

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

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stu	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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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

Tuesday, June 12, 2007

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 202—The Apology Act

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 202, The Apology Act; Loi sur la présentation d'excuses, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 provides that an individual can provide an apology without it necessarily being taken into account in terms of legal proceedings. It is hoped and anticipated that the passage of this bill will make it much easier for those who are health-care providers to say they are sorry when a medical error or a medical mishap occurs.

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

Bill 200—The Health Services Amendment and Health Services Insurance Amendment Act

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 200, The Health Services Amendment and Health Services Insurance Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services de santé et la Loi sur l'assurance-maladie, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this bill provides, as first recommended by Roy Romanow, that the principle of accountability be a fundamental principle to be recognized in the delivery of health care in Manitoba.

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

PETITIONS

Provincial Trunk Highway 10—
Brandon Hills Estates

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Provincial Trunk Highway 10 serves as a route for an ever-increasing volume of traffic including heavy trucks, farm vehicles, working commuters, tour buses, campers and the transport of dangerous goods.

Provincial Highway 10 access travelling south to Brandon Hills Estates is not only unsafe for school students who must cross the busy highway but also for the turning vehicles who must cross a solid line to enter the park community.

Traffic levels are expected to escalate further due to projected industrial expansions.

Highway upgrades to Provincial Highway 10 are occurring within a short distance of this site. Priority should be given to this community based on the dangerous access to highways for residents.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to act on the situation by considering construction of turning lanes that would reduce the danger posed in traffic access to Brandon Hills Estates, which is home to 85 residents.

This petition signed by Bruce Carter-Squire, Bill Clark, Don Smith and many, many others.

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

Lynn Lake Friendship Centre

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and these are the reasons for this petition:

Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency is a provincially mandated First Nation child protection and welfare agency. Operating under authority of the

provincial Ministry of Family Services and Housing, the mission is to help keep children, families and communities safe and secure and promote healthy citizen development and well-being.

Lynn Lake is located 320 kilometres northwest of Thompson, Manitoba, on PR 391. There is no social worker living and working in the community. The goals of the ministry are implemented from a distance and supplemented with infrequent and short visits from a social worker located in Thompson.

The Lynn Lake Friendship Centre is a designated safe house and receiving home providing accommodations, services and care to children and families experiencing difficulties in a safe environment. The designated safe house and receiving home are forced closed at this time due to outstanding accounts payable due from Cree Nation Child and Family Services Caring Agency.

Failure to have a social worker based in Lynn Lake providing immediate and sustained services and forcing the receiving home and designated safe house to close, children and families experiencing difficulties in Lynn Lake and area have their health and safety placed in great jeopardy.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) to consider restaffing the social worker position in Lynn Lake in order to provide needed services to northwestern Manitoba in a timely manner.

To request the Minister of Family Services and Housing to consider mediating outstanding accounts payable due to the Lynn Lake Friendship Centre by Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency in order to allow the designated safe house and receiving home to resume regular operations and services and continued utilization of these operations and services.

This is signed by Derwin Hrechka, Gail Sarchuk, Urgen Linklater and many, many others

Provincial Trunk Highway 2

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

As a result of high traffic volumes in the region, there have been numerous accidents and near misses

along Provincial Trunk Highway 2, near the village of Glenboro, leading to serious safety concerns for motorists. The provincial government has refused to construct turning lanes off Provincial Trunk Highway 2 into the village of Glenboro and on to Golf Course Drive, despite the fact that the number of businesses along Provincial Trunk Highway 2 have increased greatly in recent years.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider implementing a speed zone on Provincial Trunk Highway 2 adjacent to the village of Glenboro.

Signed Harley Nelson, Steve Bjornson, Daren Williamson and many, many others

Rapid Transit System

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

For decades, indecision and lack of support by NDP and Conservative governments in Manitoba has meant Winnipeg has been denied a needed rapid transit system.

While a rapid transit system has particular benefits for students, for seniors and for those on low incomes, all Winnipeggers benefit from building a quicker, more environmentally friendly rapid transit system.

Rapid transit is one of the major components of building a liveable and sustainable 21st century city that decreases dependence on importing gas from other provinces and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Rapid transit is a critical component in moving Manitoba towards smart growth policies that focus on quality of life instead of decades of dumb growth under NDP and Conservative provincial governments.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to consider ensuring that Winnipeg has a rapid transit system as soon as possible.

