

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSON, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
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.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	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, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
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, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 24, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Riverdale Health Centre

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Riverdale Health Centre services a population of approximately 2000, including the Town of Rivers and the R.M. of Daly, as well as the Sioux Valley First Nation and the local Hutterite colonies.

The need for renovation or repair of the Riverdale Health Centre was identified in 1999 by the Marquette Regional Health Authority (RHA) and was the No. 1 priority in the RHA's 2002-2003 Operational Plan.

To date, the community has raised over \$460,000 towards the renovation or repair of the health centre.

On June 1, 2003, the Premier (Mr. Doer) made a commitment to the community of Rivers that he would not close or downgrade the services available at the Riverdale Health Centre.

Due to the physician shortages, Riverdale Health Centre has been closed to acute care and emergency services for long periods since December 2003, forcing community members to travel to Brandon or elsewhere for health care services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to consider ensuring that acute care and emergency services are available to the residents of Rivers and surrounding areas in their local hospital, and to live up to his promise to not close the Rivers Hospital.

To request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) consider developing a long-term solution to the chronic shortages of front-line health care professionals in rural Manitoba.

Signed by Trevor Veitch, Kathy Davis, Maxine Weir and others.

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

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is

supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by R. Rehbein, Lynne Rehbein, Tanys Rehbein and many others.

* (13:35)

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba's provincial auditor has stated that Manitoba's 2003-2004 budget deficit was the second highest on record at \$604 million.

The provincial government is misleading the public by saying they had a surplus of \$13 million in the 2003-2004 budget.

The provincial auditor has indicated that the \$13-million surplus the government says it had cannot be justified.

The provincial auditor has also indicated that the Province is using its own made up accounting rules in order to show a surplus instead of using generally accepted accounting principles.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider adopting generally accepted accounting principles in reporting Manitoba's budgetary numbers.

Signed by Auralee Bergado, Araceli Hipolito and Jaylin Castillo.

Supported Living Program

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government's Supported Living Program provides a range of supports to assist adults with a mental disability to live in the community in their residential option of choice, including a family home. There is a lack of group homes available and this means special needs dependants must remain in the family home.

The provincial government's Community Living Division helps support adults living with a mental disability to live safely in the community in the residential setting of their choice.

Families with special needs dependants make lifelong commitments to their care and well-being, and many families choose to care for these individuals in their homes as long as circumstances allow.

The cost to support families who care for their special needs dependants at home is far less than the cost of alternate care arrangements such as institutions or group and foster home situations.

The value and quality of life experienced by special needs dependants raised at home in a loving family environment is immeasurable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) to consider changes to the departmental policy that pays family members a reduced amount of money for room and board when they care for their special needs dependants at home versus the amount paid to a non-parental care provider outside the family home.

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing consider examining on a case-by-case basis the merits of paying family members to care for special needs dependants at home versus paying to institutionalize them.

This is signed by Sherrise Hiebert, Tiffany Hiebert, Eric Sung and many others.

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved. School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring weather and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recess are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305 to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

Signed by June Elliot, Helen Edwards, Barry Edwards and others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the Manitoba Labour Board's Annual Report for the year 2003-2004.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 20—The Life Leases Amendment Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), that The Life Leases Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les baux viagers, be now read a first time.

* (13:40)

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Health, that Bill 20, The Life Leases Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Selinger: This bill will require that the owner of a life-lease complex must be represented at the annual meeting of tenants. Tenant representatives are entitled to attend board meetings of a non-profit landlord. Tenants are entitled to receive audited financial statements for non-profit complexes. The time period for refunding entrance fees is reduced to three months. Deductions against entrance fees for damage to the rental unit or a complex, or for rent arrears are prohibited unless included in a final order by the director of Residential Tenancies. Shortfalls in the budget of a life-lease complex may be covered by tenants paying a second rent increase in a year.

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

Introduction of Guests

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 from Fairholme, Baker, Cascade, Elm River, Oak River and Wingham Colony Schools 33 Grade 9 Interactive Instructional Television students under the direction of Ms. Anna Maendel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan).

Also in the public gallery we have from the Government of Canada 13 visitors under the direction of Madam Lisabeth Savard.

Also in the public gallery we have with us today 20 fourth-year nursing students from the University of Manitoba under the direction of Linda West.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, for years Manitoba Hydro has been planning for the development of a new power corridor known as Bipole III, to bring more power south from the Nelson River dams.

Even though the Crown corporation ruled out building down the west side of Lake Winnipeg some 10 years ago, this NDP government is forcing Hydro to revisit the west side options. Not only is the east side option more than \$100-million cheaper to build, it is a shorter route. I would say that the equivalent of some 70 megawatts of power is now being lost on the long trip to Winnipeg.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, building such a corridor down the east side presents government with the best opportunity to build for some 36 000 Manitobans a much needed all-season road. Can the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) tell the House and all Manitobans this: Will she support the building of a power corridor and an all-season road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, in an unprecedented move to work with communities and First Nations who constitute over 90 percent of the population of the east side, this government undertook a hearing consultation process and had over 80 meetings with community members. Ministers, premiers and the council visited those communities, discussed options with those communities, set up a planning protocol and a land-use protocol, put in place a committee to do ongoing discussions and talked with the community about what the community wanted in that region of the province. It happens to have one of the most pristine, untouched boreal forest regions left in the world.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this two-month winter road that some 36 000 Manitobans rely on to have the year's supply of fuel, food, medical supplies and other necessities trucked in is becoming increasingly unreliable. According to the winter roads co-

ordinator, it is projected that within 35 years, there will be no winter road season at all on the east side.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this Deputy Premier, on behalf of those 36 000 Manitobans who clearly are growing and are being isolated because of the situation developing, if she will tell this House and all Manitobans if she will support the building of a power corridor and an all-season road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

* (13:45)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that came out very prominently in the hearings, the over 80 community hearings that were held with residents of the east side, was broad-based support that that area of the province be declared a UNESCO World Heritage site to preserve the boreal forest, to preserve the natural state, and to preserve the economic way of life of people in those communities.

In addition to supporting the UNESCO World Heritage site, Mr. Speaker, community leaders, community members, said they want economic development. That was part of the mandate and part of the reason for the east side planning process and east side planning group that are working on economic development for those communities so that they can grow and thrive within the context of a World Heritage site, UNESCO boreal forest, that I thought the members opposite supported.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, if this NDP government in the six years had any long-term economic vision, they would look at the opportunities that this allows in the North. Clearly, what we have here is a government that has no long-term economic plan for the province of Manitoba.

I know that in an article that was recently written, and I would like to quote from that article, it talked about a fellow whose name is Roger Handel. He is the owner of the Island Lake Trading Company, one of the few critics willing to talk on the record, and blames the Doer government with what is happening around the east side of Lake Winnipeg. He states very clearly, "there is a sense in the business community here that this government is a magnet for incompetence."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask, on behalf of all of those people, the 36 000 and growing Manitobans

that are becoming more and more isolated, not feeling a part of Manitoba, but becoming more isolated under this NDP government this: Will they simply do the right thing?

I ask the Deputy Premier if she will stand in her place and support the future of the North and support the building of a power corridor, an all-season road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Will she do the right thing for those families that are being left out in the development of Manitoba?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the member opposite that this government does support the North. It is this government that put together a Northern Development Strategy based on five pillars that will see growth and opportunity in the North. It is not necessary to destroy a pristine area, as the member opposite is talking about, but I can tell you that this government is working with northern people and will continue to work with northern people.

I would invite members opposite to think once in awhile about the North, not just use it as an opportunistic thing, and visit out there and see how those people live, and look at how we can improve the economy, improve the education, improve the housing, improve economic development in the North.

Look at the University College of the North. Look at the dialysis that we have put in. You now talk about economic development in the North, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before we continue on, I want to remind all honourable members that questions and answers are put through the Chair, not directly at each other. Through the Chair, please.

Transportation Infrastructure All-Weather Road Network

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, in spite of this lip service that we have just heard, there are 36 000 Manitobans living on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, becoming more isolated all the time. They have no all-season road access. They face double and triple the costs of flying in food, medicine, fuels and other supplies compared to other Manitobans, and the season for their winter road supply line has become shorter every year.

Does the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) believe that there is no need for an all-season, permanent road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg?

* (13:50)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Acting Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that the former Minister of Transportation, as part of a newly elected NDP government, within months extended the winter road network into every community in Manitoba. In fact, we tripled the winter road budget. Unlike members opposite who discover winter roads by reading about it in the *Free Press*, many of us travel the winter roads all the time. With triple the budget, with major capital improvements on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, with the extension of the all-weather road network into Rice River Road, we have done something else that is very different from what the Tories do. We have actually, through the east side process, talked to and listened to people on the east side of Lake Winnipeg because they want to have a say in their own future that will include improved infrastructure, protection of the environment and economic opportunity. That is the difference between us and the Tories. They read about it in the paper. We are out there working with northerners.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the rhetoric, it is expected that the population of that east side region will double by the year 2020, and, possibly, had the Minister of Transportation released his 2020 Vision plan on time in the fall of 2003 like he said he would, begun by the former, former minister that just spoke, it might have addressed the transportation needs of these people.

Mr. Speaker, this report is a year and a half late. As the minister has no vision, will this minister now tell these east side residents if there are any plans to establish a much-needed road to their communities so that a reliable link for food, medicine and supplies can be established and bring their families opportunities more in line with the rest of Manitobans?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, not only did members opposite when they were in government spend as little as 4 percent of the highways' construction budget in northern Manitoba, when we came into

office there had been agreement with South Indian Lake to put in all-weather road access that the Tories had signed in '92. That was undelivered. Within two years, we constructed the all-weather road into South Indian Road. They criticized that.

We also worked with the community of Cross Lake, and we put in place a bridge. Now you can use a \$23-million bridge to go into Cross Lake. The members opposite criticized it. We worked with Manitoba Hydro and we built it. They criticized it. They have no credibility on northern transportation issues.

Red River Floodway Expansion Master Labour Agreement

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): We all know that union bosses and the union-boss mentality is alive and well around the NDP Cabinet table, and it is the union bosses that are pulling all the strings.

Mr. Speaker, we have Eugene Kostyra, who is the chair of the Floodway Authority, dictating and shoving down the throats of workers on the floodway that they must be unionized. Will the Minister of Water Stewardship today stand up and scrap the NDP union-boss mentality that will force all workers on the floodway to be unionized? Will he scrap that plan?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, the head of the Floodway Authority is well known to Manitobans, Ernie Gilroy, a former city councillor.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked very hard to put in place probably the most significant enhancement of flood protection in this province since the 1960s. Members opposite never talk about the fact that this will protect a 1-in-700-year flood, over 450 000 Manitobans against the flood.

Mr. Speaker, we have a project management agreement. It does not require people to join unions. It is open to unionized and non-unionized employers and employees. I suggest to members opposite they read the agreement and wake up to the fact that in the year 2005, there is room for unions and for non-unionized workers and that is in the agreement.

Manitoba Hydro Tower Master Labour Agreement

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): The union-boss mentality and the former union bosses, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and Eugene Kostyra, are pulling the strings and they are picking the pockets of workers on the floodway to the tune of a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, now we hear that Vic Schroeder, former colleague of Eugene Kostyra and the Premier, the union bosses, who is the head of Manitoba Hydro, is looking at the same kind of agreement for the new Hydro building in the city of Winnipeg.

Will the Minister responsible for Hydro stand up today and ensure that Vic Schroeder, the boss at Manitoba Hydro, and a colleague and friend and appointed by this government, scraps the plan that appears to be in place that will force unionization on workers for the new Hydro building?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, "Provisions of no-strike, no-lockout collective bargaining agreements are put in place to prevent strikes to deal with industrial relations in the construction industry that tend to be highly volatile and to deal with the construction agreements that are one or two years duration." The note I just read from was one of those labour agreements that was put in place by that union boss, one Duff Roblin, in 1965, in order to construct the Nelson River Development.

* (13:55)

Children in Care Safety Concerns

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the antics of the Minister of Family Services and Housing in this Chamber were arrogant, disrespectful and, in fact, desperate. The Fatalities Inquiries Act, which she felt necessary to photocopy for this House, allows for the Medical Examiner to prepare a summary of his recommendations for the annual report.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to ask the Medical Examiner to release the summary of the recommendations in this recent child death? There is an urgency to protect children in care. Will

she make these recommendations public and will she act on them today?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, the CME is an independent body. I respect that the CME is an independent body, and he will put or not put in his annual report as he chooses.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, again, the minister refuses to act. She has the authority to ask him to release the recommendations, and we should have those so that we can look at what we need to do to protect children in care in this province. This is a department in chaos. The system is broken and yet they are poised to pass on child protection to four authorities. We have heard that staff morale is low due to horrendous caseloads and job insecurity. We have heard that there are concerns that children will fall through the cracks of this broken system.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister guarantee that throughout this devolution process that children in the care of this Province will not fall through the cracks?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing to hear an attack on the child welfare initiative which was recommended in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, which sat on the shelves of the opposition when they were in power for 10 years, that was unanimously passed in this House. I was very proud as the first minister in North America to proclaim the devolution of child welfare. We will continue to work with the northern First Nations, the southern First Nations, the Métis authority and the general authority as we are the first in the western hemisphere and one of the only jurisdictions in the world to devolve child welfare.

Selkirk Mental Health Care Centre Capital Project

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine is very concerned about the deplorable conditions her mother has been forced to live in at the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. In a CJOB interview some three and a half years ago, the Minister of Health at the time when referring to the Selkirk Mental Health Centre said, and I quote, "I could not spend a day in those dorms. The facilities are terrible." He went on to say, "Selkirk is going to

redevelop and there is money in this year's budget." That was in 2001.

In 2003, in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, he said he should be ready in the next couple of months to announce major renovations of the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. A few months later came; did not happen. Mr. Speaker, then, June 29, 2004, members opposite sent out a fancy press release announcing the \$20 million for Selkirk Mental Health Centre. That was then. It is now March 24, 2005, and nothing has been done.

Mr. Speaker, how much longer do patients have to live in these deplorable conditions before this government starts to act on their empty promises?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have visited Selkirk Mental Hospital, and I would agree with my former colleague, the Minister of Health in 2003. The conditions are not acceptable. That is why we committed some \$20 million in our capital plan. That is why schematic drawings are in an advanced stage. That is why I visited the Selkirk centre and met with the building design group approximately four weeks ago. We are going to rebuild that centre. It is not acceptable. We are working on it. The money is there, the group is in planning, the architect is working. It is happening.

* (14:00)

Boxing Commission Unregulated Prize Fighting

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, around this time last year, several bars were running a competition where young women would box and fight each other in unregulated prize fighting. Many observers indicated that this was unsafe and incredibly dangerous. In the January 19, 2004, Boxing Commission minutes, the minister told the commission to hold off on any further action or inquiries into the bar fights. Then, in April 2004, after the *Winnipeg Sun* raised concerns, the Minister of Sport told the reporter that he had asked the Boxing Commission to seek out a legal opinion on whether the unsanctioned fights should continue.

Mr. Speaker, in January, this minister says do nothing. In April, he orders a crackdown on the fights. Why did the minister KO the safety crackdown?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Sport): Mr. Speaker, without accepting any of the preamble, allow me to take the details of the question and get back to the member.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, in that April 5 article, the minister even expressed worry about the health of the women. I quote the minister, "I am concerned about the safety of the participants." The Boxing Commission minutes show that they spoke with the minister about the fights as far back as January 2004, and possibly earlier. Yet the minister asked them to pursue no action.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Sport was concerned about the safety of the young women involved in these fights, why did he tell the commission to ignore the safety of the women in January?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, without accepting any of the preamble by the member, allow me to get the specifics of the question and I will get back to the member.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Liberal Party opposes what the government is doing with the Victoria Hospital. We believe it is a mistake and a disservice to those communities, those that believe in community health hospitals.

Having said that, I had a constituent who shared some thoughts with me and wants to be left unnamed, and I think had some very important questions that needed to be asked. The question is, "Doctors are required to have admission privileges to hospitals in order to practise. Are you aware that we are going to lose three more doctors because they do not have admission privileges at the Health Sciences Centre and the St. Boniface Hospital? They said they will close their practice when the birth floor closes at the Victoria Hospital."

Is the minister aware of this? Did he give it any consideration in the last couple of weeks? Can the minister provide us an update?

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I would just ask the member if he is quoting from a signed letter, and, if so, if he would table it according to the rules.

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable member quoting from a personal, signed letter?

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, you know, she initially did sign it, but she scratched it out. I am prepared to table it after I ask my second question.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a signed letter.

On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, he does not have a point of order. The honourable member made it clear that it is not a signed, personal letter.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a new point of order.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I do not want to make much of it, but if you would check the record, I thought I heard the member say that indeed it was a letter. It was signed, although the signature was scratched out. That would make it a signed letter. That rule is for good purposes so that there is no manufacturing of letters, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will re-ask the question to the honourable Member for Inkster. Is the honourable Member for Inkster quoting from a personal, signed letter?

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it was a signed note that the name was scratched out. I had indicated that I am more than happy to table it after I am done my questions. I trust you are not going to take a magnifying glass and try to determine who it was.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, he does have a point of order. Any member that is quoting from a personal, signed letter, when requested, must table that letter. The honourable Member for Inkster has agreed to do that, so that should take care of the matter.

* * *

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, if the member has information about specific doctors that are planning to change their practices, I would be glad if he would provide it to me or to a member of my department. The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Victoria General Hospital who have the responsibility of staffing these facilities have not brought that issue to anyone's attention. No one, to my knowledge, has made that allegation so I am unaware of it. If he has information, let him provide it.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what I am referring to in regard to this notice is to bring the minister's attention to the issue. I trust that the minister will immediately look into the issue in hopes they will be able to resolve it.

Another issue that is raised and a question, I think, is worthy of repeating is women at St. Boniface are already being stacked in the hospital hallways during labour. This has to be very embarrassing and disconcerting for them during this personal trying time.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health, to the very best of his knowledge, can he indicate to us that we do not have women who are in labour that are waiting in hallways, whether it is the Health Sciences Centre or St. Boniface. Has he given that any thought prior to him making any sort of a decision in regard to the future of Victoria?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, there are about 9400 births in Winnipeg in a given year, of which about 740 or so this year will be in Victoria, which represents about 7.5 percent of the births. We are not talking about a large number of births moving to Health Sciences and St. Boniface. Specifically, the member has made allegations on the basis of an anonymous note that he wishes to table. I will obviously ask the WRHA if there is any substance to these allegations. To my knowledge and in response to my questions on the same matter, they have assured me that is not the case.

