start, just to go and get a feel of the land, I guess, if I can say that. I must admit that I was quite taken aback by the state of the infrastructure that I saw in most communities.

So now we are in the process of developing a plan for these funds that I have just been talking about. As of this morning, our senior staff are meeting to try to finalize the capital plan for this year, but I would like to caution the member as well that I think for every dollar of drainage money that I have, there might be 20 organizations wanting to get all of it. Quite frankly, it is not going to work that way. I think what we will have to do is come up with a much longer-term plan and then try to get additional resources as time goes on. For the time being, we have allocated some additional money to drainage. How far that will go, I do not know. I suspect that it will not go a long way but at least we have a plan put together, and it is almost finished.

**Mr. Gerrard:** My original question asked just not about sort of where you were in terms of your efforts, but during some earlier discussions in this Legislature and member's statements that you had on the flood situation I had commented that there was a need to have an assessment of the current status of the provincial level drains for which the Province is responsible. It would seem to me rather important to have that kind of report. It would be very important to have a report on the status of all the provincial drains at the moment, the extent to which they are adequate, the extent to which they need repairs. That would be vital in terms of being able to develop a coherent long-term plan, in terms of being able to assess what the real needs are, and so on and so forth. Is the minister preparing a status report of all the provincial drains in the province?

\* (17:20)

**Mr. Lathlin:** Well, any time that you go about devising a plan, you obviously have to have some data to work from. We have considerable data on hand, historical and how the drainage program got started in Manitoba, the original

purpose of having a drainage policy in Manitoba. I know we have that information because we refer to it when we go about developing our capital plan. A lot of it, of course, is information that can be extracted from proposals. Different proposals have come in, letters, meetings with municipalities and so on and so forth. So we have the information. If the member wants, I can put that together and share a copy with him.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I thank the minister, and I look forward to receiving from the minister a copy of the sort of status report. I would ask the minister: Given the situation in 1999 in southwestern Manitoba and the concerns in that area both in terms of drainage and irrigation and water management planning, what initiatives is his department taking in the southwestern Manitoba region?

**Mr. Lathlin:** There again, Mr. Chairman, since I have been in this job as Minister of Conservation, I have met with several municipalities and gone out to tour some communities. There is some pretty innovative work that is being performed by some municipalities. For example, I was in Miami in the Carman area not that long ago, where I observed quite an amazing project that helps to store water, drain some areas. I was quite impressed with the work that was being done by the community. One of the questions I asked, as a matter of fact, was: How come we are keeping this a big secret in Miami? How come we are not sharing it with other communities such as those that are situated in the Interlake, for example? I made a commitment that we would continue to work with them with the view that eventually this work they are doing in the Miami area can be used as a template in other areas. I think they will be in agreement to do that.

As far as what are we doing for the communities in the southwest, the only thing so far that we have done is, as I said, we have met with them. We take stock of the kinds of losses they have incurred through the Government Services Department, EMO—Emergency Measures. There has not been any definitive, final decision made as to what areas are going to be looked at right away in terms of installing drainage ditches and so forth.

I think one of the things that I also found as I am travelling around in these flood-prone areas, or areas that were inundated by spring runoff and rainwater, was that drainage ditches are, it seems like—I will take Westbourne for example. I went there as well. I toured the Westbourne area. Their No. 1 priority, their No. 1 objective is to dig another big ditch from that area towards Lake Manitoba. But then people also complain about the big ditch from Portage to Lake Manitoba because they feel, especially around the south basin of Lake Manitoba, people feel there that, if water could be better regulated or if we do not have any water at all coming through the diversion channel, things would be all right with them. They would not have to experience the flooding that they did this past spring.

So, from what I am able to gather thus far, and we are having further meetings with, for example, Westbourne, we agreed to get a committee going to pretty well, to use their reeve's words, start from scratch, because apparently, when they were trying to address the flood problem, essentially what happened was people started digging ditches to get water out of their area. Of course, it had an effect downstream. I must have counted at least 40 main ditches on a map that they were showing me, and they were all headed towards the marsh, and it gets filled up and comes down to Westbourne, and Westbourne is right at the bottom. They get all drowned out, and they are also telling me: If we had some sort of a co-ordinated approach with respect to deciding where ditches are going to go, then perhaps we would not experience the problem with spring run-off that badly every spring.