Signed by Donn Bittle, Shaun James, Greg Stefanyshyn and many, many others.

* (13:40)

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table the Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the year ended March 31, 2006.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table two reports. First, I'm pleased to table the following annual report: the *Manitoba Human Rights Commission Discriminatory Business Practices Act Annual Report*, fiscal year ending March 31, '07. Yes, I'd also like to table the Annual Report of the Provincial Court of Manitoba 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba's Waterways Pollution Prevention

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier has repeatedly indicated that environment trumps everything under his government, and that water issues are a top priority in terms of his legacy to future generations of Manitobans. Against the backdrop of the rhetoric and the apparent political statements with regard to his commitment to water, we've had one after another of bad news stories when it comes to water quality in Manitoba. Firstly, the reports of the increased levels of blue-green algae on Lake Winnipeg caused by high flows of phosphorus into the lake.

Secondly, reports earlier this week of dangerously high levels of E. coli around certain beaches that are frequented by Manitobans and visitors to Manitoba. We refer to the issue of the Emerson lagoon flowing raw sewage into the Red River earlier this year.

Now we have the issue of Devils Lake, and the fact that the outlet has now been opened, that there's now apparently water flowing from Devils Lake into the Sheyenne River making its way into Manitoba.

The Premier was in Deadwood yesterday with Governor Hoeven. I'm wondering if he can indicate when he was advised that this step was being taken by North Dakota and what steps he's taken to date in order to address this latest threat to Manitoba's water.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member will know from the time we were elected and became aware that Governor Schafer had in June

of '99 announced both an inlet and an outlet to Devils Lake, an outlet for heavy rain and flooding and an inlet for drought. When we became elected in September of '99, we made it public that this, in fact, was planned by North Dakota, and we made it very public that we were opposed to both the outlet and the inlet at Devils Lake. As well, we were opposed to the son of Garrison, if you will, with the North Dakota state water act appropriation of \$650 million for water from the Missouri River to the Red River basin.

Mr. Speaker, we have an ongoing disagreement with the governor of North Dakota. Ambassador Wilson has met with Governor Hoeven. The Prime Minister has met with Governor Hoeven when he was in Gimli last year on Lake Winnipeg. We have discussed this over and over again, including at the meeting in South Dakota. We agree to disagree.

Manitoba believes: No. 1, that there should be no outlet from Devils Lake; No. 2, we believe there should be no inlet from the Missouri River, and that is something the United States has promised not to do; No. 3, we believe that if any water moves it should be going through an advanced filter to deal with some of the issues raised in the testing and No. 4, we dramatically disagree with the lack—*[interjection]* Well, the member opposite would know that the former standard at 300 parts of sulphate have—unfortunately, we have weaker conditions today than we had two years ago with 450 parts now being the stop-dead point.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, with the original proposal that we didn't agree to, the 300 parts would have meant that the water would not be flowing today where the sulphate levels are 376. We have raised this with the Prime Minister. We've said, under your watch we've actually got weaker standards.

Today Minister Melnick met with Minister Toews and Minister Baird, and we've asked that the Canadian government get some support from the U.S. national government to have the U.S. administrator of the environment withdraw the delegated authority that they have given to North Dakota on the sulphate levels.

We want North Dakota's hands off the levers. We want the U.S. Bush administration to take those hands off, and we want our Prime Minister to make sure that happens.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before recognizing the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I want

to remind members that when making reference to members of this Chamber, to use their titles or members by their constituents, not by the names. I ask the co-operation of all members of the House.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, that answer is symbolic of so much of what has happened under this Premier's watch with respect to water issues in Manitoba; lots of rhetoric, lots of wishes, lots of hopes, lots of speeches, lots of drama, and the worse the situation gets the higher the volume gets in terms of the responses to questions. But, unfortunately, there's no correlation whatsoever between the rhetoric and what's actually happening when it comes to water in Manitoba.

So I want to ask the Premier, just over a year ago he was hailing the agreement that was made between Canada and the United States which was going to once and for all resolve this issue. Has he called on the federal government to begin to take legal action under that agreement that he was hailing a year ago to stop the actions on the part of North Dakota to flow water from Devils Lake into the Manitoba watershed?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, in terms of rhetoric, this is the first time the member opposite has raised Devils Lake since he's been Leader of the Opposition. So I'm glad he's found a newfound interest in the topic.