Maternity Wards Comparative Birthing Costs

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I will await the results from the minister. He will have to excuse me if I just do not buy what it is he is saying to the Chamber, given their record on hallway

medicine and so forth. You know, this government since taking office has spent \$1.259 billion more in health care. That is more than the retail sales tax, the gasoline tax and tobacco tax combined.

The minister initially said he was closing obstetrics at Victoria because of safety issues. We said fix the safety issues, obstetrics can stay open. Then he is quoted in the paper as saying, "Well, it costs \$3,300 to deliver a baby in Victoria and only \$1,500 for a tertiary hospital." I do not know where or how this minister comes up with these numbers. I would ask him to provide numbers that clearly indicate what he has indicated through the media is in fact factual.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): I just want to assure the member that we are continuing to work with Victoria and with the WRHA to provide enhanced services for women, particularly our older women's health services. We are working with our midwives to explore a community birthing option and a midwifery centre at Victoria Hospital, but I am assured that on the basis of the budget that is provided by WRHA to the facilities in question, those are the numbers in terms of cost per birth.

Given the funding of the obstetrics unit, the costs of pediatricians and anesthesia provisions on a 24-7 basis, \$3,500 is the current cost of a birth at Victoria. Approximately \$1,500 is the cost of a birth in the current situation at St. Boniface. That said we are not making this move for cost reasons.

Obviously we have been spending more and more and more at Victoria Hospital. Originally we were funding beds on the assumption of about 122 births per bed per year. We are funding them now on the basis of only about 94 births per year. We have actually increased the support per bed. Nevertheless, women and doctors have been voting with their feet, moving their births to other facilities and that is why we made this decision.

Urban Deer Population Road Safety

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I have heard from some constituents of mine about a growing concern that we have in Charleswood and that is about the deer population causing some very serious concerns. On one road alone in a given day there could be 20 deer walking

down the road. Not only are people afraid for the destruction of their property, but there is a serious, serious concern about the possibility of a motor vehicle accident where somebody could be quite severely injured by this. The roads are not very wide and with 20 deer in a given day that is a serious issue.

I wrote to the Minister of Conservation several weeks ago about this issue, and I still have not had a response from him. I would like to ask him today what he intends to do about this problem.

*(14:10)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation):

Mr. Speaker, first of all, this past winter we have seen widely varying numbers from one region to the next in Manitoba in terms of deer population. We have seen, in some areas, a huge increase in the number of deer, and along with that goes the collisions, goes other problems that the farm community have talked to us about, residences that are close to where their deer populations are. We have seen more deer entering, not just city limits like Charleswood, but in smaller communities right across Manitoba.

We have a number of tools that we can use in order to try to contain the deer populations, given specific conditions in specific locations, and I know that the Member for Charleswood understands that in a location such as Charleswood, there are certain challenges that we face.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the Minister of Conservation was like a deer caught in the headlights with that answer because he had no answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote a letter about this serious problem two years ago to the former Minister of Conservation who indicated in a response that he, too, at that time had the tools to address the problem. We have still seen nothing in the last two years to look into this with some of these tools that they have talked about.

I would like to ask the Minister of Conservation now if he would be prepared to look into this issue to see if we cannot prevent some serious, serious accident from happening in my constituency and to protect some of the damage that is happening to a lot of the property there.

Mr. Struthers: I had assumed that the Member for Charleswood would want a full and complete answer, and that is what I was trying to provide for her. This is not a straightforward question when it comes to dealing with animals in the area of Charleswood when these animals are more used to living in other parts of our province.

Mr. Speaker, attempts in Manitoba to manage the populations of deer and other animals are ongoing. We have been doing this for a number of years. We have many people in my department who are very well trained, educated and very committed to making sure that the deer populations remain at such a state—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would dearly love to be able to hear the answers.

Mr. Struthers: The last time I got up to answer the question, Mr. Speaker, you could barely wait for me to finish.

I want to assure the members opposite, and particularly the Member for Charleswood, that our department is doing everything we can to make sure we minimize the contacts between wild animals, in this case deer, and the constituents in her constituency.

CAIS Program Elimination of Deposits

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): KAP has asked the NDP government on a number of occasions to follow the government's lead and do away with the required CAIS deposit. Will the NDP government recognize the hurt in Manitoba's agricultural sector and show leadership among the provinces by eliminating the deposit requirement, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I have been asked this question before. When I was asked before, I indicated to the member that there was discussion and, in fact, there is a news release out indicating that CAIS deposits are going to be delayed until March 31, 2006. As well, Mr. Speaker, it indicates in the news release that the ministers have also agreed to pursue the necessary authorities as quickly as possible on two additional issues. That is allowing

producers to access all remaining funds in their accounts and to extend the one third deposit for the 2005 program year.

So, measures are being taken, Mr. Speaker. We have listened to the producers. We have extended, and we are looking at options of how the producers can take all of their money out.

Mr. Eichler: They have the power to eliminate it and they should. Manitoba's agricultural sector has been hurting and it is in a crisis. Farmers were promised that the CAIS program would be their saviour. However, many farmers have not even qualified, and some of those that have applied, even in September, have not received their cheques.

Will the minister now admit that the CAIS program deposit is not the answer? Will the NDP government join Ontario and do away with the required deposit, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Wowchuk: The Agriculture Policy Framework Agreement is an agreement between the provincial and federal governments. In order to make amendments, 70 percent of the provinces have to sign on to make the changes. As I indicated to the member opposite, the process is taking place. However, the producers have been notified that their deposit deadline will be extended, and we are looking at options of how the CAIS deposit can be eliminated, Mr. Speaker, but we are also looking at what the alternate will be for the program.

I remind the members opposite they were the ones that were saying, "Sign the APF. Get this program going."

Provincial Budget Fee Increases

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): In spite of record revenues this year, the NDP offered no meaningful tax relief to Manitobans. Instead, they increased taxes by increasing the Pharmacare deductible. I ask the Minister of Finance to guarantee to Manitobans that there will be no further increase in taxes this year through the back door by increasing licence fees, permits and levies through Order-in-Council. Give us your guarantee.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): What we will do is we will follow through on what we said

we will do in the budget. We have reduced personal income taxes by 19 percent. We have reduced the small business rate from nine when we came into office. It will go down to four, it is at four and a half now. We will increase the threshold at which the small business rate is calculated from 200 000 to 400 000, more than doubling it for small business owners.

In addition, the first time since the Second World War we have reduced the corporate income tax rate. At the same time, we have completely reformed the personal income tax system so that the non-refundable credits have been increased by 39 percent. There has been a special benefit put in place for families which has been spread across a wider range of the population, and the result, Manitobans have a more affordable cost of government now than they have had in the last 30 years.

Mr. Hawranik: With record-high revenues coming into the Province this year, it is unconscionable for the Minister of Finance not to guarantee to Manitobans that he will hold the line on backdoor taxes.

Given this NDP's spending addiction and their habit of wringing every nickel and dime out of the hands of Manitobans, I ask the minister this: In all conscience, with record-high revenues, how can he not guarantee to Manitobans that he will not increase taxes through the backdoor by increasing licence fees, permits and levies for this year by Order-in-Council?

Mr. Selinger: All the major tax reductions and/or fee increases have been announced in the budget.

There have been some items that we did not announce which are reductions. We have taken away the dairy licensing fee. We have taken away the elk rancher licensing fee. Those are reductions of 100 percent on a \$100 fee. We did not announce every little detail, because not all of them are finalized. When they are finalized, they will be announced publicly with due notice given to everybody.

But what we have done is what I have just mentioned. We have kept Manitoba among the most affordable places in the country to live. As the member opposite knows, that is a far greater effort that has been made than members opposite made during their time in office.

At the same time, we have increased funding for things like the Selkirk Mental Health Centre that the member was demanding just moments ago, like the schools in the member's constituency that he was demanding just a moment ago. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot demand spending and ask for tax cuts at the same time.

Children in Care Safety Concerns

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, the office of the Children's Advocate released a report. In this report, the Advocate indicated that under this NDP government requests for services in 2004 have risen to an unprecedented level.

What assurances can the Minister of Family Services provide today that ensures children's safety throughout the province and ensures children's concerns are being heard?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I am pleased to let the House know that since 1999 the budget for the Advocate's office has risen by more 130 percent.

There are two more full-time staff in the Advocate's office, and as to what our government is doing for children, let me just name a few initiatives: the Lighthouses program, the Safer Schools, Healthy Baby, Healthy Child, Triple P, prenatal supplemental, the children's therapy initiative and rebuilding and growing the community-based, not-for-profit child care throughout all of Manitoba.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answer, but I guess my question is this. Why have cases risen from 685 in 1998 to over 2045 in 2004? Obviously, your programs you are spewing about are not being reached out to the families.

The Children's Advocate is concerned that over the next year, as cases are transferred between the four new CFS authorities, they do not have enough resources to track the issues that will arise. In fact, there are not enough resources to provide the level of case services and the systemic reviews with the current level of funding.

I will ask again. What assurances can the minister give to the children of this province and the office of the Children's Advocate that sufficient resources will be provided so that no more children fall through the cracks?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, we have made sure that the office of the Children's Advocate is very well advertised and perhaps that result is showing the increased numbers. When I talked about the budget earlier, since 1999, I would like to quote the 1994-95 program progress report of the Children's Advocate, page 2, and I quote, "Despite repeated requests for additional staffing resources to meet the needs of our evolving program, to date no new resources have been provided."

Again, we have made progress of increasing the budget by over 130 percent, two new full-time staff in stark contrast to, I will quote, "No new resources have been provided in '94-95."

MACC and FCC Merger of Staff

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, it is just three months ago that the Minister of Agriculture assured the people of Manitoba that there would be no merger between MACC and FCC. Just a few weeks ago she said, Wowchuk was responding to claims that the then—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Penner: I am sorry. The Minister of Agriculture then quoted from Jack Penner, the Agriculture critic, of two agents—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just a reminder to all members when addressing each other, it is members by their constituencies and ministers by their titles. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Penner: She was responding to the critic of Agriculture's question whether the corporations would merge. Now it is very clear that she has merged the two corporations. Why would the minister not have been honest with the people of Manitoba at that time?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, when I answered that question, I was being honest. I am still being honest when I say that we are bringing the two corporations together under one umbrella, but they will continue to operate as a separate pillar for crop insurance and a separate pillar for the credit corporation. That is what I said before. I had said we would be looking at bringing human resources and technology together, but the corporations would remain as separate operations.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

New Flyer Industries Hydrogen Bus

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of attending the completion of the cold weather demonstration testing of the new hydrogen fuel bus at Red River College on March 10, 2005. The testing phase for the hydrogen bus saw it travel a city bus route that runs through Windsor Park in St. Boniface for approximately two weeks. The bus runs smoother, quieter and cleaner than the standard diesel-fuelled city buses.

Why is this good news, Mr. Speaker? New Flyer Industries and Kraus Global, two partners in this project, are located in my constituency of Radisson. New Flyer Industries built the bus chassis for this project while Kraus Global provided the compressed hydrogen gas refuelling dispenser. Both companies are innovators in the field of alternative fuel technologies. Kraus Global is a worldwide leader in alternative fuel dispensing systems while New Flyer Industries is a leader in developing alternative fuel and hybrid-electric buses. New Flyer also recently won the 2004 CALSTART Blue Sky Award for sustainable transportation.

Compressed hydrogen gas, when used as a fuel for buses, produces harmless by-products of water and heat. This reduces the amount of poisonous emissions entering our atmosphere and reduces our dependency on non-renewable resources such as oil and gas to operate our city transit system.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the president and CEO, John Marinucci of New Flyer Industries, for his leadership in this project. I also want to thank executive VP of sales and marketing, Paul Smith of

New Flyer, president Norm Estey of Kraus Global and president Jeff Zabudsky of Red River College for attending this event. Finally, I want to congratulate the staff and the students of those organizations for making this hydrogen bus a reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Manitoba Cattlemen's Association Scholarship Recipients

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I rise today to honour two young women in rural Manitoba who recently were awarded scholarships from the Manitoba Cattlemen's Association. Ramona Garbald and Carlanna Thomas wrote essays about the events they saw unfolding in rural Manitoba, particularly, the problems around BSE.

In reading their essays, they pointed out that, in Ramona's essay, she talked about the fact that an industry is being jeopardized and made the point that every time another business, another farm in rural Manitoba, shuts down, another yard light goes out, we all lose. And she made the point, as did Carlanna, that not only do the small communities of rural Manitoba, the medium-sized communities of rural Manitoba, indeed, the whole economy of the province of Manitoba suffers when we stand by and allow an unwarranted and unnecessarily large number of these agricultural enterprises to go down.

They were not making the case that they should be subsidized. They were not making the case that they need to be dealt with as charity cases. They were making the argument through the eyes of young women in rural Manitoba who were looking to their own future and, no doubt, hoped that at some point they would have an opportunity to play a role in the future of agriculture in rural Manitoba. With what has been happening in the cattle industry which is obviously near and dear to their heart, and now what we see happening with the prices of the grain industry, they were worried that they might be seeing their dreams and aspirations disappearing in the sunset, to use the rural vernacular.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the members of this House would join me in recognizing the concerns of these young women.

École Saint-Avila

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the students and staff of

École Saint-Avila who are undertaking many unique artistic initiatives and programs within their community school. On Wednesday, March 2, I visited the school and enjoyed reading a fractured fairytale to the students of École Saint-Avila, a French immersion elementary school in the constituency of St. Norbert.

The school has a fabulous academic program as well as having a very creative and extremely strong music and art program. One recent initiative this school has participated in is Young Artists on the Avenue, a program operated by the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ. Students from Grade 2 and Grade 3 classes designed art pieces related to the theme celebrating music in art. This coincides with the 2005 Juno Awards.

* (14:30)

One group of students designed unique pottery pieces decorated by a mosaic of different coloured melted glass while another group designed a human-sized violin out of papier-mâché, along with violins drawn in charcoal. The students' art will be in a storefront display at 346 Portage Avenue until June 12.

École Saint-Avila is involved in several other artistic and musical initiatives. The school is one of three schools to partner with the University of Manitoba's School of Music to offer its students violin lessons. School students are also currently finishing off a number of celebrity ceramic bowls, which will be signed by Juno performers in early April. These bowls will be auctioned off to support the Empty Bowls project which sees all proceeds donated to Winnipeg Harvest.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate teachers, Mademoiselle Debbie Miller, Mademoiselle Rupal Malik and their students for participating in Young Artists on the Avenue. I would also like to thank Principal Gordon Campbell and the staff and students of École Saint-Avila for making art an important part of their students education. Thank you.

FCC and MACC Merger

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the people of Manitoba, the farmers from Manitoba

really have to wonder where they are at today. As I said in Question Period before, the farmers of Manitoba have been told that there would be no merger of MACC and Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation. Yet, three months later, just a few weeks ago, the minister confirmed that the two corporations would be merged under one board, under one administration and would have to operate as one corporation.

I find it very interesting that the same principle applied when the BSE situation struck in the province of Manitoba. The farmers of Manitoba and the people of Manitoba were told in large ads that the Province of Manitoba had put in place \$180 million to support the BSE and the cattle producers, the ruminant producers, in the province of Manitoba. Yet, when I look at the numbers, the real numbers, there is \$14 million, or \$15 million, I am sorry, announced under the Manitoba BSE Recovery Program.

There was \$15 million announced under the Manitoba Feeder Assistance Program, 6.2 million was delivered. The Manitoba Slaughter Deficiency Program; 10 million announced, 9.4 delivered. The Drought Assistance Program; 12 million announced, 4 million delivered. The Manitoba cull program; 6 million announced, 4.8 million delivered. The Manitoba BSE Recovery Loans Program; 100 million announced, 67.9 million delivered. The Feeder Finance Program, the Stocker Loan Program, nobody knew how much was identified there because they were old programs and it was false advertising. The Canada-Manitoba BSE Recovery Program; 24 million announced, 8.4 million delivered.

Mr. Speaker, the point I make is constantly the people of Manitoba have been told that certain things would happen and they have not happened. They have been misled and the people of Manitoba are sick and tired of this Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) misleading the people of Manitoba.

Concordia Hospital Orthopedic Facilities

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House about some great news for my constituents in Rossmere and for all Manitobans in general. Briefly, I would like to draw the attention of all members to the efforts of our government responding to the health care needs of our seniors, particularly in regard to orthopedics.

Mr. Speaker, hip and knee replacements make an enormous difference to the mobility, comfort and general well-being of those who require this surgery. Accordingly, we have made reducing wait lists a priority in Manitoba. Since forming government in 1999, we have already increased the number of hip and knee replacements by 20 percent over the last five years by investing in state-of-the-art orthopedic facilities at Concordia Hospital. These initiatives would continue to help Concordia evolve into a centre of excellence.

In our year 2005 budget, we have made provisions for a 10-million investment in 1000 more procedures over the next two years. In addition to the increasing surgical volumes, our government's plan to reduce the wait list for hip and knee surgeries focuses on increasing the number of doctors and nurses, standardizing the way family physicians refer patients for surgery and appointing wait list coordinators to facilitate referrals to surgeons with shorter wait times. We are also building a provincial network of orthopedic surgeons that will better coordinate the Winnipeg, Brandon and Boundary Trails orthopedic programs by transferring cases as required.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the government for its continued effort to improve the health care infrastructure in Manitoba so that all Manitobans can enjoy dignified, healthy and active lives. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Would you please canvass the House to see if there is leave for two sections of Supply to sit in the two committee rooms, to consider the Estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives in 254, and the Estimates for Labour and Immigration in 255 simultaneously, with bills being considered in the Chamber, and that there be no quorum calls or recorded votes, with any requests for recorded votes to be deferred, and for the House to rise at 4:30, given that it is Holy Thursday?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for two sections of the Committee of Supply to sit in the two committee rooms to consider Estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives in room 254, and the Estimates for Labour and Immigration in room 255 simultaneously, with bills being considered in the Chamber, and that there be no quorum calls or recorded votes, with any requests for recorded votes to be deferred, and the House to rise at 4:30 p.m.?

Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: If there is agreement, it would be the House and the Committee of Supply to rise at 4:30. Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Mackintosh: In the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, would you please call second readings in the following order: 13, 14, 23, 16, 3, 8, 11, 17, 18, 21. Then would you please call report stage amendments, 22, The Water Protection Act.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we will do second readings, and the Committee of Supply can go into the two committees and start their Committee of Supply anytime they want, if they wish to.

In the House, we will deal with second readings in this order. It will be bills 13, 14, 23, 16, 3, 8, 11, 17, 18, 21. Once completed, then we will do report stage, Bill 22.

Okay? So now I will call second reading of Bill 13, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 13—The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), that Bill 13, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (14:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, after discussion with the milk producers and processors in this province, it was decided that it was necessary to make an amendment to The Milk Prices Review Act. The proposed legislation is intended to remove certain limitations placed on the Manitoba Milk Prices Review Commission when establishing a cost-of-production formula for the purposes of pricing fluid milk at the farm gate in Manitoba.

The commission is an independent body responsible for compiling information related to the costs of production, processing and distribution of fluid milk. Currently, Mr. Speaker, The Milk Prices Review Act requires that the commission establish a cost-of-production formula based on a survey of costs on farms. The database was first established in 1988. This database is considered by both producers and processors to be out of date and not reflective of the structural changes that have taken place in the industry since 1988. Unless the act is amended, the commission must once again undertake a cost-of-production survey of producers, which is considered both time-consuming and which will be very costly.

Milk producers have expressed, over the years, concerns as to the accuracy and have requested changes to the legislation. The processors contend that the formula does not reflect today's competitive market in western Canada. The commission has recently met with representatives of dairy farmers of Manitoba and the fluid milk processors to consider the issue of the producer and fluid milk priced differently between Manitoba and other western provinces. Both agree that changes are warranted, particularly with the establishment of the Western Milk Pool agreement and the provisions of Pool revenues.

The proposed amendment, Mr. Speaker, will enable the commission to undertake discussions with other western provinces as to the benefits of establishing one fluid milk price across the west. Both the dairy farmers of Manitoba and the processors have pledged their support for one fluid milk price in western Canada. The current legislation does not provide the commission with the ability to enter into serious discussions with other western provinces on this issue.

The proposed amendment would delete the phrase "on the basis of information obtained from the

survey of the cost of production of milk on farms" in section 3(2).

Mr. Speaker, in concluding my remarks, I understand that the dairy farmers of Manitoba have met recently with both opposition parties and briefed the members on the need to proceed with this amendment. Dairy farmers of Manitoba have advised that they support the amendment moving forward. So I am hopeful that the members opposite have received the information. I have also provided a spreadsheet for them, and we can move forward with this amendment in the best interests of both our dairy producers and our processors.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture for those comments specific to Bill 13, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act. Yes, we have had the opportunity to meet with the board of directors regarding this act. Certainly, in our discussions with them, they were looking forward to fast passage of this act.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a few comments on the record regarding the tremendous impact this industry has within the province of Manitoba. There were some facts that were brought to our attention, which I was not aware of, but we still have over 500 dairy farms within the province of Manitoba, which is good to see. However, as was indicated to us, these numbers are slowly dwindling as the size of the farms is getting larger and larger.

Now I can speak a little bit from personal experience here where I have a son-in-law who is involved in the dairy industry. It is becoming more generational. So this was the indication that was given to us by the board yesterday, where, in fact, the numbers of people who are employed in this industry are not necessarily declining; however, the farms are growing where they are allowing their children, in many cases, to become involved in the industry. Coming from rural Manitoba, I am really pleased to see that.

Again, the industry is good for the province itself in that it also adds dollars, and many dollars, to the Province of Manitoba. They produce over 200 million litres of milk in a year. I think it is important for us to note as well, in fact, the question that we posed of the board when we met with them was the indicator, would it be possible on a carton of milk to actually put the costs on there from the cost of the

carton to the amount of money that the farmer was receiving for the milk product that was in there, just to show the consumer that, No. 1, it is not just that the milk itself comes the Safeway store, but, that, in fact, it does come from a farm and there are costs of production, but to indicate clearly that the values that could be attributed to the farmers who are, in fact, doing the work, getting up at 5:30 every morning, going out and looking after their herd. Believe me, they do a good job of taking care of their animals.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to indicate is that there are a number of plants within the province, and, of course, the fluid milk plants that we see are in Brandon and in Winnipeg, but there are also a number of cheese plants. We have those in Winkler, Grunthal and New Bothwell. I know that the cheese plant within Winkler has continued to expand and, certainly, helps to aid in the revenues that are generated within our own local area, and, of course, the number of people who are employed at the plant as well. So, for the areas that are able to have these plants within their communities, they are certainly good industrial plants to have and good corporate citizens. So we applaud the efforts that they make. The other thing is that there are two butter plants within the province that, of course, produce our butter. Those are located in St. Claude and Notre Dame.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I wanted to indicate was that the board has gone to the work of determining the average age of the dairy farmers. It was interesting to note that the average age of the farmers is 42 years, which is significantly less than the average age of the farmers within the province of Manitoba. That is good to see. I am really encouraged by the fact that the younger generation is getting involved in this industry because, as we all know, milk, cheese, butter is something that, I would say, all of us have within our fridges and utilize on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to indicate that we on this side of the House believe that this amendment act should be passed as quickly as possible in order to assist the board in the work that they have to do. With that, thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I rise today to put a few comments on the record on The Milk Prices Review Act that is before the House currently and how I think that affects the total economy in the province of Manitoba.

When one looks at what the dairy industry has accomplished in Manitoba, when I look at southeast Manitoba, which I am more familiar with than the rest of the province, although I recognize the importance of the dairy industry to the entire province, including the city of Winnipeg and the western region, the central region, and the impact of the employment opportunities that are being created by a farm organization and a group of farmers that are dedicated to producing a very healthy product that will lend to healthier children in the province of Manitoba, and, indeed, contribute significantly economically to the communities in our entire province.

*(14:50)

When I looked at the statistics, we have 509 dairy farms in the province of Manitoba, and we always talk about large producers and how large the industry has really become and how large agriculture operations have become. The average size of herd in the province of Manitoba is 60 cows. When one looks at today's economic modelling across North America, a herd of 60 cows is not a very large herd of cows. I think that sort of demonstrates the demographics of Manitoba agriculture and the Manitoba producers.

When one looks at the total milk production of those 509 60-cow units, in the province of Manitoba, and recognizes that those 509 producers produce 299.5 million litres a year, which have a total farm-gate value of \$192.7 million, one recognizes how dramatic an effect that industry has on communities such as La Broquerie, Manitoba, such as the southeast part of the region of my constituency. By the way, La Broquerie at one point in time was known as the dairy capital of Manitoba and still, I believe, deserves and is that capital in the province of Manitoba, because of the many dairy producers that reside and operate in the R.M. of La Broquerie.

When one looks at the number of fluid milk plants, there are three in Brandon and Winnipeg, and there is one in Winkler, one in Grunthal and one in New Bothwell. I am somewhat familiar with the Parmalat plant in Grunthal, having visited that a number of times, and recognize the significant amount of fluid milk that is sometimes needed, even from northwestern Ontario, to keep that plant going. Therefore, I would suggest to you that there is room for expansion in the province of Manitoba under that process.

Sometimes I think that there should be a consideration made because of how dramatically the province of Manitoba has changed since the devolution of the Crow rate and how we are now becoming more and more dependent on our livestock industry that will eat the products, eat the grain that we produce in this province of Manitoba. One cannot assume that it will always be affordable to ship feed grains and other grains out of the province of Manitoba into export positions. Therefore, I think we should pay every bit of attention to the needs of the agriculture community to ensure that the livestock segment of this sector in the dairy industry, and in many other aspects of the livestock industry in the province, need to be properly evaluated, need to be properly orchestrated, the expansion of which, and then I believe we will see Manitoba agriculture and rural Manitoba again come into its own.

One of the problems I have with some of the things that I hear from the government's side these days is their constant evaluation from a negative aspect about the livestock, about the effects of the livestock production in the province of Manitoba. It concerns me greatly. There was a time not too many years ago before this NDP government was in power, that it was assumed that the waste products from animals were deemed organic fertilizers. Yet, today, when I look at the new water bill that is being proposed, and when I look at many of the statements that have been made previously on matters such as this bill before us now and the dairy industry amongst the other animal industries, one can only assume that it is the intent of this NDP government to restrict the expansion of the livestock industry through mechanisms that we had previously not used in the province of Manitoba.

It is the rhetoric that concerns me more than anything else about natural fertility products, and they are the waste from animals that needs to be properly evaluated, and organic fertilizers. I have heard many times the discussion on the NDP government side of the ability to expand our organic food production. Yet, when I hear about the waste products which are organic fertility products, those we are not supposed to use as far as they are concerned, the danger that they pose on other parts of our environment, such as water, the soil and those kinds of things, are really questionable at best when coming from the NDP side of the government. They simply do not know what they are talking about.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So I would propose to this House that we would support the introduction of Bill 13, which would allow for proper evaluation of a cost of production mechanism that could be used by the dairy industry to, in the future, help them set prices for milk in a proper and responsible manner. I think that is important and would give us a clear indication that there would be a means established that would see an economic structure that would be viable over the long term for the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand here today and take some pride as the deputy critic for Agriculture to support this bill and, hopefully, the minister will see to it that this bill will receive swift process through this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, too, want to just rise to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 13. We recognize the stakeholders within this very important critical industry seem to be onside in recognizing the value of passing this legislation. We do not have any problem in terms of it going to committee and to see if there is any additional feedback that might be provided to us. But, on first glance, it would appear to be legislation that will better enable and empower a more efficient way in terms of the way in which reviews are, in fact, conducted. In that sense, it is a positive thing.

We want to do what we can to support the dairy industry as a whole. As speakers prior to me have commented on the value of this industry, I would echo their comments in recognizing that this is an industry that has done quite well for all Manitobans.

Having said that, I would also like to just put on the record that there always has been this ongoing concern in terms of the end product, in terms of its price and ensuring, as much as possible, that we have, in particular, our young people in the North, and in fact, throughout the province being able to afford this quality product that is being produced by first quality dairy farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With those few words, we are quite prepared to see the bill go into committee. Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I begin my comments by saying where would we be without our farmers. Being a father of three young children, I can tell you that we go through an amazing amount of milk and just take it

for granted. I think often, we get to the point in society where we just assume that milk will be in the refrigerator and do not give any consideration to where it comes from, the hard work and effort to supply milk to those of us who love consuming it.

I think of my days when I grew up in the country. There was nothing more refreshing on a hot day than a fresh glass of cold chocolate milk. Again, we should give thanks where thanks is due to those who produce the milk for us in the province.

* (15:00)

In fact, we have this beautiful list of statistics here. In Manitoba, we have 509 dairy farms. The average size is 60 cows; the annual milk production, 299.5 million litres of milk; the annual farm gate value, \$192.7 million; and the average age of a dairy farmer, 42 years. There is, also, the number of fluid milk plants, three, that are in Brandon and Winnipeg; the number of cheese plants, three in Winkler, Grunthal, New Bothwell; and, the number of butter plants, two, are in St. Claude and Notre Dame.

Mr. Speaker, it is important for this Legislature, not just to pay homage to our milk producers, but, also, to periodically look at the act and see what needs to be changed. Certainly, there are recommendations in here that will improve things for our farmers, for agriculture. So I do also wish to see this move on to committee and hear the public give their comments on where the legislation, where they feel that it impacts them. Again, we certainly appreciate what our dairy farmers do for us as a society, not just milk, whether it be the butter that is produced from it, ice cream which we, of course, all love, and on and on and on. We, certainly, do, and the cheese. How could we forget the cheese that is produced, and all the other by-products?

On behalf of the milk producers of Springfield, I say congratulations. We look forward to seeing this bill move on to committee. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): It is a pleasure just to put a few words on the record, before the bill moves forward to committee. Certainly, I look forward to hearing the comments and the suggestions from Manitobans that have come forward in those committee hearings, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Certainly, I know within my own constituency the dairy

industry is very important. It is very significant. It is a tremendous job creator, and it is really part of our heritage. We have a number of people who are employed within the area, job creators, certainly, while on the farm itself, in the direct production of milk, but also in some of the tertiary areas. We thank those who are involved with the New Bothwell cheese factory, and Ivan Balenovic, who is the president of New Bothwell cheese, does a tremendous job, having taken over the organization a couple of years ago.

I have a special connection with the factory. Many might know that my wife comes from New Bothwell, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, she lived in the home right next to New Bothwell cheese. Her mother worked at New Bothwell cheese. In fact, I hope I do not get called as a conflict of interest, but my wife's mother still works at the New Bothwell cheese factory, and I know that her brother Rob worked there for many years as the inspector.

I am glad to hear that the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) says she likes cheese. It is good. I think that that is a nice slogan. Certainly, I do want to thank everybody who works at the factory in New Bothwell for the good work that they do.

I would, while I am here on this issue, like to challenge the minister of highways to ensure that the roads around the New Bothwell cheese factory are in good condition. I know that there was difficulty just a while ago getting the raw products into the cheese factory to ensure that they could continue on. I went to the minister to ensure that the company was not road restricted out of business, which was fast becoming a reality. I hope that that situation is rectified in the future. Certainly, bills are one thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but action sometimes speaks louder, and we would hate to lose or to make it more difficult for a fine institution like the New Bothwell cheese factory to operate.

Parmalat, in Grunthal, is also in my constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, good community and corporate citizens in the wonderful town of Grunthal. We always feel somewhat conflicted between whether or not to buy the cheese from Grunthal, or the cheese from New Bothwell. So, like a good Liberal, we take both sides of the issue, and we buy a little bit from Grunthal and we buy a little bit from New Bothwell. I know my friends in the Liberal Party think that being on both sides of the fence is a

good issue. I, typically, do not. I, typically, do not, but on this side I am truly on both sides of the fence when buying a cheese, either in Winkler or in New Bothwell.

I do know that within my own area that there are many who are concerned, and want to ensure that the supply management system that has operated in our area, has been successful for our particular constituency. There has been, I think, stability brought to the industry, because of the supply management system in southeastern Manitoba, and they have done well by it. Certainly, I know this is not all within the provincial jurisdiction of this Legislature, but, as legislators who are elected to represent views, I think it is important that all of this Chamber know that supply and management has worked well for those producers in my area. We, certainly, hope that in ongoing negotiations, whether in WTO and the ongoing agriculture rounds in negotiations, or through GATT, that there will be protection afforded to those who are working in a system that is doing good things for Manitobans.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to conclude my comments by thanking all those who are in the milk production business and the dairy industry, and in the other areas like cheese production and butter, as well, because they are providing good jobs for us in our region and are good community and corporate citizens. Thank you very much for the opportunity to put those few comments on the record.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words about The Milk Prices Review Act, and, of course, that gives us licence to talk about a number of things including the act. It would appear that the act that has been put before us does have the support, in the main, from the milk producers of the province, and, therefore, will likely receive expeditious handling within this Chamber.

There are some very good reasons why milk is one of the agricultural commodities that is under a quota system that is mandated. In looking at the production of milk in this province, I think, we need to remember that these entrepreneurs undertake a responsibility in production of fluid milk in this province that puts them in a position of being committed to a 24-hour-day, seven-day-a-week responsibility, for which they deserve to be

appropriately reimbursed, or, if you will, compensated for the production that they put forward.

One of the concerns that from time to time is raised, and I say this very carefully and very pointedly based on what I just said a couple of moments ago, there are those out there who are somewhat envious of the guaranteed price that the milk industry is able to achieve, but, at the same time, those same critics would probably be very unlikely to make the commitment and to make the demands on their own time management and family to commit themselves to this industry and to this lifestyle.

* (15:10)

While this bill is the object of our discussion, I want to remind my colleagues that, indeed, the first few years after I left school and began to participate in the agricultural industry, my father and I were part of a dairy operation, not anywhere near the level of a number of cows and volume of production as dairymen achieve today, but, nevertheless, I had about 15 years of a pretty intense relationship with some black and white cows. Anything that we can do in this province to encourage, maintain, and expand the dairy industry can only be good for the communities in which the dairies are located, because first of all, the industry demands high quality services from the industry providing service to them, the feed supply, the herd health, all of those input requirements that dairymen have, not to mention the supply of specialized equipment and the opportunity to be able, on a decent infrastructure, to move their product to market.

They, nevertheless, through the current tax structure and through the fact that this is a labour-intensive industry, are significant contributors to the tax base and to well-being provide a stabilizing factor within our communities wherever dairies of any size are located because of the very nature of the business and because of the stability of those who are in the industry.

While in the area encompassed in the constituency of Ste. Rose there are not a lot of dairymen, there are a fair number of people who in fact have left the dairy business. To me that says we need to be all the more appreciative of those who are in the business and who are committed to making the

product that my colleagues speak so glowingly about available within the province.

As a sidebar, while we all know about the downside of BSE and how cull dairy cows were impacted by that the same as cull beef cows, it compounds the losses that we incurred when we lost the market for the breeding stock that comes from the very good dairy herds we have in this province. Manitoba, in particular, has been known for producing some of the best-quality dairy breeding stock in North America.

The irony of this is, and really the point that I wish to get to, Mr. Speaker, that with the closure of the border that we are continuing to deal with in terms of a health issue with the United States, is creating no end of grief for our American friends because there has been built up a very large dependency south of the border on breeding stock coming from Canada to help replenish their breeding herds and, in particular, their production herds.

Careful how I choose my words here, Mr. Speaker. They are looking for the type of production that our cows can provide, and they are looking for the bloodlines that our industry has and they are unable, over a period of years—of course they will because artificial insemination will help offset the inability to import live animals, but in the short term, and in the near term, it is very ironic that the very basis for the operation of many dairy herds south of the border is severely impacted by the restrictions that the Americans themselves have put on the importation of our cattle.

I would like to put on the record that may be one more leverage we as Canadians can use to talk to our American neighbours, friends, colleagues about why it would be in North America's and in United States' best interest to do everything we can to rationalize and normalize trading relations. I have very specifically chosen the words, colleagues, friends, neighbours, trading partners in reference to our American neighbours, and particularly in this case those involved in the dairy industry because they have a need, they have a willingness, and certainly have demonstrated a desire to have our breeding stock available to them.