So I think part of the problem is that we need to have some sort of an agreement or an acceptance by the different communities that they just cannot go and do things in an ad-hoc way. Maybe it worked in the past, but, as more and more units get started, more and more people live in that area, and, well, there are more people to accommodate. So, as a result, you get that many more drainage ditches being dug, and then, instead of solving the overall problem, it creates maybe two or three more new problems downstream. I have to admit, though, that that is a big undertaking.

\* (17:30)

I think it is going to require a lot of good will and co-operation and discipline from just about everybody, but mainly from the communities themselves. So, Mr. Chairperson, we have unorganized, unco-ordinated, not properly managed drainage work, and that is causing a lot of problems. The lack of resources, both financial and human, is causing a lot of problems, so currently we are trying to come up with an overall approach that would address the water issue, not just for drainage, but for other things like drinking water, irrigation.

**Mr. Gerrard:** There are a number of people in the wake of the flood and wet weather of 1999; there are a number of people who feel that there should be for southwestern Manitoba a water management strategy, as there is an effort to do in the Red River Valley, which is, of course, subject from time to time with major floods. Your Government has been involved with that effort in the Red River Valley, and so my question for you would be this: Do you plan to have an overall plan for southwestern Manitoba? I think that is probably particularly relevant, given what you have just said in the Westbourne area for an unco-ordinated approach, so will you have a plan for southwestern Manitoba?

**Mr. Lathlin:** Mr. Chair, as I was saying earlier to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), I think there is no question that we need a co-ordinated approach. When we were discussing The Water Rights Act about a year ago during public hearings, we made a commitment that we would then go on to develop a province-wide water management scheme, and that water management plan, whenever it is finished, will take into consideration all aspects of water management in Manitoba, whether you are in the southwest or in the Red River Valley or in the Interlake, because we really believe that if we do it in a co-ordinated way, in a well-managed way, we can, albeit it will take a considerable amount of time, but we believe that in the end we do not quite frankly have a choice but to go that route. Again, in my humble opinion and I am practical too, I do not think it makes sense for us to try to tackle this one problem in this part of the province and say it is irrigation, and then the next day we go over to another part of the

province where we are dealing with safe drinking water, and then maybe the next day we are talking to cottage owners in the south basin of Lake Manitoba because their shoreline is being eroded. So the list goes on and on. It is a big job, you know, it will take considerable time, but I think really that is the only way to go.

The other thing, too, is these past two weekends that I have been up north, people complain about how dry it is up there. The Saskatchewan River, the level is just going down. People, especially the fishermen, are complaining that they do not have enough water. They have difficulty I think believing me when I tell them that in the south the problem is the reverse, that we have too much water in the south.

Once we have developed a province-wide management plan, as I said earlier, it will not just take into consideration the south part of Manitoba or the main problem areas. I think it would be important for us to also look at, for example, the Saskatchewan River, the Nelson River, the Hayes River, all the northern rivers just to make sure that we have not left anything out in this overall plan that I keep referring to.

**Mr. Gerrard:** So I hear the minister pretty clearly. The minister is not really interested in a regional plan for southwestern Manitoba.

One of the areas that I have heard quite a bit about concerns flooding in the northern Interlake, you know, along the Fisher River and Peguis and also along the Fairford and Dauphin Rivers. I wonder if the minister could provide an update on the situation and his ideas for water management plans in this area.

**Mr. Lathlin:** Mr. Chair, well, again, as I indicated to the member earlier, I also took the time to go to St. Laurent and Ashern just when the problem was at its worst. They were having to pump water from the fields that were inundated with water over No. 6 highway and onto Lake Manitoba. The people, the reeves and councillors that I met, told me all kinds of stories about what it used to be like in the past. You know, we never had this problem in the past, and all of a sudden we are starting to experience the same thing over and over again. Sometimes they

will blame just the way the infrastructure has been installed. Some of them claim that perhaps it might not have been the best way to install a certain infrastructure, and that is becoming a contributing factor in the water that comes in from spring runoff and onto the property.