Secondly—[interjection] Yeah, yeah, you ask the questions.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the issue of the increased sulphate levels that we have opposed, which is a delegated authority from the Bush administration to the North Dakota state, we have taken that to court and you know what? The national federal government has not joined us in that court case, something the member opposite, I hope, raises at the next federal Progressive Conservative convention.

Mr. McFadyen: It's just typical and consistent with past answers on issues to pass the buck to the federal government. The fact is, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note that every time there's an opportunity to try to look like a statesman on this issue, the Premier takes ownership

of the Devils Lake issue. Every time something goes wrong, it's the federal government's fault and that's the pattern that we have seen time and time again.

Every time there are tough issues coming up on Crocus or any other issues, he's flying to the United States to solve the Devils Lake crisis. The fact is he can't have it both ways. You're either the champion of Devils Lake or you're going to duck on Devils Lake. Today he chooses to duck when the news is bad, and when there's news that's good such as the agreement he was attempting to take credit for just over a year ago that he's all over the news, Mr. Speaker.

I want to ask the Premier: Given his government's failures on Lake Winnipeg when it comes to algae and E. coli, we now see stories today about future concerns about drought; we now see a failure and a setback on the issue of Devils Lake; what assurances can the Premier provide that going forward his record on water issues will be better than the record of the past eight years?

* (13:50)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asked the question about legal action and the national government. The answer to the question is the national federal government would not support Manitoba in its legal action against Devils Lake. If the member opposite doesn't like the answer to the question, don't ask the question.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: I thought they trained you in law school to always know the answer to the question before you ask the question. Obviously, the member opposite missed that chapter or chose to ignore it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: I do believe that the federal government and our Prime Minister has—and I know he has raised it with Governor Hoeven. I was there in Gimli when he did raise it directly with the Governor, and I appreciated that. I know that Minister Baird has raised it with his counterpart, the CEQ head and the environmental head. I know that former Prime Minister Martin also opposed this project. I believe all Canadians and all Manitobans are opposed to the

unilateral flow of water without it being referred to the IJC and without Manitoba being protected.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of offering solutions to this issue, we have offered to North Dakota to solve an issue of water protection in terms of flooding at the road, at the border. We've offered to invest money into that proposal in exchange for North Dakota holding back water from Devils Lake until the Bush administration can get around to building a filter that should have been installed over a year ago to protect Manitobans. We have offered that as a positive way of dealing with problems on both sides of the border.

I want to announce to the House today that we have withdrawn that offer because we believe that flowing of that water unilaterally is against the best interests of Manitobans. We've withdrawn that offer and we've taken it off the table.

CAIS Program Revisions

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, we're experiencing a historic increase in the value of the Canadian dollar. Speculation is that we could reach parity with the United States by year-end. The CAIS program was ill-conceived from the beginning and needs to be bankable, predictable and reliable for our farmers. This program has had a negative effect on our producers.

Will the Minister of Agriculture please update the House on the provincial government's support for these provisions to the Canadian farm income support program?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that we have been working with other provinces and with the federal government to get changes to CAIS. Many changes have been made and these changes have been made with a lot of input from the farmers. We are working on phase 2 of CAIS, of the agriculture policy framework, and that will be the subject of discussion at the next Agriculture ministers' meeting.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, estimating cost of inputs have jeopardized the viability of every farm operation in Manitoba. At no time in our farm history has it been more incumbent on the government to act quickly in support of the ag industry.

Will the minister today demonstrate some leadership and commit to work aggressively with revisions to the CAIS program?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, the member should listen to the answer before he gives his next question. I already told him that Manitoba has been part of the negotiations. Manitoba has made suggestions on amendments to the CAIS program, and many of those amendments have been implemented.

Mr. Eichler: If this NDP government considers farm families so important, why was there, in their 2000 election platform, nothing ever mentioned? Why was there nothing in this year's provincial budget? Why was there barely a mention in the Throne Speech? That's because they don't care about the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has a plan to improve the income support program. However, it requires the support and participation of this Province. Are the minister and this Premier (Mr. Doer) prepared to work with the federal government on behalf of Manitoba producers? *[interjection]* You answer it then.