Everything we can do and everything this government can do to prove and improve our ability

to demonstrate the herd health that we have, not only in the beef industry, but in the dairy industry.

If we could achieve success in that area, it would relieve tremendous pressure on a lot of people in this province. A lot of them, interestingly enough, who are not talked about as much as they should be, are the dairymen. While their milk products have been stabilized, they too have been feeling the down sides of the border closure. I would simply urge my colleagues in the Legislature not only to acknowledge that, but to work through any channel that we can to keep the lines of communication open with our American neighbours because there are a lot of them. There are a large number of them who want to communicate and want to do business.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): This amendment is small in words but big in action, Mr. Speaker. The 505 dairy farmers are affected by this within the province of Manitoba; it also affects our neighbouring provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta with their business plan. The number of dairies that are moving from B.C. into Saskatchewan is at a nominal rate. It does have an impact, not only in Manitoba, but in our neighbouring provinces as well.

Out of the average herd of some 60 cows within the industry there, there are a number of barns that are over that, but there are 327 producers that are still under 60 head. It seems to work out that about 40 cows per family is the norm, so, once you get to 80 cows, then that moves up to a double and triple once you hit the 120. There are eight new facilities that have been built within the province in the last year, of which a few of those are immigrants that have come into this country and brought foreign money with them.

The dairy producers yesterday, when we met with them—and the president, Mr. Bill Swan, lives in Woodlands and is one my constituents—were very persuasive in their comments. Along with his colleagues of Jim, Hans and Dick, they made it very clear about the fact that they would like us to support this bill. We had this bill brought in last session. We will definitely move this forward.

The thing is that out of the 3 million litres that were being produced last year, from 1991, I think you will find it interesting to know that there were only 130 million litres being produced at that time. The member from Ste. Rose talked about the spinoff

effect that happens within the dairy industry. When you look not only at the cheese processing, but the trucking, the benefits that affect everyday life and the ripple effect that we have seen, not only in the BSE, but the dairy producers have had the opportunity to assist in making the economy grow, it is one of the more stable ones that we have within our province, and we are very proud of some of the producers we have within Lakeside.

We talk about the Larson farm, the Hueging farm, Donohoe farms, the Swan farm. Boonstras just built a new state-of-the-art barn last year as a milking parlour that houses 180 cows. It has a system that can milk those cows in about a two-hour period, and they milk three times a day. We are very proud of the fact that this agriculture sector is one that seems to be doing quite well and, through good management, good responsibility in farming, they have some of the best breeding programs, the best record keeping, and they have brought the standard of milk production up phenomenally over the 10 to 15 years.

* (15:20)

Those genetics are being sought all over North America, Mexico and other parts of the world. I had an opportunity to travel to South America and talk about our genetics in the year of 1996, and no matter where I went, they wanted to talk more and more about our dairy cows and our productions and our record keeping. It is something we can stand proud of here in the province of Manitoba, because those genetics are very important, and we can do the embryo transplants and that type of thing that just make science what it is today. We, as Manitobans, have that expertise that we can rely on, and sell to those countries, which will make them proud one day and follow our lead.

We talked a little bit about the cheese plants in Winkler, Grunthal and New Bothwell. Just the spin-off from that as well is phenomenal. I know that the minister will be talking about some changes to the butter act in, maybe, the next session when we come back. We look forward to that as well.

The value, at the gate, is going to exceed \$200 million this year, which is a substantial amount that is going to be helping the farmers out there. Unfortunately, with supply and management and the CAIS program, we did talk about that a little bit yesterday, with the dairy producers, and there are

only two producers that they were aware of that the CAIS program actually helped. That amount of money was a very insignificant amount. In fact, it was just a few hundred dollars. That money has not been received by those farmers, as well, which we find very disturbing. They applied for it, but they have not got it.

Mr. Speaker, everybody on this side of the House will, of course, be moving this bill forward and we want to make sure that it does do that. We will not be standing in the way. We would like to get this on to committee. So, having said those few words, we would leave it at that and move it on to committee.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 13, The Milk Prices Review Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 14—The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: Now we will move to Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), that Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Advanced Education and Training, that Bill 14, The Electricians' Licence Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Ms. Allan: I am honoured at this time to have the opportunity to outline the purpose and the details of this bill.

We are all aware, Mr. Speaker, of the serious hazards posed by working with electricity. In the past

four years alone, there have been nearly 70 instances of injury from electric shock among Manitoba workers. Young and inexperienced workers are particularly vulnerable in this regard. A report done in the year 2000 indicated that in Canada in that year alone, more than 200 workers under the age of 30 were injured by electric shock.

The bill is designed to address this hazard by stipulating that, with a few very limited exceptions, only licensed electricians or their apprentices will be permitted to perform electrical work. In doing so, the bill will ensure that those working with electricity in Manitoba are adequately trained. More specifically, the proposed amendments eliminate helper as a category of worker authorized to do electrical work, as defined under the act.

Currently, many workers designated as helpers have not received the level of training provided by an apprenticeship program, which would help ensure that their work is done properly and safely. Many Manitobans are familiar with the case of Michael Skanderberg, the 19-year-old who was killed while working as an electrician's helper in 1999, and to whom this bill is dedicated.

The Department of Advanced Education and Training will work with those who are currently helpers to ensure they have the opportunity to enter the apprenticeship program and become licensed. Our ultimate goal is to have all persons currently working as helpers complete the apprenticeship program and become fully trained licensed electricians.

In addition to the helper category, the bill also removes from the act certain definitions that are no longer relevant, including limited appliance repair electrician and electronic equipment serviceperson. Furthermore, the bill eliminates the categories of limited construction electrician and limited maintenance electrician. However, in recognition of the realities of the workplace and to accommodate those who currently hold or are working toward these classes of licences, the proposed changes allow persons issued those licences prior to the bill coming into force on January 1, 2006, to renew those licences after that date.

The proposed changes would mean that only the following persons may do electrical work as defined under the act: a person who holds a valid licence

within the limitations specified in the licence; a person who has been issued a permit may do electrical work in accordance with the permit; an apprenticeship in a designated electrician trade in the presence and under the direct personal supervision of a journeyman who is continuously employed on the same contract or job as the apprentice; a person in training to obtain a limited specialized trade electrician's licence with respect to installations directly associated with the trade he or she is regularly employed in.

While proposing these new measures to limit who may perform various kinds of electrical work, the bill also recognizes the need for flexibility. To that end, it introduces a new definition of restricted electrical work, which will allow for some electrical work by persons on unconnected electrical equipment and under very specific conditions.

Under the proposed program, the following persons may perform restricted electrical work: workers at commercial or industrial premises who are assisting and under the direct supervision of a licensed electrician and for whom this type of work represents a small portion of their overall duties; a miner at an underground mine, and again, only under the direct supervision of a licensed electrician.

The amendments also provide for placing in the regulations all requirements that must be met for obtaining the various classes of licences.

Having these amendments come into force on January 1, 2006, will allow affected parties sufficient time to make necessary adjustments in terms of compliance, and will also allow sufficient time for the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board to introduce a system of compulsory certification in the stipulated trades.

The views gathered through consultation with industry and labour are reflected in the content of this bill. For example, the *Free Press* article, quote: "The Manitoba Electrical League, an industry group that includes both union and non-union contractors, also supports the amendments," said General Manager Dave Foreman. "A survey of our members showed most contractors supported the change for safety reasons," he said."

These proposed amendments will protect workers, employers, consumers and property from

the many effects of electrical mishaps, while at the same time ensuring we have the highly trained work force that we need now and in the future. The changes balance the needs of workers and employers and embody a degree of flexibility in response to the realities of the workplace without compromising safety or training standards.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I commend this bill for approval of the Assembly.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I move, seconded by the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

* (15:30)

**Bill 23—The Workplace Safety
and Health Amendment Act
(Needles in Medical Workplaces)**

Mr. Speaker: We will now move to Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces).

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), that Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House. *[interjection]*

Sorry, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is not in the House. *[interjection]* Oh, sorry. Oh, yes, I cannot say that. *[interjection]* Okay.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship that Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House, and, also, the minister has tabled the

message from the Lieutenant-Governor, so we have that.

Ms. Allan: I am pleased to have an opportunity to put on the record a few comments to explain the purpose of this bill.

In the Throne Speech of November 22, 2004, the government indicated that it would be introducing legislation that would require the use of safer needles in medical workplaces and health care facilities. New technology has provided for the availability of safer needles and their use will protect thousands of health providers from accidental needle-stick injuries and exposure to infectious diseases.

In more specific terms, the proposed amendments provide that an employer in a medical workplace where hollow-bore or intravenous needles are used, ensure that workers use only safety-engineered needles or devices so as to prevent needle-stick injuries. These would include retractable needles, shielded needle devices and needleless devices. As well, an employer will be required to ensure that safe work procedures and practices relating to the use of safety-engineered needles are implemented in the workplace.

For purposes of addressing situations where a worker does experience a needle-stick injury, the amendments require an employer to develop a treatment procedure or protocol. In addition, an employer in a medical workplace would be required to investigate every needle-stick injury and make a report on it. Upon request, the report would have to be made available to a safety and health officer.

In situations where the employer demonstrated that it was not reasonably practical to use safety-engineered needles, the employer would nonetheless be required to establish safe work procedures and practices relating to the use of hollow-bore needles. Such a practice may include the need to provide a worker with personal protective equipment to protect against needle-stick injuries.

Very rarely would it not be practical to use safety-engineered needles. However, situations could possibly arise where safety-engineered needles for a specific task or procedure are not commercially available or where it is demonstrated that use of safety-engineered needles poses an additional risk to the worker.

These amendments will come into force on January 1, 2006. This should allow employers in affected workplaces sufficient time to test and decide on the types of the safety-engineered needles that best suit their particular needs and circumstances. It is important, I believe, that workers also be involved in the process of testing and choosing the new needles to be used. This lead time should also allow medical workplaces and health care facilities sufficient time to negotiate or renegotiate contracts with the suppliers of safety-engineered needles.

As we are all aware, accidental needle-stick injuries can create a significant risk to workers of being infected with viruses that cause HIV, hepatitis B and C or a variety of other disease-causing microorganisms. Despite safe work practices and procedures that may currently exist in medical workplaces, it is estimated that some 3000 needle-stick injuries occur annually in Manitoba. While most of these may not involve time-loss injury claims under the Workers Compensation system, certain protocols are instituted to determine if the worker has been affected. This, of course, can result in a considerable amount of down time for workers and medical workplaces. In addition to the direct impact of the injury itself, needle-stick injuries can involve a host of protocols that must be observed in the treatment of injuries. These protocols can include testing and medical treatment, including, in some cases, prophylaxis treatment. Such procedures can be both costly and time-consuming.

While the proposed amendments in this bill set out basic requirements relating to the prevention of needle-stick injuries, regulations now being developed as part of a more comprehensive review of all workplace safety and health regulations will expand and elaborate on these requirements.

It is anticipated that those regulations will also set out measures and procedures designed to prevent accidental injuries that may occur while working with other sharp devices, such as suture needles, scalpels, lancets and glassware.

These amendments, I firmly believe, merit the support of all members of this Legislature. They will reduce the incidents of needle-stick injuries to workers and alleviate many of the health, social, emotional and other consequences that could occur in cases where a worker acquires a life-threatening, blood-borne disease.

I would like to thank Jennifer Howard for her support and expertise regarding this legislation.

I commend this bill for approval of the Assembly.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member from Steinbach, that this bill be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Now we will move on to Bill 4, then Bill 16, The Wildlife Amendment Act.

Bill 16—The Wildlife Amendment Act

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 16, The Wildlife Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la conservation de la faune, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Conservation, seconded by the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship, that Bill 16, The Wildlife Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to offer for consideration to this House Bill 16, The Wildlife Amendment Act. I believe it does several things that are very important and that I hope all members of this House will see as progressive steps forward with this act. This act is intended to address improvements to public safety, enhancements to enforcement, increased protection of wild animals, and to provide for the administration of the non-resident licence allocation system for Manitoba outfitters through the regulation.

The proposed amendments that we are talking about here today are intended to make The Wildlife Act more contemporary.

An Honourable Member: Does it help the bears?

Mr. Struthers: The member opposite asked if it would help the bears. I think I can count on his

support on this one because he will like the kind of protection we are offering, not only to the bears but other forms of wildlife in Manitoba, especially when we consider the first point of this act, which deals with removing the use of pesticides as a method to control problem wildlife.

We do not want private landowners who defend their property to be placing poisons, herbicides out there on the landscape. These poisons are very effective in killing wildlife, but they are very difficult to control. We have had examples of endangered species which we have found poisoned. We have had unintended, I guess in the terminology of war, the collateral damage with other wildlife other than the intended species. Mr. Speaker, we believe that we have to be able to control problem wildlife, but we should not do it with herbicides.

* (15:40)

The Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) knows full well that trapping, hunting, these kinds of opportunities are very effective tools in maintaining management of problem wildlife.

The other areas, Mr. Speaker, involve increasing the efficiency of officers by providing clear authority to deal immediately with problem wild animals in situations where there are concerns about public safety or the protection of property. We do not want our Natural Resources officers to be put in a position where their authority is unclear as to how to deal with problem wildlife, whether they be within urban areas or whether they be throughout the landscape of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, this means that we would allow resource officers a degree more flexibility in investigating the breaches of the act and threats to wildlife. The protection of Manitoba's wildlife requires the use of a variety of enforcement techniques ranging from traditional uniformed officers all the way to undercover operations that we employ in this province and that we employ in cooperation with other agencies.

I want to offer this legislation to members of this Legislature. I would encourage my critic and other members of this House to ask questions, clarify, but, ultimately, I am hopeful this act can receive the support of all members of this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to this bill being in committee because, while I missed some of the minister's remarks, he was trying to defend some of the clauses in this bill in his remarks, and that is fine. I think there are aspects to this bill that raise questions that will need further clarification from the minister, and we will either have to get that through his communication with our critic or by questions that perhaps he will answer in committee.

My colleague from Russell intends to comment on this, and I am always concerned when government takes to itself the authority to manage a particular aspect of our resources in an area which has been traditionally under regulated perhaps and where people like myself and the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) where our operations have been on the landscape for 80 years or more. We have been used to being able to manage and control some of the predators that are on the landscape. I do not think that I, or the majority of farmers who are out there, are abusive of wildlife. When I was—I am starting to sound like an old codger, but you talk about the 1950s—[interjection]

Mr. Speaker, I thought I heard some abusive comment from my colleagues across the way relative to my age. I am sure I did not hear them right. I guess they were just remarking on my haircut, but the fact is that—

An Honourable Member: Are they calling us white-haired Tories, again?

Mr. Cummings: Us old, bald, white guys.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to leave on the record is that this bill may have some endearing characteristics but I think I owe my constituents, many of whom will live in relatively sparse areas where there is a lot of wildlife that can be a problem, that they will have some concerns if this starts to unnecessarily impinge on their ability to deal with problems as they arise.

I do not live in the middle of the wilderness, Mr. Speaker, but my neighbour recently had to deal with rogue wolves who were coming into his yard and doing damage. In other words, they were killing calves. I do not think his herd could have expected the same type of expedient protection from overworked and understaffed members of Natural

Resources, who—I have the greatest respect for the work that the employees in Natural Resources do, but I hope this bill does not set up a situation where they are going to be charged with taking responsibility for some of the control functions where there is an inter-reaction between legitimate commerce and legitimate wildlife, if you will, living on the landscape. They will not be able to do it Mr. Minister. They are overworked and understaffed, and I stand by that statement.

When I read some of these clauses I will be needing some serious explanation about what the inferences are. We talk about being able to sell certain body parts of wild animals. That has always been at issue and we will be seeking and again, very much on the part of some of my constituents who would be very interested to know what this does—

An Honourable Member: His, too.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I will let him worry about whether or not his constituents support what he is doing.

The bear that was a quarter of an inch, or less than half an inch off the world record was shot in the middle of ranch land in my constituency so it is not like we do not have to deal with that. You know, earlier in Question Period today, we were talking about deer in Charleswood. That is appropriate that we were, but we are talking about business, and people trying to do business on the landscape, and the interaction and possible interference that pieces of legislation can cause.

I am raising some what-ifs, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to put a bogey man out there, but I want to put the minister on notice that we will be scrutinizing this very carefully because there are some of these clauses that seem to have implications that we would not like, but they have to be read in conjunction with the act that it is amending. We will proceed to do that.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak on this bill and I know that I will have another opportunity at another stage of this bill to put comments on the record, and perhaps at that time, we will have greater clarity from the minister in terms of what the practical application of this bill should be. Perhaps we will not, but certainly that is something we will seek through debate and the committee stage

of this bill. We will also be listening very carefully to those who come forward to make representations on this bill as well.

Mr. Speaker, one of the areas where I have to take a little bit of caution is the area with regard to people who are engaged in an agricultural industry to be able to protect their property. I just want to relate an incident that happened last evening where an owner went out to check his cattle and has a shelter for his calves where he had about 80 calves or more, or 100 calves, and in amongst these calves were four wolves. Although no calves had been injured, the question comes, how do I deal with these wolves. Do I start phoning Natural Resources to come and deal with them because they just literally have to live there in order to be able to protect these calves. That is not practical, but that farmer, that producer still has to have a way to protect his enterprise and to protect his property.

* (15:50)

Mr. Speaker, I can relate a personal incident, as well, where, for some reason on the west side of the park this year, we have an inordinate number of ravens that are starting to use cattle shelters as their shelters for the night, and farmers are now starting to lose newborn calves to ravens. As a matter of fact, this incident happened on our farm where a newborn calf, although it was fine at one o'clock in the morning, by six o'clock the same morning the calf was dead because of the ravens having picked its belly button to its intestines, and the calf died. It is not just one or two ravens. These are packs of ravens that seem to descend on these operations. So you have to have some way of protecting your enterprise, protecting your property, and protecting your stock that are just as important as wildlife.