There again, you know, people say to me in order to alleviate the problem like right away, we have to build a ditch here. My question usually is: But what do we do to the people downstream? Do we make it worse by doing it this way, or is there any other way that we can manage the water? A development of the water management plan for Manitoba, hopefully, that is what it will address so that in the long term we will have a system that is workable, a system that is manageable, and a system that will be understood by all the different stakeholders, you know, rather than just taking the attitude it is every person for himself or herself, you know, like I will look after my land the best way I know how but create three or four problems down river.

**Mr. Gerrard:** In the consideration of drainage, one of the differences between Manitoba and Ontario is that in many parts of Ontario the development of tiling drainage infrastructure is pretty advanced, and this certainly appears to have some major advantages for those who would grow corn and potatoes and a variety of other crops. Maybe I could ask the minister what his view is on the development of tiling infrastructure for drainage.

\* (17:40)

**Mr. Lathlin:** Mr. Chair, unfortunately, I have not really looked into that particular method that the member is referring to, but I know that once our consultation part of the water management strategy begins, we will be looking—I have already asked my staff to look at all of—see there have been many, many studies and reports that have been done on Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg, the different rivers and so on. Many of them were good studies, good reports, and even some of the recommendations on some of those reports have been implemented.

So what I have asked our people to do is we do not want to recreate everything, invent the

wheel, reinvent the wheel. I just want them to look at all of those different studies and reports that were done, what is being done in other jurisdictions, you know, jurisdictions that have similar problems, and see what we can learn from there. So, hopefully, the review part or the consultation part of the project will take into consideration other vehicles that are being used in other jurisdictions.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The minister has organized an assessment of climate change and the greenhouse gases, and the committee has been holding hearings and will be bringing a report later on. One of the things that the committee has heard, when I was there at some of the proceedings, was that about a third of the greenhouse gas production in Manitoba relates to agriculture, and quite a significant proportion of that appears to come from the generation of nitrous oxide. This appears to be from the application of urea and fertilizer, and the interaction under certain soil conditions protects some wet soil conditions which generate nitrous oxide. Clearly, what has also emerged is that there is not nearly as much known about this in terms of what should or can be done to decrease greenhouse gas production in this area. If Canada were to agree to meet the Kyoto targets, we had better know something about this and what we could do to influence it. So I would ask the minister whether he has in his department any research which deals with the production of nitrous oxide and how it might be modified under different agricultural management practices, and perhaps, he could provide an update on this for me.

**Mr. Lathlin:** As the member probably knows, Manitoba is a member of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. They meet twice a year. Since I have been minister, I have attended about four of these meetings. One of the items that has always interested me when I attend these meetings is the very subject the member has raised here. That is because, somewhere along the way, I became aware that the federal government had agreed to be a signatory to a protocol that was signed in 1987, I believe, in Tokyo.

The federal government came back and said that we have signed on to this protocol and it is

up to Canada as a whole, including the federal government, to come up with action plans as to how we are going to achieve the targets that were set at that particular meeting. Some jurisdictions have bigger problems than others. Some provinces do not have the degree of problems others have. For example, in Manitoba we are considered to be one of the lowest, I guess—in other words, our emissions are not as high as, for example, in Ontario, Alberta, but we are still required to come up with an action plan. We take that to the federal government Minister of Environment and those plans get incorporated into Canada's plan. We take that back to the international community.

In Canada, some provinces have differing views as to how these targets can be reached. Our attitude in Manitoba has been—at least I have said in public meetings that we should not become too preoccupied with what others are doing. If we can do some good things with respect to emission reductions in Manitoba, then perhaps we can go to Ottawa and have more credible standing whenever we rise to speak on these issues. In Manitoba, we organized a meeting here. I cannot remember when now. It was the wintertime. We announced some funding to climate change, and then more recently we announced a task force that is being headed up by Lloyd Axworthy. As the member pointed out, that report will be coming back to government, I believe, in September or some time in the fall. Hopefully that will give us an idea as to how we should go about developing the made-in-Manitoba action plan and will take that to the next meeting and go from there.