Now, there is no way, as the member from Ste. Rose pointed out, that conservation officers can get out there and do justice in trying to deal with these types of circumstances, because they exist all over the place, especially in the areas that the minister and I are from, which is an area surrounding the Riding Mountain National Park. Then we have got the added complication of river valleys, and also the Duck Mountain riding park, which are natural habitat areas for wildlife. But, as we have seen the national park being destroyed by that wonderful beaver, Mr. Speaker, and the lands are flooded, the habitat for other wildlife is being destroyed. I am talking about

wildlife, such as elk and moose, but as the elk and moose and deer move out, so do the wolves. So a lot of the habitat that was supposed to have been there for those types of wildlife has now been destroyed. So where do the wildlife go? They go outside of the park, and they are starting to mingle amongst cattle herds, and they are creating a significant problem to a lot of the producers around the park. That is an area that is natural for livestock production.

Added to that complication is, of course, the whole issue of tuberculosis. The minister knows what I speak of, because this is another cost to those producers in that area, where they have to assemble cattle for tuberculosis testing, but also a number of herds have been destroyed. Livelihoods have been, in essence, taken away, because of the mingling of the wildlife from the park with the cattle herds outside of the park.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are significant issues. They are significant to our residents who pay taxes to the Province, who are trying to eke out a living, if you like, out of the landscape. So, every time we turn around, we seem to find a piece of legislation coming forward that causes another impediment to the ability to make a living, if you like, on the rural landscape. I have to say that the people who, I guess, are very protective of the landscape, are the people who earn their living off it. These people live with the landscape. It is no different than an area where you were born. People learn how to survive on the landscape. People learn how to make a living out of that landscape. People learn how to earn a living and develop a life on that landscape, and that is exactly what is happening on the rural side of our province.

When we talk about, and I am going to stray a little bit here, I am going to talk about water protection, which is a bill that we are looking at in the Legislature, and something that seems to be of great importance, and for some reason some people feel that those people who live in the rural areas do not protect the water. I challenge that, because, Mr. Speaker, I live in a rural setting. There is nothing more important to me in my setting than water, because if I do not have fresh, clean water, I do not live there. My livestock depend on clean water. My family depends on clean water, and so, therefore, we do everything we possibly can to protect our water supply. We do not have the government, whether it is municipal or provincial, paying for any of the infrastructure that we have on our property for either

water development or sewage disposal. That is a cost that is borne by ourselves as owners of properties in rural Manitoba.

Now, there are some municipalities where water development has taken place and water infrastructure has been put in place because there is no supply of water through the well system, Mr. Speaker. In the part of the world that I live in, the fresh water supply still comes from the ground, but people in the area are very cognisant of protecting that water supply. As a matter of fact the town of Russell, which has about 2000 people in it, gets their water supply out of a freshwater well. So protecting that water supply is important to those people, and so they conduct their activities as carefully as they can to ensure the protection of that supply. But then we have government coming along and telling people how to do it their way and how to do it better, because that is what the book says.

Let me relate an incident, Mr. Speaker. We have a single person living in my part of the world. It happens to be a woman who lost her husband, but chooses to live in a rural setting. She is surrounded by nature, she is surrounded by wildlife, she is surrounded by her own animals that she keeps, but her sewage disposal system quit working on her, and it was a field system. So she went to her plumber, and she said, "I want you to put in a new sewage disposal system for me." "Oh," he said, "I cannot do it now. I have to get the department of environment and the Department of Conservation, because I will lose my licence if I do not get them to come out and approve your system. But," he said, "the way to do it is . . ." and he described how this should be done, and she, thinking that the government has the best interests of her safety and her protection at heart, went ahead and contacted the authorities to come out and tell her how to do this.

Well, I want to tell you how it happened. They designed a system for her that the plumber, the contractor, said would not work, but they insisted that this was the only system that would work for her. So, to comply with the wishes of authorities, she went ahead and did exactly what the authorities said had to happen. Well, they turned the system on. A few days later, the entire system is frozen up. So the authorities came back and now they are going to redesign it, because, obviously, something happened, but nobody is taking responsibility. You see, the responsibility is that of the owner. So they

redesigned the system, and they excavate, and they put in the system in accordance with what the authorities say, not what the plumber says, but what the authorities say. So they turn the system back on again. The system fails again. So they come back, again, a third time. They are now saying, "Well, obviously, this is not going to work, so now we have to redesign the whole system." They go to work and they redesign a whole system, and, even in the redesign, the person who is putting in the system says, "I do not think this is going to work," but the authorities say, "Yeah, this is what we recommend."

* (16:00)

This woman has spent \$8,000 on trying to get a sewage disposal system for her house, and she does not have a sewage disposal system. She has to spend untold sums of dollars, again, when, if she had done it the way that the contractor had recommended, who had worked on these systems for years and years and years—it is not as though he came on the scene yesterday and decided that he was going to become a plumber. This was someone who knew what systems work, how they work and how they should be installed. But, someone who had worked in an office, and who had gotten this new responsibility said, "Now, I have got to go according to the book." Who wrote the book?

Mr. Speaker, what we see are instances of this kind happening time and time again because we are so anxious to put in regulations on things that are not broken. If we really want to fix the system, whether it is the water system, whether it is the sewage system, let us take a look at where the problems are and let us fix the problem where it exists. The first place we should be looking at are the sewage systems of towns and cities. You know, we talk about manure management. If you really want to talk about management of effluent, which this bill does not address, of course, and I am straying from the bill, I say, but let us look at what is practical rather than what is impractical.

So, Mr. Speaker, although I digress from this bill somewhat, I wanted to point out I was doing this to illustrate that sometimes when we write bills and legislation, we do not think about the applicability of that in a practical sense to the people who have to live with the legislation. We think about it from government perspective. We think about it from big government's point of view of the world, and I say

sometimes government has to put on its shoes and walk out and look at it from a different perspective and how people who actually make their living in this particular bill, in rural areas, how it impacts on them.

Mr. Speaker, I know that poisoning animals is not the right way to do things. We have lost our own pet dogs as a result of someone poisoning, and inadvertently dogs in a rural will go out for a run and they will pick it up. We have lost at least one dog, maybe more, to this kind of thing, but that does happen. But I say to the minister, if we are going to put these restrictions on, then what is the alternative? Let us provide the alternative. Let us make sure that people in the area will know that although you cannot do this, there is an alternative in how we can deal with it. The alternative may be to allow those people either to use a particular kind of trap, a snare, or some humane way that can be dealt with, in terms of trying to protect their livestock and their property.

I know that there are lobbyists that will say, "Oh, you should not be able to do anything. Just let the wildlife wander." Well, who actually feeds the wildlife? Is it the government? No. Who is the protector of the wildlife? Is it the government? Well, yes, they are out there with resource officers who do a wonderful job, Mr. Speaker, and we need them. They have to be out there. But I say that in large measure the people who live in the countryside, the people who own land and own property in rural Manitoba largely play an important role in protecting and making sure that we have a healthy and an abundant wildlife presence in our province.

Mr. Speaker, you are someone who lives or lived in an area where you depended very heavily on wildlife. So, therefore, those people who depend on that resource do not ever want to see it depleted. There is a way to manage the harvest of that resource so that that resource can continue to stay healthy and can continue to thrive. It has been proven time and again that if you do not harvest knowledgeably and properly that your resource will become extinct by itself.

There is a practical way on how you go about harvesting, and making sure that a resource is healthy. Mr. Speaker, I know you know of what I speak, but so do others in this House as well.

Mr. Speaker, when I turn my attention to this bill, I want to just remind and caution the minister

that although some of the actions and restrictions the minister is putting forward in this bill, and it is unfortunate that every piece of legislation that comes about has a negative impact of some kind on someone somewhere in the province, but in this case, residents in rural areas have to have the knowledge and the comfort that they can protect their property, they can protect their livestock, they can protect themselves in the event that for some reason there is an inordinate entry of unwelcome wildlife onto their residences.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we listen to the beat of the wrong drummer, and we come in with legislation that meets the agenda of one group or one interest party, but it does not really put balance into the system.

I look at the minister, who is a resident in the Dauphin area, and say to him that he lives in an area that depends largely for its livelihood on agriculture. He needs to be cognizant of the impact this legislation is going to have, not only on his residents, but on all residents who live in these kinds of areas. That is why I stand in my place today and put some comments on the record with regard to cautionary approaches that we need to take. Maybe there are some amendments that have to be made in this legislation to ensure there is in fact a balance, that we are not unnecessarily causing hardship to a sector that is already under stress.

Mr. Speaker, when I speak about wildlife, we talk about clearing bush on lands, and I can tell you that in our area, generally speaking, although land is a valuable resource and those who own it need to be able to extract a living out of it, people are still conscious about leaving a little bit of land for wildlife to be able to use as a shelter to be able to raise its young, whether it is a stream, a pot hole, a small bush, or whatever it might be.

I have to tell you that because I live so close to the Riding Mountain National Park I have opportunity to see wildlife quite often. What we have been noticing, and not just me alone but people who live along that side of the park have been noticing, is that elk, to a large measure, are now moving out of the park to have their young. Where are they moving? They are moving to small wood lots that might be two acres in size in the middle of a field or on a quarter section outside of the park. If you go there in

late May or June, it is quite easy to find several female elk with young babes along their sides.

Why is that happening? It is happening because, by and large, some unnatural predators have been introduced to Riding Mountain, and some unnatural species. I am talking about the beaver, who has destroyed the natural habitat of elk in that area. I am talking about cougars. Cougars are not natural to that part of the world, but they were introduced to that part of the world. Now they have become predators on elk and on cattle outside of the park. I am talking about the timber wolf that was not a part of that landscape. Therefore, the diet of the timber wolf has been upset, so what do they go after? They go after the elk. They go after the young elk and so forth. The bears have always been there, so I am not going to point at the bear as being a problem because he has always been there. For that reason, we see wildlife coming out of the park mingling with cattle herds.

*(16:10)

It is not uncommon today to find along the southern edge of Riding Mountain, elk actually mingled among cattle grazing alongside of them. That was never the case 10 or 15 years ago. That is being done now, because of the wildlife habitat having been destroyed in the park.

If one does not believe that the wildlife habitat has been destroyed, I would welcome you to come out to that area, and let us go for a hike. We will not have to walk very far before you come up to a swamp, a lake that was never there before. You will come up to beaver dams that are 12 feet high and higher. You will find all kinds of forest falling into and decaying in these large bodies of water now.

When we talk about pollution of our major lake in this province, what you have to do is take a look at how much organic material is decaying into our water streams. That decaying material carries with it phosphates and other pollutants that are being swept down our rivers and into our lake.

You add to that the enormous amount of pollutants that are coming out of our sewage systems, whether we start in Brandon and come down through Portage and then into Winnipeg and then on into the lake, the pollutants and the heavy metals that come out of our sewage systems, that we drop into the

rivers and then discharge into our lake, and we wonder why the lake is dying.

You see, it is not just one thing that does it. So you have the organic materials that are decaying and are washing the pollutants into the rivers. You add to that the sewage that we drop into the rivers and we sweep down into the lake, and then you add to that the depletion of the lake by our hydro-electric dams.

One says, "Oh, well that doesn't happen." Well, I remind this government that when this lake was drawn down a couple of years ago, it was drawn down, I am told by my colleagues, by something like six feet. When the winds came up, the amount of algae that was washed ashore was unbelievable because we were creating a stagnant lake by the human activity, that was not just one action, but a number of activities, that we had thought that that lake could sustain.

Number one, we have stopped the grazing around the lake to some extent. All of that material that is not grazed is now rotting, decaying and washing its way into the lake, and all of the pollutants go with it. Then we draw down the lake because we need hydro-electric flow. That, once again, starts the lake to die. Then we wash down all of the pollutants from our sewage systems into the lake.

Then we stand up on political platforms and we say, "It is the phosphates from fertilizers that are causing the problem." Those are an addition that is also an addition to the problem. But I say that that is such a minor addition to the problem that we had better take a look at the other problems that are truly causing our lakes to die.

Mr. Speaker, I come back to this bill, and I say to the minister have you looked at a balanced approach in what this bill is addressing. Have you looked at whether or not the impact of this bill is really what you intend it to be? Have you discussed this bill with people who it is going to impact? I am not talking about the wildlife groups. I am not talking about the interest groups. I am talking about the ordinary Manitobans who make their life and their living on the land and whose lives are impacted by this, who are actually the stewards of our wildlife because they are the ones who have the habitat for the wildlife to grow and to develop. Have we discussed it, and have we consulted with them

adequately to ensure that, in fact, the bill has a balanced approach?

I do not have the answers for the minister. I do not even know if he has done that. That is why I am going to wait, and I am going to leave this debate open to allow the minister, then, to respond in terms of how, in fact, he has consulted and what he has done.

One of the failures, Mr. Speaker, of this Legislature, is that the minister introduces a bill, and he makes a few comments on. I have never seen this happen so regularly in the past as it does now. The minister stands in his place. He makes a few introductory remarks on the bill. On second reading, he may or may not, or she may or may not, put some comments on the record with regard to the bill. It is not a half-hour debate; it is not a 20-minute debate. It might be 10 minutes, if it is 10 minutes at all. Then it is left to the opposition to carry the debate from there on because the minister says, "This is our legislation, this is where we stand. We are not saying anything because we do not want to compromise, by our words, what the bill may do."

That is wrong, Mr. Speaker. So that is why I challenge this minister, when he has his opportunity to stand in his place to talk about this bill, to tell us exactly how he has balanced the effects of this bill so that, in fact, it is a bill that can be adopted and accepted by Manitobans as being fair and reasonable. If he can do that and if his colleagues can do that in the Legislature, I will guarantee him that I will support this legislation. But he has to show me why I should support this. He has to show this side of the House why we should be supporting his legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say in this House that that is a shortcoming because many times much of the legislation that is introduced is not explained. Much of the legislation that is introduced by this government has been an enabling type of legislation, which allows a minister just boundless amount of latitude to be able to bring in regulations of any kind that fit the day, if you like. That is not disclosed when the bill is in the House. We do not find out about the regulations till perhaps a year or more down the line.

To make my point, I want to refer to the Minister of Education's (Mr. Bjornson) legislation that was introduced over a year ago with regard to safe schools. A year later, we still do not have the

regulations for this bill that are the implementation tools of the bill. Although the minister was out there with his press release about the bill, and the notions seemed fine, Mr. Speaker, what we find in reality is that a year later the bill is not practical.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: So, Mr. Speaker, my time is out, and I will look forward to further debate on this bill.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I, too, would like to put a few comments on the record on this Wildlife Amendment Act, in large part, because I represent an area on the exact opposite side of the province that the minister for Roblin-Russell represents.

An Honourable Member: It is Roblin.

Mr. Penner: Roblin represents—but, because of the similarity of the wildlife situation in my part of the riding, all the way up to the Ontario border, including Lake of the Woods, Moose Lake and all of that part of the country—I know that the minister knows that area well because his uncle resides in my constituency and is a good friend of mine, a very good friend of mine. I appreciated his company many times.

* (16:20)

Of course, when you drive out to that part of the country, you hear the stories that some of the people will tell you. I had a phone call about six, eight weeks ago from a person who had been walking out in a wilderness area. He said about 200 yards from his home there was a bluff of trees, and they had a trail through it. He said that is where they would go for the evening walks. He said, "I was walking along. I didn't have a gun or anything with me. But, I got the lesson of my life. Walking along, I was just coming out of the bluff, and on the trail I felt something that was different." He said, "I stopped, and I turned around, and about 10 yards back of me was a large timber wolf." It had been following him. He said, "So I stopped, and stood perfectly still." Another one came up right beside him. He said, "Then I turned around and looked ahead of me" There were two of them on the trail ahead of him. He said, "My young 13-year-old daughter walks this trail almost every day. We had not seen this pack of timber wolves around before. We knew they were in the area, but we had not seen them like this before. I

stood perfectly still until they left the trail and walked away. I did not run home. I very gently and quietly walked back to our house. I am sure that had I run, they would have attacked." Knowing timber wolves, as he does, I am certain that would have provoked an attack.

Similarly, we had the former reeve of the Piney municipality phone me one day, and he said, "Jack, if you could, when you stop by here next time, I would like to chat with you. I just had a cow that was taken down. I believe it was a black bear that took this cow down, because it had paws ripped across the side of it, and it ripped open its belly."

I said to Bill, "You know, that is really unusual, that you would have a black bear attack a cow in that manner and rip open its belly while it is alive. Are you sure they were not cougars?"

I reminded him of the time when my wife's uncle brought down a little kid goat, just a tiny one, when my boys were younger. He always liked to do these little trick-type things and brought them this baby goat. Of course, baby goats grow up into fairly bigger goats fairly soon, and this one did, too. You know, it loved to stand on top of the car, and we had a vinyl-top car at that time, and it loved to eat that vinyl. So it started doing that. It always liked to stand on top of the combine; these little goats can climb like mountain goats. So it was standing on top of the combine. We decided that, overnight, we would tie it in the back of the yard next to the well. We tied it over next to the well, and when we came home at night, it would always let us know that he was all right. He would always, sort of, bleep, or whatever these goats do, and make some noise.

One night we came home and there was no bleeping of this goat, and I said to Dora, "I should really go out back and take a look, whether the goat is missing, or maybe the boys took it." We went to bed and the next morning I walked back to the well, and here is our pet goat half-eaten. It rained overnight and the tracks were quite visible. There were big paws and a set of smaller paws, about half the size of the big ones, and I said, that is not a wolf and that is not a bear, and, I said, it almost looks like cat tracks. So, we phoned Natural Resources, and then we also called the University of Manitoba. They came down, and they actually made plaster casts of the tracks, and there was a mother cougar and a cougar that had attacked the goat.

The reason I say this, there are times, I believe, when those kinds of incidents will occur whether it is cougars taking down a cow, or black bears attacking a domestic animal, or wolves threatening human beings, and we do have a tremendous number of timber wolves out in the southeast part of the province, and we have complained or noted to Natural Resources time and time again that they should try and reduce the herd of timber wolves that we have out in that area, as we have in our area. I live, as most of you know, just west of the Red River, right in the valley, right in the middle of the lake when the floods come, but we have never before seen timber wolves out in our area. This last couple of years, we have noted the odd timber wolf wandering through, and I think it is because of the huge number of white-tailed deer that we have on the Aux Marais River, the Red River and the whole Red River Valley.

I drove by the neighbour's place the other day, which is right on the Aux Marais River, a very nice place, and there was a herd of deer, better than a hundred, right next to his yard. This is the reason why I believe timber wolves, predators of wildlife are in such abundance in our area, which we have never experienced before. I have grown up there, and never before did we see that. It leads us to believe that we must ensure that farmers have the ability, when dangerous situations occur, or threatening situations occur from wildlife, that farmers should be given the right to protect their property and their livestock herds, as well as human beings.

I know that had this person had a gun, that was threatened by these timber wolves on this trail at the end of a bluff, if he had had his gun with him, he would have illegally shot a timber wolf, or maybe two, if they had not attacked him. I know he would have done that, as I would have, as most anybody else would have to protect themselves. Yet, when we do legislation, seldom do we pay attention to the safety of our families. In this disrespect we have far more leniency toward the protection of that wildlife, as we should have. We are the stewards of nature and we must be the stewards of nature, but there are times when we must give individuals the right to protect themselves and/or their livelihood.

So I say to you, Mr. Speaker, I think we all have a responsibility as legislators that we pay attention to the needs of society, that we pay attention to the safety of those of us that live in this society, and the

future generations, and the protection of water, be it the protection of water, or others, is most important. We must pay attention to that, but it must be done in such a way that we are assured that the needs and wants and the musts, of future generations will be met without imposing undue hardship on them.

When I look at this Bill 16, The Wildlife Amendment Act, it just raises the concern once again that we should be very careful because we will always have those people in our midst, either in our departments that have their own little agendas, and maybe with the best intention at heart will put legislation before a minister. Very often we as ministers, and I can speak from experience, do not know the issues as well as they do. Therefore, sometimes we are in danger of putting in place legislation that does not serve the best interest of the general public and the needs of the general public. I think we should be careful when we do this kind of legislation.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, by saying that we, those of us that live in an area such as the Red River, when I read some of the reports that I have seen on the Red River and the nutrient content, or supposedly nutrient content in the Red River, and I look at some of the actual testing that has been done on the Red River, I have to wonder where the minister got his information to point his finger at agriculture and the Red River Valley as being the main contributor. The Red River being the main contributor to the pollution or the degradation of Lake Winnipeg. When I look at the whole watershed area from the Rocky Mountains east to the Red River, and I look at the rivers that run from the Rocky Mountains east to the Red River, and the huge areas of land that they drain in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and then I look at the little area that the Red River drains into that same lake, and I look at the Winnipeg River and the immense area that river watershed brings into Lake Winnipeg, as well, I have to wonder where the numbers came from to cause the kind of concern that the minister has raised.

I only raise that, Mr. Speaker, in light and in retrospect of Bill 16 and how a little clause of two or three lines can change how we do business or allow us to use protective devices and mechanisms to protect our families and to protect our livelihoods.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, I hope that those comments will serve to demonstrate to our constituents that, when we do have these debates, we take

their advice and we take their counsel and we take their fears into this House, and expressing concerns, when we do this kind of legislation.

I think very often we should pay a lot more attention to putting in place legislation giving people the rights to defend themselves and their properties in a meaningful way when danger approaches in numerous ways that it can on the farms and in rural communities in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the debate will remain open, as previously agreed.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (15:20)

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Would the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now be considering the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I want to begin this Estimates process by saying that, as a department, we take great pride in serving farm families, rural communities and the industry that is related to agriculture. Because the industry is a very important pillar, both the primary production and the agri-food are very important to the economy of this province.

I am also very pleased that we are able to work with small businesses and in the area of community economic development. That has become a great priority of our department.

I also want to begin by recognizing the dedicated staff that we have in this department. Certainly, these last couple of years have been trying times for farm families. As we work through the trade issues related to BSE, other issues in the hog industry where we have countervail and anti-dumping actions on the industry, those kinds of issues have put a tremendous amount of pressure, particularly in the case of BSE. Our staff has worked diligently and put in many, many extra hours as we try to develop programs to help the industry through these difficult times.

As you look back at last year, it has been a very challenging year. BSE, as I said, the park countervail, the high dollar that we have now is affecting our trade, and certainly, the unprecedented weather has not co-operated with agriculture. First, it was a drought; then in some areas we had flood; then last year we had a very early frost that was very challenging for producers, as well as the low prices of our commodities. Those low prices are, indeed, something that I think are of serious concern. Although we cannot change the prices, I believe that, as a department, we have to work very closely with the industry as to how we can help reduce costs or add value to the products, so that producers are getting more for the product they are producing.

It is in light of these challenges that we had decided we have to look at the department, reorganize it and look at better ways to serve Manitobans. Of course, everybody has heard about growing opportunities and the new organization that I announced in December, which is now being implemented.

As I say, the first phase of the reorganization was extensive consultation with industry, with the producers, staff, community leaders and people that are involved in the industry. It was from the advice and the consultation we did that we listened to our partners. Those partners advised us that the department needed to work more collaboratively with the industry, with rural communities, with agriculture associations and organizations to take advantage of emerging opportunities in food and non-food value-added and other opportunities.

As I said, there has been a tremendous amount of discussion, a lot of consultation and from there, we have come forward with some new priorities. I will only highlight a few of them, but certainly, the position of a new chief veterinarian is an important

one that we feel is very important and one that we will be filling very quickly because this veterinarian will have the responsibility for provincial strategies for food safety and animal health. This officer will work very closely with CFIA, and again with other provinces on issues of food safety and animal health.

As well, we are increasing our emphasis on food commercialization, marketing, innovation, bioproducts, agri energy, aquaculture, land use planning and urban planning. Another area where we are in the marketing section, we are introducing an organic marketing specialist. We have put in place, for the first time in history, an organic specialist in the province. We want our organic producers to now be able to take advantage of a growing market that is out there and that is why we are putting in place a specialist as well.

As I said, we have put in place the first level of staff in their new positions. Over the next two years, we will move towards implementing our plans with GO offices and GO centres. Our goal is to better serve our clients. I want to say that I am very pleased that Manitoba took a different direction from other provinces, where in other provinces, we saw a centralization of services and a reduction of employment in the rural areas. This plan is to, in fact, bring services closer to people, enhance them and create new opportunities for growth in rural Manitoba.

As I said, there are certainly challenges facing us. I could spend hours talking about BSE and border closures and the need to continue to work in this area. I only want to tell the committee that we were very disappointed when we learned R-CALF won their challenge. It made us reinforce our commitment to reposition our industry and work toward increasing slaughter capacity and finding new markets.

* (15:30)

We are working in those areas, but I also want to say that I am proud of our record for the amount of support we have been able to put in place for the producers. If you look at what Manitoba put in place and how much the federal government put in place for Manitoba producers, the provincial government's contribution to this crisis has exceeded that of the federal government. Is there more work to do? Yes, there is more work to do, and we will continue to do it.

I want to indicate that I established a ruminant task force in January of 2004. That task force came forward with recommendations in June. If you look at those recommendations, we are working on many, for example, when you look at developing a made-in-Manitoba label, expanding provincial abattoirs to increase slaughter capacity in the province, many of those areas we are working on. Of course, everybody knows about the Rancher's Choice proposal, but there are other proposals that are out right now. We announced additional money in this budget to help people move from provincial to federally inspected plants. The member opposite, himself, raised the issue of interprovincial trade and the challenge that we have moving a product from Saskatchewan into Manitoba. It is an issue I have raised many times at the federal level. I wish I could get some of my counterparts in other provinces to support us on this issue, but we have not been able to do it. That is why we have to increase our federally inspected plants.

I have to say that the Province made more than \$11 million in commitments towards the Rancher's Choice co-op. I cannot say the same for the federal government. They have put in place a Loan Loss Reserve Program. No one has been able to access that program. They put in place money for other ruminants; they have not provided that money either. So in that area, our goal, of course, is to have the border opened. But we recognize that could be some time, and we have to continue to work on slaughter capacity and developing new markets.

I talked briefly about the hog industry. Certainly, when we heard the announcement of the U.S. trade action, our department immediately retained legal counsel and participated aggressively in the defense against countervail allegations. After consulting with the Manitoba Pork Council, we struck a government-industry swine trade task team that has worked very diligently to analyze the potential impacts of dumping duties on the Manitoba pork industry, to develop a trade advocacy strategy, and to seek methods to augment Manitoba's feeder pig industry and expand Manitoba's pork-processing capacity as ways to add value to Manitoba pork. So we continue to work in that section.

The other issue that has been of concern is the level of farm income, and I want this committee to know that Manitoba is spending more on whole-farm income issues than ever before. Our CAIS budget for 2005 and '06 is \$52.5 million. This is significantly

higher than our budget of \$43.1 million in 2002-03 that was there for NISA and CFIP combined.

There are issues with CAIS. As I indicated in the House today, we have been working on those issues, and we will continue to work with our federal government and our other counterparts to address the issue of CAIS deposit. There has been some movement, but there is a delay till March '06 or until such time as an alternate program has been put in place.

Crop insurance continues to be a major program for us, and I want to say that, as we indicated in the budget speech, the two corporations will be brought under one board but the pillar of crop insurance and the pillar of the credit corporation will be kept separate. I value those as very important services, but we are bringing them together to take advantage of better human resource management and to take advantage of technology that is available.

Mr. Speaker, there are other very important components of the department in the area of rural economic development. Certainly, REDI is a very important program. REDI funds have been used to support both specific projects related to BSE slaughter and processing, and are also used to increase and diversify the economic activity in rural Manitoba. REDI has been used and has contributed money to the Manitoba Beef Fund program to increase beef processing capacity in 22 existing provincially registered abattoirs in Manitoba.

As well, there are other programs, and one of the new programs we have is Hometown Manitoba. I can tell members of this committee that it has been very successful. I have just recently visited Neepawa, Ste. Rose, Miniota and other communities that have taken advantage of that program to beautify their communities and the program is being received as a great success. I look forward to visiting more communities where this program has been put in place.

We have also implemented the Community Enterprise Development Tax Credit program and that will start to be delivered and will encourage local private investment by providing community-based enterprise development projects with the means to raise equity capital. The program is really intended to promote opportunities for value-added processing which will lead to further farm diversification, but it

can be used for other economic development as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at our budget and see an increase that is very significant, higher than it has ever been in a long history, we have made some significant changes in tax reductions for farmers. We have made significant investments into the CAIS program, but, as I mentioned, the tax credits and the farmland tax credit of \$20 million to help reduce farmland school tax is a significant movement and puts much needed additional money into farmers' hands.

Mr. Speaker, I could make more comments. I could talk about the changes that we have made to crop insurance. I could talk about the Crop Coverage Plus program that is now an option for producers, but I will save those comments to use as we get into Estimates. I want to say that I look forward to the debate with my critic on this very important issue of Agriculture and rural economic development. With those few comments, I will conclude and look forward to my critic's comments.

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

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Lakeside, have any opening comments?

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Yes, I do, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that. I do just want to put a few things on the record and talk a little bit about our position as the opposition to some of the things the minister has put on Hansard to be talked about here during the next 10 hours of Estimates.

I think it is important to note that my predecessor from Emerson did a great job in his role as the Agriculture critic. He will be taking part as a deputy critic on some of the questions as they come forward, as well as some of the members from our side of the House. We will look forward to those comments.

However, there are some concerns that I have with respect to the minister's opening comments. She did not mention much about the youth of our farmers that are so important to our industry. The farm age is alarming. With the crisis that the farm situation is in

at this point in time, I am very concerned about that. The young farmers are not going to have the opportunity to purchase these farms, and why would they want to get into it?

I am not just too sure that the plan on immigration that has been brought forward by this department and the Department of Industry is the saviour they think it is going to be by lowering the requirements. I have some very grave concerns about that with the price of machinery. If they are talking smaller operations, how much that will affect the farming industry as a whole, I think, is uncertain.

* (15:40)

The minister also talked about the GO offices and the GO centres, and also the amalgamation of MACC and the Manitoba Crop Insurance program. With the crisis that agriculture is in at this point in time, I am not sure this is the right time to do it. I know that change is good. Change is always welcome, and I welcome those challenges no matter what side of the House we are on because we do want to see change.

At this point in time, I am not sure that the Department of Agriculture needs the topsy-turvy atmosphere that is out there. I know I have talked to a number of people in the GO offices and GO centres, and there is so much uncertainty out there. My main feeling is that they are somewhat unnerved about the whole operation, the way that it is going to come down. I would urge the minister to take it slow and steady, but having said that, the farmers are trying to get their finances into order. They are trying get everything ready to go for this upcoming crop year, and the minister talked about the CAIS program.

Unfortunately, I was on a radio talk show this morning, and we talked in great deal about the CAIS program. The number of calls that came in were alarming. I know the minister has made her staff available to me, and I thank her for that. When somebody puts in an application in September, they still have not got confirmation that they are going to be receiving payment.

Last year in the House, she mentioned several times, there is hurt out there; tell your people to sign up for the CAIS program; sign up for the CAIS program. Well, they signed up for the CAIS program

and the money is not flowing. We talked about \$52 million in the program. When we get into Estimates, I would like to find out how much money actually has flowed and how many producers it has helped.

The minister just talked about the milk bill and we met with the milk producers yesterday. That is one sector that probably is in one of the best financial situations in the agricultural sector other than the hogs and the poultry. They are doing pretty darn good. But, having said that, they also are a diverse group and not everybody has just dairy. There were three producers that made application for CAIS monies and they are yet to receive those either, even though it is a few hundred dollars. The main problem with the CAIS program is the criteria that has been used to set up the CAIS program. It is so complicated, the only ones really making any money off this program are the accountants, and, unfortunately, they get their monies first. Farmers just do not have an abundance of cash to find out whether or not they are going to be in a position to qualify for the CAIS program.

The other problem with the CAIS program is that the farmers do not have the money to pay the accountants. The banks have been somewhat helpful in their comments about saying they will help us and help the producers and loan money for the deposit that the minister says is not required until March of 2006. However, we have a different opinion on the deposit, and we feel that the minister should follow Ontario's lead and do away with the deposit requirement. Now, she has the authority to do that, and I think that she should take the leadership role and do that.

The other issue that is always coming up time and time again is the fact that the farmers are so strapped for cash at this point in time that we never talk about the input cost. The price of fuel just in the last six months is huge. Fertilizer is huge. When we look at the statistics from the Web site that were just put out showing the level of hurt in agriculture, grain prices in 2004 are 19.4 percent lower than in 2003. They are 25.3 percent lower than in 2002. From December of 2003 to December 2004, the grain price index fell 36.8 percent. With the input cost, purple fuel in January of 2002 was 44.07 cents per litre. In January '05, it was 62.02 cents, a 40% increase. Diesel fuel went in 2002 from 33.35 to 51.97, an increase of 55.83 percent.

We talk about the hurt for the cattle farmer. Barbed wire, in January 2002, went from \$44 to 2005 at \$56, again, a 27.89% increase. Anhydrous went, in January 2002, from \$553 to \$676, again, an 18% increase. Herbicides is another one that went up, on canola seed alone from \$760 to \$1,021, another 34.27 percent.

So I think what we see, Madam Minister, in all fairness, we talk about the huge increase in your budget. Unfortunately, when you take out the \$20 million that we, on this side of the House, feel should not be in that sector—and we have asked about this in Question Period time and time again—we are setting up our farmers for a severe case, under the WTO, to be penalized for subsidizing farmers. This is not a program that we need to see in the Department of Agriculture.

Granted, I give the minister credit and the government credit for trying to help the farmers, but you are not going to be doing these farmers justice when it comes to world trade issues. It will be considered a trade problem, and we need to deal with that.

The other thing that the minister talked about was the organic farming. Again, I commend the department for their efforts. I think that they are doing a great job. But in my meetings, when I go out and I talk to the farmers, not only in my area but around the province, I have made a huge commitment to our party, on this side of House, to have a five-year plan. I was tempted to have a ten-year plan. But, when I am talking to the producers that are out there, they feel that we are missing the boat when it comes to the real issues and the cash that we need to get the crops in.

When we talk of the incomes on the farm, from 2003 per farm it was \$43,178 in the U.S. compared to the farm debt in the U.S. of \$113,402. But in Canada, our net farm income was \$24,604, and the average farm debt in Canada was \$199,000. So, relatively speaking, we are not doing so good. I think we need to have a long, hard look at it.

The minister talked about the help for BSE. I have got to give the department and the NDP government a lot of credit for their announcements. In fact, I will give them an A. I look at them here, and it is a huge amount of press releases. In fact, almost everybody in the city thinks that every farmer

is the richest person in the world. I am not sure that is a message that the Minister of Agriculture, of all people, should be trying to put out there.

I think it is a misnomer that these farmers are receiving all of this money. One announcement after one announcement does not do the farming sector the justice that it should. There was \$180 million that was announced by her government. By the time it got through to the media and the urban people, they seemed to think that everybody is doing okay. In fact, the farmers are probably in a worse situation now. According to statistics, numbers here, they are not adding up. They are not computing.

So we need to have a long, hard look at that when we get into the Estimates. Hopefully, the minister will take this as constructive criticism, as criticism that will not only help her government but all our farmers within the province, and not just as opposition trying to be critical of the department because we are not trying to be critical of the department. We are trying to make sure that these solutions are worked out for the benefit of all Manitobans, not just a select few.

The department is probably into a situation that they need a lot of input. We are prepared to do that, and would like to get into the Estimates. Having said that, I would like to move on at this point in time, Mr. Chairman.

* (15:50)

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 3.1(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 3.1.

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

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I want to begin by thanking the member, my critic, for his comments. I look forward to an interesting debate. As he said, he

is willing to give advice and I am certainly willing to listen.

I want to indicate that I am joined at the table by my Deputy Minister, Mr. Barry Todd; Marvin Richter, who is the executive financial officer for MAFRI; and we will be joined in a minute by Mr. Lorne Martin, who is ADM in Policy and Management Division.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the minister.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the estimates of this department in a chronological manner, or have a global discussion?

Mr. Eichler: Global discussion, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I would prefer that we would move, I am comfortable with a global discussion today, but as we move into the Estimates at our next sitting, I would prefer to go in a line-by-line fashion. That would allow us to bring staff in.

As the member knows, there is staff in Brandon, there is staff in Portage la Prairie. I would not want the whole department to have to be waiting over the period of time that we are doing the estimates. My preference would be that we start on a global basis today, but as we move into the longer time that we have for estimates, that we could go on a line-by-line basis to allow for staff to be called when we get to a particular line.