The member is right when he says there are two things in Manitoba that contribute the most. One of them is agriculture; the other one is transportation. We are working with the Department of Agriculture, we are working with the Department of Transportation and Government Services to get their ideas, get their research and incorporate that into the Manitoba action plan that will be eventually developed by Mr. Axworthy.

We know that the nitrous oxide that the member refers to is a product of the agriculture industry, and we are working co-operatively

with those two departments as well as with our other partners throughout Canada, including the federal government.

\* (17:50)

**Mr. Gerrard:** One of the measures that the minister's Government passed last year dealt with banning transfers of water from one basin to another or sub-basin to another. Clearly it would be rather valuable to understand the effects of such transfers. In understanding these effects, we have an example, I would suggest to the minister, and that is the Portage diversion which transfers significant water from the Assiniboine River into Lake Manitoba.

As I have talked with people in and around Lake Manitoba, there are a lot of concerns about the effects of this transfer. Yet when I ask has there ever been a study to look at the effects of this transfer and evaluate this in a careful and scientific fashion, the answer that I get back appears to be that there has not been. So I would ask the minister whether he will be undertaking a scientific study of the effects of the water transfer from the Assiniboine River into Lake Manitoba, its long-term impacts on the lake in terms of things like siltation, its effect on the fisheries and the organisms and whether in fact there were biota that were transferred from one sub-basin to another that had an influence, as some have suggested, on the fisheries. Is the minister going to make sure that such a study is done?

**Mr. Lathlin:** I am glad the member raised that question because, as I said earlier, I think in the past everybody had good intentions. The public came to the Government and articulated their concerns, problems, issues to the Government, and in most cases government responded. I know, for example, in Lake Manitoba, I guess certain things did not make sense to me when I first got the file, and I wanted to know more about it. Like you, I went and asked questions and talked to fishermen and elders in that area, and I tried to get a picture of the history of Lake Manitoba, how the water levels are managed. I was advised that at one time there were people living on the south basin. Both private residents and some industry, probably agriculture, had gone to government and lobbied for some kind

of relief from high water-saturated land. I believe it was at that point that the Government responded by installing some control structures on the east side, I guess, of Lake Manitoba around the Fairford area.

I do not believe there had been adequate study done before that measure was taken because I am told by fishermen, and they have written me letters saying this: We told you this would be detrimental to the ecosystem, the fish, any life that exists in the waters of Lake Manitoba. Apparently they had warned the Government that the environment would be damaged, especially the fish. Apparently government decided to go ahead with the project. Now these fishermen are telling us, and they have proof. They say that this project may have helped to solve problems for some people on one part of the Lake, but it certainly helped to create new problems for people in another part of the Lake.

So that is what these fishermen are saying. Not only are the communities downstream of the control structure at Fairford negatively impacted, but it also impacts negatively on the fishing industry on Lake Manitoba. Fishermen tell us that all the time.

So, when we get this study underway, my hope is that we will look at everything. I think it is important for us to look at everything rather than just going after one piece and trying to come up with a good plan. I think the plan would be flawed if we were not able to look at every possible data that exists.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Do I take that to indicate, minister, that in fact you are going to make sure that such a study is undertaken to understand the effects of that water transfer on Lake Manitoba?

**Mr. Lathlin:** Yes, that is what I am saying. When the fishermen write me letters and they tell me stories about how the fish life has changed in the waters of Lake Manitoba, I think

we should respond to that and look at the way the fish have been damaged.

**Mr. Gerrard:** In the Red River Valley, I gather there has been some emerging news in terms of: Is it environmental impact statements today in terms of flood planning? Perhaps you could bring us up to date.

**Mr. Lathlin:** What has developed today was a progress report was released by our Water Services people, and I understand it is a progress report with the main report to come, I am advised, in about a month's time. It was just done today. I do not even have a copy of the progress report. It probably went to my deputy minister and then it is finding its way to my office, because I really have not had time to look at all the paper on my desk today. So maybe it is sitting on my desk. I do not know.

But you are right. The progress report was released today and I will see it in the news tonight, I guess.

**Mr. Gerrard:** When will the final report be released and available?

**Mr. Lathlin:** My information indicates that the report would be coming in a month's time.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

**Mr. Speaker:** The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 18, 2001

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