Mr. Eichler: That would be fine with me, Mr. Chairman. I think that makes good economic sense. We are not here to spend extra time and money on anybody's wages, so let us be fruitful in our efforts and try and stick to the plan the best we can.

Mr. Chairperson: There is understanding we have global discussion today. I thank you for that.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Eichler: We can start with page 20 on the Executive Support staff. I guess the major change there is the ADM has now been replaced with a new ADM. Is that correct on the first line there?

Ms. Wowchuk: The change in that line is the change in moving the deputy minister into the position.

Mr. Eichler: Under Communication, and I understand that, if some of the questions cannot be answered today, we can come back to them at another point. I do not want to call in extra staff in today. I want to make that very clear, Mr. Chairman and Madam Minister.

On Communication, I notice that the budget is the same at 10.9. Could we get a little bit of a breakdown on how much is spent on advertising, or is that more just press releases? What is in communications?

Ms. Wowchuk: In this particular line, this section, Communication refers to telephone, electronic communications service, postal service, advertising, program promotion, radio systems and other. So it covers off that whole area.

Mr. Eichler: Under the same Executive Support, under the Professional/Technical, who are those two people?

Ms. Wowchuk: They would be my special assistant, Andrea Coulling, and my constituency assistant, Ken Munro.

Mr. Eichler: How were those two people hired, Madam Minister? Was it a tendered position?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, those two appointments are the only two appointments in the department that I am able to hire, and I interviewed both of them for those positions.

Mr. Eichler: Are they term positions, year-to-year, then?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I said, those are two positions that I have the ability to fill, and as long as I am in the office, those two positions are there. So they are the staff that I have the ability to choose.

Mr. Eichler: The Administrative Support staff, you are showing five there. Has there been any changes in those positions, and where are those people working out of?

Ms. Wowchuk: Those are the staff in my office and in the deputy's office. I believe, if we look from the last staff Estimates, there have been some changes. There has been some shifting around of people.

Mr. Eichler: Were those positions appointed, or were they advertised positions?

Ms. Wowchuk: Those would be, again, people that are hired internally. They go through an interview process. They have all been filled by interview.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that. We will move on to the next section.

On the Planning Directorate, what is the function of this board, Madam Minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: The Strategic Planning Directorate is a new organizational unit that was announced as part of the Growing Opportunities process when I made the announcement on December 13. The directorate in part is a response to the client-identified interest in having greater support and clarity from government on strategic planning with respect to agriculture, food and rural development. So it will be a directorate that will be put in place to provide staff functions, to really put together the strategic plan of the branches.

* (16:00)

Mr. Eichler: So who are the two Managerial positions in this department?

Ms. Wowchuk: The Managerial positions are Christine Burton and Debora Lyall. Both of these are people from within the department. As we do the reorganization, staff has worked with the various people to slot them into positions.

Mr. Eichler: So there will be a board then, is that correct? And they will be reporting to the minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, there will be the agri-food development advisory council that will work with this group of people and report to me.

Mr. Eichler: The selection of this board, how will that be determined?

Ms. Wowchuk: That board will be ministerial appointments.

Mr. Eichler: How many will be on the board, and will it be term appointments? For how long? It is a two-part question.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, those details are still being worked out. We have not got the final number. I do not expect it will be a huge, huge board, but we

have to work through that with the Strategic Planning Directorate and with other people in the department to come up with a reasonable number for a board and they will be appointed.

The length of time, again, those are details that will be worked out as we move forward.

Mr. Eichler: Having said that, does the minister have a time frame that she would like to see this board up and running at?

Ms. Wowchuk: As you know, Mr. Chairman, we have begun the process of implementing the plan. We have put some people into their positions, but this is a process that will take a period of time because we do not want to have people moving or have too much disruption. Having said that, I would hope that we would be able to have this board in place by fall.

Mr. Eichler: Looks like you are putting an awful lot of responsibility onto this board when you look at the activity that you are going to be having them implement and deliver various policies on. Is this going to be a political board or is it going to be a non-political board?

Ms. Wowchuk: It will not be the board that is delivering. It will be the Strategic Planning Directorate that will be doing the delivering of the activities that are identified here. The board will be offering advice. We will be looking for Manitobans who have expertise in a variety of areas that will be of assistance to the Strategic Planning Directorate.

Mr. Eichler: Will it be part of the advisory board's position to help—I noticed one of the criteria here is the Agricultural Policy Framework. Is it the minister's opinion and staff to have them come up with a new program and provide advice on changes for the next program that we are going to be seeing within the province?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, we have a policy branch. It is that group of people that has worked on the framework, and it is that group of people that will continue to work on the framework agreement. The strategic planning committee will also be able to offer advice to work along with it, but it is the policy group that will be working on any changes.

Mr. Eichler: The four Professional/Technical positions, have they been hired yet? You have a budget

of \$213,000 for that; I believe that you have budget to those people, in place?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, those people have been identified, although they are not all in their positions yet because they have responsibilities in other areas that they are completing. That is part of the process we have in place where everything cannot happen overnight. As we do this reorganization, some will have to finish up a job in another area before they move in, but there have been four people who have been identified from within the department to fill those positions.

Mr. Eichler: Will those positions be appointed or are they applied-for positions?

Ms. Wowchuk: These are existing staff, so there is not going to be some advertising for new positions as people having their job description redefined and moved into different roles. In this process, there has been a lot of consultation. As I had indicated earlier on, as we were developing the plan of how we would reorganize the department, there was a lot of consultation. Staff in the department were aware of what it was going, and we knew where they have interests, and so it has just been a repositioning of people from within the department.

Mr. Eichler: I have a little bit of a concern about that, Madam Minister. If somebody has like minds, they will be the ones that are promoted, or how is this process going to be determined? I am very uncomfortable without applications and due process being done. I find that disturbing actually.

Ms. Wowchuk: Whenever there is a position that is a move up, so to speak, those positions are advertised. For example, when we were filling the positions of managers, the people were able to apply for those positions, but these positions here are lateral moves, so it is a shift laterally. There is not the need to advertise for these positions because they are within the department.

My deputy tells me that if we wanted to, we would have to lay them off first before we would be able to recruit them again. So, within the department and in every department, there is this ability to move people laterally when there is a change in job description. When there is a step up or a new opportunity, those positions are advertised, and those positions, when we were moving into the manager

positions for the different regions, centres then or offices, those positions were advertised.

Mr. Eichler: It still boils down then in my mind that it is like a political appointment. You have identified these four people, the four people that are going to be filling these positions. Then can you tell us who those people are?

Ms. Wowchuk: First of all, I want to make it clear to the member that I have not identified them. This is the work that is done through the department. I play no role in this. I leave that to the department, but I can certainly tell the member the people that have been identified: Alexandra Pfeiffer, John Kokorsch, Scott Struthers and Maurice Bouvier.

Mr. Eichler: Is this Struthers a relation to the member from Dauphin?

Ms. Wowchuk: I doubt it very much. The names are spelled different. In fact, if I can clarify the record. It is not Struthers; it is Stothers.

* (16:10)

An Honourable Member: Stothers.

Ms. Wowchuk: Stothers, not Struthers.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that. It is a department that you have significant change in, and that is why I am spending probably a little more time on this than I would normally, but I just want to make sure that the minister and her staff have thought this through carefully. It is a substantial amount of money. The board that is going to be making these recommendations, do you see this as a long-term board, or is it a short-term board that you are looking at?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, I see having this board in for a long period of time.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Not that there was much noise, but, somehow, we could not hear the speaker.

Ms. Wowchuk: I have to learn how to speak a little louder. Okay. I will try my best.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I see this as a board that is being in place for a long period of time, a board made up of industry representatives that can bring the industry view to the planning directorate. If you are asking whether it is a temporary board, no, this is part of our reorganization structure, and it is what we heard from the industry that they would like to have more input into strategic planning. I see this as an advisory board. I see the directorate carrying on the day-to-day responsibilities, but the advisory council would be the one that brings us advice and suggestions from the industry and how we might be able to address strategic planning.

Mr. Eichler: Is there remuneration for the board members?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, there will, just as there is with other boards, but the size of the board has not been set nor has the remuneration, and that would, I hope, by fall we would have that in place.

Mr. Eichler: So there will be a small deficit then if all expenditures are met because there is no budget for remuneration that I can see here, unless you have got it covered off in Other Operating. Is that where it is at?

Ms. Wowchuk: That would appear under Boards, Commissions in another part of the budget.

Mr. Eichler: The travel, is that for staff or board members that is covered off there then?

Ms. Wowchuk: Within this budget here, that would be the staff of the department.

I wonder if I might correct the record here. If we look at it, we anticipate the board cost to be about \$15,000, and that is included in the Other Expenditures in this area. I apologize for that error.

Mr. Eichler: So the Other Expenditures of \$134,000, is that correct, of which \$15,000, or is that the total? That is what I understood to be the total. So it would be under Other Operating.

Ms. Wowchuk: It is under Other Expenditures. We anticipate that the cost for the board's travel and remuneration will be about—what we have budgeted for is \$15,000.

Mr. Eichler: So, then, there is nothing else under the Other, other than the board's remuneration and travel costs. That is what the Other Expenditures are allocated for?

Ms. Wowchuk: The Other Expenditures are listed. They are Transportation, Communication, Supplies and Services, Minor Capital and Other Operating.

Mr. Eichler: Well, earlier, I had asked you about Transportation, of the \$27,000, and you said that was for staff travel. So which is which?

Ms. Wowchuk: The travel that is listed on here as \$27,000, that is staff. Under the Other Expenditures, we have identified \$15,000. That will be for travel and remuneration of board members under the Other.

Mr. Eichler: We will move on to the Policy department. Who are the managers in that particular department?

Ms. Wowchuk: The acting director is Greg Fearn, and Mike Lesiuk is the manager of Policy.

Mr. Eichler: Do they work out of the Leg office, or are they over in the Woodsworth Building?

Ms. Wowchuk: They work out of the Norquay Building. The only people that work out of the Leg are my deputy and his staff and my staff. The others work out of the Norquay Building.

Mr. Eichler: The Estimates here show that you are planning on two more staff members. Is there a major reason that you are increasing staff there from 9 to 11?

An Honourable Member: What page are you on?

Mr. Eichler: 26.

Ms. Wowchuk: Our intention is to increase our rural policy position, so there are two positions there. They have not been filled yet, but it is part of our transition and will be filled over the next period of time.

Mr. Eichler: They will be working out of the Norquay Building as well, these two new positions?

Ms. Wowchuk: They could be working out of the Norquay Building, or they could be working out of

Brandon as we move forward with our moving some of our Rural Development staff to Brandon. That has not been determined. That is also part of our transition.

Mr. Eichler: That is all I have on Policy for this point in time.

The Knowledge Management on page 29, could the minister tell me who the manager is that runs that department and where they are located out of?

Ms. Wowchuk: The manager is Darren Brothers, and he is located in the Norquay Building.

Mr. Eichler: It seems as though we have another increase there in Professional/Technical support staff of five units. Is there a major reorganization of this department as well? I am finding it somewhat difficult to follow through your reorganization. Does the minister have a bit of a breakdown that would show us where each of these people is going? Are they moving in from other areas, or is this just a restructuring within the department, because it seems to me that, you know, it is kind of all over the map? I guess that is why the confusion is there.

* (16:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, it is a realignment of people within the department. Within the Knowledge Management, there are three areas: capturing the knowledge, co-ordinating the knowledge, and then disseminating the knowledge out to the people that will use it. So there is a knowledge manager, which is the information and technology and industry intelligence. That is collecting the information about the industry, the stats and then the co-ordination of those activities. So it is bringing the knowledge together, some that was in policy before, bringing them into one area where they can work more effectively.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that, Madam Minister. Some of the notes here that they talk about is the execution of the Agricultural Policy Framework in the agreement. Is this just the criterion that they work on for drafting purposes? Do they do administration, or do they put out monies to the farmers? What is their role as far as that department is concerned?

Ms. Wowchuk: We spend a lot of time, when we talk about the Agricultural Policy Framework, on the

business risk management, but there are four other pillars. There are the pillars of environment, renewal, food safety, and science and innovation. So it is this group of people that does the tracking and co-ordination of all of the other activities. Those other pillars are very important to the industry. There is more work to be done in this area. It is this group of people, this knowledge co-ordination team, that works on collecting all of the information and tracking to be sure that we meet our requirements under the agreement.

Mr. Eichler: So they have nothing to do with pay-outs then or administration of those programs.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Eichler: The minister talked about food and science. What role do they play in developing that policy? Do they meet with the stakeholders, or is this something that is done within the department itself?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, this would be the policy analysis group, the group that collects the data and makes sure we meet our requirements under the agreement. There is another group of people that would do the work that the member asks about.

Mr. Eichler: The group of people in this Knowledge Management team, will they be getting feedback from the board as well, or is the board just referring their information and reports back to just the minister and her ADM, or is this going to be an overlap with these people as well?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the advisory council that we talked about earlier will work with the strategic planning group, but that strategic planning group could work on any issue and would be in communication with all branches in the department, so that is not their specific goal. Certainly, there will be the opportunity if there were issues that the advisory council was raising that would then come through the strategic planning branch and would then have contact with the whole department. It is a strategic planning group, but it does not work in isolation. It is a strategic planning group that can disseminate information throughout the whole department and be part of providing information to all areas of the department.

Mr. Eichler: With the respect to the science in this data that is collected, is that, again, flowed out

through the GO offices and GO centres, or does it work from the grassroots back?

Ms. Wowchuk: Under technology services, this is the tracking branch, and they would track expenses to be sure that we are on line with what we are supposed to be doing with the APF. It would be the innovation branch—that is in another section—that would be the one that would work directly and or disseminate information to producers.

Mr. Eichler: I guess the last question I have on this department is the last line that says, "Maintain the department's existing business applications." Could the minister just highlight what the purpose of that is and what type of people will be applying for applications that would be mentioned in this department?

Ms. Wowchuk: In this Information Technology service, this business application is the software application, the application that would be used in vet services to track their business, to do their billing. It would be the software that would be used at the Food Development Centre or in other areas, so it is the technology branch and the application of technological services.

Mr. Eichler: Then they develop the software that will be used for some of these programs, they will be used in the GO centres then, is that my understanding to be correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: Within the department, we use a lot of software that could be commercially bought software, but should there be the need to develop something unique that might be needed, as I said, there could be a unique system that might be needed at the Food Development Centre, Vet Services may need something different for their billing, so when there is something unique that has to be developed, then it would be this technology group that would help put that in place. They would not put in place special networks for the whole department, because there are many services that are available commercially, and we have a desktop service, EDS, that is used across most departments.

Mr. Eichler: We will move over to the Information Technology Services, then, that you just had talked about that has the main function with the APF program. Who is the manager for the department?

Mr. Chairperson: As was previously agreed in the House, the hour being 4:30 p.m., committee rise.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

* (15:50)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Does the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration have an opening statement?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I do, Madam Chair. It has been an honour to be both the Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women for this past 17 months.

This department makes a major contribution to the social, economic and cultural well-being of Manitobans by promoting immigration and cultural diversity, safe and healthy workplaces, fair employment practices, harmonious labour management relations and equality for women.

I would like to thank the department's staff for their excellent work and dedication in providing high-quality services to the citizens of Manitoba. I also want to thank the members of the department's External Advisory committees and boards for their expert advice and assistance on important policy matters. A very special thank-you to Mr. Wally Fox-Decent, who chaired several of those committees throughout the years before his retirement.

The 2005-2006 total budget requests for the Department of Labour and Immigration is \$31,209,100. This request represents an increase of 7.1 percent from last year's adjusted vote. Most of the increase is allocated to increasing immigration to Manitoba, an important priority for the government. It represents a 12.1% increase to the Immigration Branch's budget.

Other significant adjustments include a 6.9% increase for the Manitoba Labour Board. This amount includes a 32% increase for operating costs at the board to permit improved access to Labour

Board services for Manitobans, an 8.1% increase for the Multiculturalism Secretariat. Included in this allocation is a 34% increase in operating costs for the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council for delivering services to ethnocultural communities, and a 7.9% increase in operating expenditures for the Women's Directorate. This increase was made possible in part through reduced salary costs that came about because of the synergies resulting from amalgamating Status of Women with the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Manitoba's population is growing because of our government's active role in attracting and retaining immigrants. Last year, 7414 immigrants came to Manitoba, a 14% increase over 2003. This is the highest immigration level in over two decades and doubles the 1999 levels. This government will meet our goal of 10 000 new immigrants each year coming to live, work and enjoy Manitoba.

Our strong immigration performance is largely due to the success of the Provincial Nominee Program, accounting for 54 percent of Manitoba's newcomers. This year 4037 provincial nominees and their families arrived in the province. Approximately 30 percent of provincial nominees settled in centres outside of Winnipeg, including Winkler, Steinbach, Morden, Arborg and Thompson.

The Provincial Nominee Program has been redesigned so that immigrants with the strongest potential for success are processed more quickly. We have addressed program backlogs and increased nominations by 46 percent since 2003. Employers work directly with us to fill their labour shortages with the right people with minimal delay. We are well on track to increasing our intake over the next two years to achieve our provincial objectives.

Effective in April, Provincial Nominee application guidelines will also be clarified with the new occupational requirements list that will expand employment opportunities for potential newcomers. The Provincial Nominee Program for business continues to attract entrepreneurs who establish businesses, create jobs and directly strengthen economic development. In 2004, Manitoba approved 121 business nominations bringing a total investment of \$44.4 million and the potential for over 260 jobs.

Immigration has positive benefits for all sectors of the Manitoba economy, including agriculture. In

February 2005, our government launched a new farm component to the Provincial Nominee Program that will select young farmers from around the world who can invest a minimum of \$150,000 toward buying a Manitoba farm. A farm mentorship program offered by Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives will assist young farmers when they arrive.

In addition to skilled immigrants, refugees and reunited family members make a valuable contribution to our communities. In the past year, Manitoba welcomed over 1200 refugees, 17 percent of our total immigration. Over half of those were privately sponsored through the hard work and commitment of a vibrant sponsorship network. We also received over 1100 newcomers as a result of family reunification, accounting for 15 percent of Manitoba's total immigration.

I would like to mention that the Manitoba Immigration Council was recently established through legislation to provide government with advice on all immigration and integration matters. As immigration to Manitoba increases, settlement, employment and language training programs are being improved through expanded partnerships and innovative services such as our new entry program to orient newcomers to the province. Under a funding arrangement with the federal government, we will be adding \$790,000 for languages and training services and \$265,000 for settlement services to speed the integration of immigrants into the life and work of Manitoba's communities.

Since 1999, combined settlement funding from the federal and provincial governments has almost doubled to \$8 million to support a wide range of services delivered by almost 100 agencies and programs. One of our priorities is to improve qualifications recognition so that immigrants can gain better entry to the labour market. Through the Manitoba qualifications recognition strategy, we are taking a leadership role in consulting and working with the federal government, employers, post-secondary institutions, regulatory authorities and the public to improve qualifications recognition. The Province will add \$125,000 in new funding toward qualifications recognition, and we can continue to break down barriers so our newest citizens can fully participate in our economy.

The Multiculturalism Secretariat advises the minister on issues related to multiculturalism in

accordance with the fundamental principles of Manitoba's policy for a multiculturalism society, pride in our diversity, a determination to achieve equality of opportunity for all in our community and a belief that the opportunities of a multicultural society can best be realized through partnerships among communities and with government. In keeping with this commitment, the 21-member Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council provides advice and recommendations to the minister on all ethnocultural matters in the province.

Many of the department's policy areas, including Employment Standards, pensions and prevention of workplace violence are of a particular concern to women. The addition of the Manitoba Women's Directorate as a branch in the department's Status of Women, Labour/Management Services Division, and the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council to the department has led to more efficient and effective services for women and for all Manitobans. As a result, we are seeing more consultation and a closer working relationship between the Women's Directorate, the Women's Advisory Council and other branches of the department. This is helping to raise the awareness of women's issues within the department and their impact for policy, programs and legislation.

Keeping Safe At Work is a province-wide initiative focussing on the safety of women working alone, or travelling to and from work alone. Approximately 67 000 pamphlets have been distributed with valuable tips to increase awareness of the potentially threatening situations, and to assist employers and employees to plan ahead to avoid crimes of opportunity. These pamphlets are also extensively used by the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP.

Trade Up to Your Future is an innovative program that encourages women of all ages to consider employment in the skilled trades, prepares them for work in an industrial setting, increases the number of women apprentices and increases the number of women in high-demand, well-paid employment.

In January 2004, the Trade Up program was changed from a five-month program to a full ten-month program so that women can apply for the same level positions as others students taking trades training at Winnipeg Technical College. A total of 66

women have graduated from the Trade Up to Your Future program.

To promote women's equal participation in society and the workplace, the Women's Directorate conducts gender-based analysis to identify and address the impacts of public policies and programs may have on women. In keeping with this mandate, I am pleased to inform the committee that the Women's Directorate recently provided \$10,000 to the UN Platform for Action Committee to conduct a gender-based review of the provincial budget.

The directorate also offers the training for tomorrow's scholarship awards program for women entering Manitoba community college diploma programs in math, science and technology-related fields. Fifty scholarships of \$1,000 are awarded each year with a total of 541 women receiving this financial support. In 2004, 141 applications were received.

* (16:00)

Power Up, an introductory computer and Internet training program, is offered to women across Manitoba through adult learning centres and adult literacy programs. In the fiscal year 2004-2005, 22 agencies contracted to offer 55 Power Up classes in 25 different communities throughout the province. The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council brings voice to women and women's organizations across the province. It is focussing on collaboration with community and government to become more responsive to community needs. This includes raising media awareness regarding issues of concern to women and their families.

One of the most important activities for the council is working with Aboriginal women's organizations. The council collaborated with the Women's Directorate, Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Mother of Red Nations and the Women's Committee of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to bring government to a grassroots Aboriginal women's conference called "Our Healing Hands."

The council will also be setting up a round table on Aboriginal women's issues this year as an ongoing venue to discuss issues of concern. October 2005 will mark the 25th anniversary of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council established under the

Pawley administration. I am certain that all members will join in celebrating that commemorative event.

Reducing workplace injuries and illnesses is a high priority for Manitobans and for this government. Manitoba's time-loss injury rate continues to decrease from a high of 5.8 injuries per 100 workers in 2000 to a projected level of 4.5 per 100 workers for 2004. This represents a reduction of over 20 percent. The 2004 level is the lowest injury rate in 10 years.

The government is continuing the SAFE Work public awareness campaign with the newest ads currently under development. The Workplace Safety and Health Division also continues working with industry associations, the education system and the farming community in raising safety and health awareness. The division is delivering enhanced training programs for workers and supervisors in more locations across the province and is involved in an effort to improve the reporting, diagnosis and investigation of occupational illnesses.

Following the amendments to The Workplace Safety and Health Act in 2002, the government undertook extensive consultations to update the workplace safety and health regulations which are now in their final stages of development. Our government has also introduced legislation to amend The Workplace Safety and Health Act to improve protection for Manitoba's health care workers from needle-stick injuries.

The division has taken steps to improve priority enforcement on high-risk workplaces, while maintaining a system of random inspections in other workplaces. In 2004-2005, more than 5031 inspections were conducted by the division, a 38% increase over 2001 when the government's workplace injury prevention strategy began.

In 2004-2005, the Mechanical and Engineering Branch conducted over 20 000 inspections of boilers, elevators, gas and electrical installations. Over 6000 licences were issued to gas fitters, power engineers and electricians. At the high pressure welder test centre, the branch tested 793 welders, of whom 667 passed and were certified.

Changes have been introduced to The Electricians' Licence Act, including the elimination of the helper category so that no worker who is not certified

can work on live electrical circuits. Several outdated licence classifications will also be eliminated from the act. The Internet gas permit program has been further expanded to better serve rural and northern clients by including a link to the propane industry in the same manner as natural gas utilities.

The Manitoba Pension Commission safeguards employees' rights to benefits promised under employment pension plans. The Pension Commission undertook the first major review of The Pension Benefits Act since 1983. Following this review, Bill 10, The Pension Benefits Amendment Act was introduced. The bill incorporates the consensus recommendations of the Pension Commission of Manitoba and increases access to individual locked-in pension accounts. The bill modernizes Manitoba's pension legislation and reflects views from all sectors of Manitoba society. This government is committed to balancing the pension promise with providing individuals with increased flexibility.

At the request of construction industry stakeholders, consultations have begun to review parts of The Construction Industry Wages Act. A review panel, with four employer-appointed representatives, four labour-appointed representatives and a neutral chairperson was established. The panel has been asked to submit consensus recommendations for new wage rates, hours of work and a process for moving to an integrated wage schedule by September 2005.

On April 1, 2005, Manitoba's minimum wage will increase by 25 cents to \$7.25 an hour. This continues our approach since 1999 of increasing the minimum wage on a more frequent, but incremental basis. We believe this balances the need to restore the purchasing power of workers with the ability of employers to pay. A new minimum wage board has been convened to discuss Manitoba's minimum wage strategy for 2006 and beyond, and has been asked to report by September 1, 2005.

The Worker Advisor Office provides advice, assistance and, where necessary, representation to injured workers and their dependents who request support with their Workers Compensation claims. To provide more efficient programming to a greater number of vulnerable clients, the office is working to reduce the average length of time for claim resolution by resolving issues informally as a first step before formal review and appeal activities.

The Employment Standards Branch investigates claims of violations of the legislation to ensure minimum standards and conditions of employment for workers are maintained. By focussing on the delivery of core services, succession planning and aggressive recruitment strategies with a focus on employment equity initiatives, the branch has successfully accommodated a large number of retirements and an unusually heavy claim intake. With claim loads again at manageable levels, the branch can be more proactive in assisting, educating and protecting vulnerable employees.

Conciliation and Mediation Services Branch: Since the year 2000, the monthly average of person days lost to work stoppages in Manitoba has declined by 60 percent, resulting in one of the lowest levels of work stoppages in Canada. Much of the success can be attributed to the work of the department's Conciliation and Mediation Services Branch. Up to mid-March in the 2004-2005 fiscal years, the branch was involved in 143 conciliation assignments; 93 percent were completed without a work stoppage. During the year, the branch has also handled 240 joint-grievance mediation assignments with a success rate of 98 percent, and 30 expedited grievance mediation cases with a settlement ratio of 93 percent.

In May 2004, the Manitoba Labour Board hosted the National Labour Board's chairs conference at the Elkhorn Resort. This event gave the chairs of Canada's labour tribunals the opportunity to meet and discuss recent developments in adjudication of labour issues. The labour board is moving forward on improving its services. An automated case management system is close to being implemented and will be ready for testing later this year.

A multi-disciplinary urban search and rescue team has been created in the Office of the Fire Commissioner, which is one of my special operating agencies, to respond to national and international search and rescue missions. This is a specialized team of 120 members from municipal, provincial and federal departments that is funded through a federal-provincial, cost-sharing initiative with the province committing 25 percent of the funding.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner has developed a hazardous materials technician team to ensure that Manitoba has a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response capability. Additional training and equipment has been provided to

emergency responders throughout the province, and partnerships with government agencies, police agencies and other major groups have been established.

In partnership with the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Office of the Fire Commissioner developed a fire protection strategy to enhance fire protection services in northern and remote communities. Over 4000 persons have received certification in the past year in various Manitoba emergency services college programs.

In response to increased incidents of rural arson, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has worked with the city of Brandon to establish an arson strike force based on the very successful Winnipeg model.

* (16:10)

This concludes my opening statement, Madam Chair. The diversity of our mandate, programs and services reflects the important work we do in protecting public safety, preventing workplace injuries and illnesses, ensuring fair employment standards and benefits, promoting immigration and settling newcomers, achieving equality for women and building a stable labour relations climate.

These are the goals of our society as well as our government to benefit working women and men and their families in communities across the province. In achieving these goals, our government is committed to a collaborative process with the citizens of Manitoba and stakeholder organizations in ensuring that the department continues to deliver the highest standards of service. I look forward to questions by members that will contribute to a productive discussion of the Department of Labour and Immigration's 2005-2006 program Estimates.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for those comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member from Springfield, have any opening comments?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Yes, Madam Chair. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister for her speech. Those who wrote it did a good job. I have, of course, been the critic on and off, more on than off, for the last 5.5 years since 1999, and have now lived through my third Minister of Labour. I have seen a lot of changes take place. The minister has mentioned some areas where we

certainly would agree on that have been areas of success. Others we would probably disagree on where we do not believe the government has succeeded in pushing Manitoba forward.

One of the issues the government did touch on, or the minister did touch on in her speech, of course, was the whole immigration side of her department, which has been a success and must continue to be a success if we as a nation are to continue. With our declining birth rates, with an aging population, in fact, with urbanization and modernization we know that families are having smaller and smaller families, if they are even choosing to have children. To make up for that population, we are going to look increasingly toward immigration to make up for the shortfall, or we will actually see a declining population, which brings with it other very difficult and trying economic difficulties.

Over the years, the nominee program, which was introduced by the now-Member for River East, under the former Filmon government, was in its infancy, was in its test when the current government assumed power. Then Minister Becky Barrett, rightfully so, saw a program that had great value, and, to her credit, actually took the program and moved it forward, believed in it strongly. It is easy for politicians to view something as being the other individual's creation and dropping it.

I will have to say that Minister Becky Barrett at that time did an amazing job in moving the program forward. It went from its test infancy stage to being a cornerstone of bringing individuals into this province. I see that the current minister has had a good look at the nominee program and has chosen to continue to move forward with it. We happen to think that is a good thing. The individuals that are coming to this city and this province are contributing lots.

I think there are areas where we must do better. I noticed with some interest that there is an increase in the immigrant resettlement categories. It is actually an area where we, as North America, fall down considerably. We seem to be able to attract new Canadians to Canada, and then seem to leave them high and dry. It is a very poor model that we follow if you compare it to something what they do in Europe. In Germany, for instance, they will take up to a year where you will be housed, the children go to school, the parents get language training. They are shown

how to integrate into society, how you do banking, doctors' offices, all those kinds of things. It is certainly an area where we can do better as a nation. I think we have to do better as a province.

The minister did touch a little bit on the labour side of her department. Of course, an area which we will continue to disagree in is the forced unionization on urban projects. I know this minister has pointed out in previous Estimates, and even in Question Period, that she is not a participatory party to the agreements being discussed, but we know that they cause a lot of difficulty in Manitoba.

I would say to the minister I think it is disingenuous when you have members of her government getting up and trying to smoke claim that former Premier Duff Roblin brought master labour agreements on the floodway, which he did not. There was no such thing. We all understand that master labour agreements are an issue when you deal with very remote, very intense hydro projects. We understand why those have to be there. We are appalled, to put it mildly, that these have now been turned around and are being placed on basically urban construction projects where you do not need to negotiate time at home for workers, where you do not have to negotiate who does what because you are in a very large urban setting.

Of course, I have stated on this on numerous occasions. It would have been my preference to have seen this minister involve herself more in that negotiation. All workers need protection, not just some, and it would have been nice to have seen the minister take more of an active role in those situations.

The minister did also touch on Bill 10, which is in front of the House. I am sure this committee knows that this has been a big issue for me. Myself and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray), have a bill before the House, Bill 212, which looked at opening up pensions for defined contribution programs. When we started down this path, there was no interest on government benches to even look at this issue. We have seen over the last months and, in fact, it has come to the point where we actually have Bill 10. It does not go as far as we would like to see it go. I know there are members like the Manitoba Society of Seniors who would have liked to have seen it go further, but I think the government recognized that something had to be done. There was

a lot of pressure being put on, and my suggestion to communities that are being affected—it certainly is one step in the right direction.

We give the minister and, certainly, Debbie Lyon a lot of credit for the work she did, and certainly explained it with great integrity and great passion for the bill. We see it as being a good step forward. We will see what happens after this. So the minister did reference it briefly, and we feel that it is an important part of what is done in the Department of Labour. It is one of the reasons why taxpayers' dollars go in there. That bill is not just stale in the Order Paper, but is modernized and reflects current situations.

Certainly, as we move along, we will be having more in-depth questions for the minister. I always take a great deal of interest in the Fire Commissioner's department, very important for those who live outside of the city where you do not necessarily have all the services that you have in a very large urban setting like the city of Winnipeg, very important especially because there are some concentrations of fairly heavy industry, and you need the expertise and you need the professionalism of the Fire Commissioner's office.

* (16:20)

So I look forward to asking some questions there when the time comes. I know the clock is ticking on us today, and I would like to get on into the Estimates process. So I will leave my comments at that and look forward to asking some questions of the minister on how the budget has been put together.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks. Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for the Estimates of a department. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of this item and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 11.1.

Mr. Schuler: Can we do a global?

An Honourable Member: Sure, whatever you want.

Madam Chairperson: At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask that the minister introduce her staff present.

Ms. Allan: Thank you very much. I would like to introduce the Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration, Jeff Parr, and I would like to introduce our Director of Financial Services, Ken Taylor.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister. We will now proceed to the remaining items contained in Resolution 11.1 on page 123 of the main Estimates book. Shall the resolution pass?

Mr. Schuler: If it is agreeable with the minister, perhaps we can look at the budget on a global basis, keeping in mind that there has to be some notification given to certain officials from the department. So, as we go along, we will always make sure that we give advanced notice of where we want to go with the budget, and then at the end go into it line by line, if that is agreeable for the minister.

Ms. Allan: I would appreciate that immensely because my department is so diverse. The notification to staff would be very helpful, because then I do not have 12 people sitting, you know, trying to determine which particular part of the Estimates that we are going to go through. We just have Jeff and Ken with us today, but we think we can handle it.

Madam Chairperson: Agreed? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Schuler: Well, thank you very much and, of course, we would like to welcome Deputy Minister Jeff Parr and Director of Financial Services, Ken Taylor. Of course, I am sure the first thing that has sprung to every committee member's mind is how does it feel working here since you left the—was it not the Canadian Embassy in Iran? But I am sure it is a different Ken Taylor. Anyway, welcome, and I certainly appreciate the work that the department does. If there is one thing that makes a democracy shine or fail is its public service, and we know that we get very good non-partisan public service in Manitoba. That is very important, especially in a very adversarial parliamentary system that we have here in Manitoba. On that note, I was wondering if the minister could tell us—we will start with sort of her political staff—who is her political staff working in her department?

Ms. Allan: My special assistant is Sharon McLaughlin.

Mr. Schuler: To the minister, she has a SA. Does she have an EA?

Ms. Allan: Yes, my executive assistant is Brenda Deamel.

Mr. Schuler: How long have these individuals been working for the department?

Ms. Allan: Sharon has been working for the department since September. I might be out a week or two, and Brenda has been working for me as my executive assistant since I was put into Cabinet, so November 2003.

Mr. Schuler: Again, those wages come out of which line in the budget?

Ms. Allan: Out of the Executive Support line.

Mr. Schuler: Of course, without giving specifics, what category are they hired as?

Ms. Allan: Their staff classifications are administrative. One is a special assistant and one is an executive assistant.

Mr. Schuler: When they were hired, is that a pay category, administrative, or are they called a something, something 1 or 2, or whatever?

Ms. Allan: No, the SPA and the XA, the special assistant and the executive assistant, those are the pay categories.

Mr. Schuler: What are the ranges for an SA and an EA?

Ms. Allan: My special assistant gets paid approximately \$54,000, and my executive assistant gets paid approximately \$49,000.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that. The other support staff within her department, just how many individuals are assigned to the minister's department? I know those are public servants. How many are there?

Ms. Allan: I have two individuals in my support staff that work full time in my minister's office, and then we have someone who works three days a week.

Mr. Schuler: What positions are those?

Ms. Allan: An AYM, an AY3 and an AY4.

Mr. Schuler: Thank you, Minister, and then the deputy minister's office is right next door?

Ms. Allan: That is correct.

Mr. Schuler: How many people work in that office?

Ms. Allan: Three.

Mr. Schuler: That would be the deputy minister and two other individuals?

Ms. Allan: I apologize. It is the deputy minister plus three support staff. I believe, just to cut it short, all three support staff are full time.

Madam Chairperson: As previously agreed to in the House, the hour being 4:30 p.m., committee rise.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 4:30, this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until April 11 at 1:30 p.m.

And a Happy Easter to all.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 24, 2005

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