Ms. Wowchuk: I would remind the member that we brought in a budget and if he looks at that budget, Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture budget has increased.

With regard to the election, I would encourage the member to look at all of the initiatives that we are putting forward with alternate energies: value-added, wind energy, biodiesel, nutraceuticals, functional foods. All of those are important to producers, Mr. Speaker, the programs that we have in place for young farmers. And yes, there is money there for insurance programs and for the CAIS program. I encourage him to read the budget.

Agricultural Production Costs Farmers' Access to Funds

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, the growth in the biofuels sector is creating a high demand for grains and oil seeds. As a result, the price for input for crop production is increasing. Why don't you applaud now?

Fertilizer, fuel and a chemical are imposing significant costs for producers who have no one to pass the cost of production on to. The federal government has brought forward a plan to contribute \$400 million this year to cover the rising cost of production for Canadian farmers.

Mr. Speaker, has the Minister of Agriculture developed any plans to address the rising cost of farm inputs through the provincial government?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've put back millions of dollars into farmers' pockets from the tax rebate that was in our budget, in our Throne Speech, that the members opposite refused to consider. In fact, when they were in government they increased the portioning of farmland. They increased farmers' taxes.

Our government is committed to creating new opportunities, new markets for farmers and that's why the biodiesel initiative, the wind energy initiative, the ethanol initiative, are all new opportunities and new markets for our producers. Certainly, the input costs are significant but new opportunities—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dyck: The fact is that this minister has done absolutely nothing to ensure that Manitoba's portion of the new cost of production financing has reached the province's farm families. The growing season is well under way, but this NDP government has taken no action to discuss with the federal government how it will roll out its funding commitment.

Mr. Speaker, what is the minister's plan for ensuring that our producers will have access to that money before it is too late?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed and has put funds in place to the CAIS program. Our government has made commitments and has the necessary funds in place for crop insurance.

Our producers want to ensure that there is a proper safety net for them. When there were parts of the program that weren't working, Mr. Speaker, we worked with the producers to make amendments. By creating new opportunities for markets and the ability to grow more crops that is what farmers want and that is what we will continue to do. We will offer them the safety nets that they need, and we will create new opportunities for their crops.

Hog Industry Moratorium

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the Minister of Agriculture. The hog industry moratorium has created significant economic pain to all Manitobans, both urban and

rural. The hog industry is the most highly regulated industry in Manitoba, and this moratorium has created uncertainty for long-term planning as new projects need a long window for construction.

Outside events are also creating pressure on the industry such as country-of-origin labelling in the U.S. and loss of plants in Moose Jaw and Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: When will the government, now that the election is over, end the moratorium on new construction for the hog industry?

* (14:00)

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, I would encourage the member to talk to his leader, because his leader also when the moratorium pause was brought in, Mr. Speaker, he said he supported it—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that there is a tremendous amount of pressure. The member opposite talks about country-of-origin labelling and what pressure that will create. The member opposite should again talk to his leader who was against a slaughter facility being built in this province. The member opposite spoke against it. He supported a moratorium. We need some clarity from the members opposite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind members when the Speaker is standing all members should be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence. We're trying to get as many questions and answers in as we can because the clock is ticking.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I see uncertainty continues as this government leaves an entire industry in a situation where no development can occur and with no end in sight to the moratorium and no answers from this minister. The moratorium in place does not even allow current operations to upgrade or expand.

I ask the minister: When will this government lift this moratorium and allow the industry to move forward with certainty?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, again the member opposite should talk to his leader who, in fact, did support the pause and did support it going to the

Clean Environment Commission. It has gone to the Clean Environment Commission and there will be a report coming.

The member opposite should know that our leader has said that this will be dealt with within a year. We are working very closely with the pork industry which we recognize as an important industry. But, Mr. Speaker, I would assure you this is not a moratorium. It's a pause until the Clean Environment Commission does their hearing. I would ask all members opposite if they are opposed to the Clean Environment Commission looking at this industry and giving it some guidance.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Emerson has the floor.

Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council Government's Contribution of Funds

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Last week the Minister of Agriculture was on the radio indicating a forthcoming announcement on cattle processing and funding through the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. Over the past year, the NDP has confiscated over \$600,000 and allegedly matched it with provincial contributions of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm that the provincial government has made its full contributions to the fund administered by the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question on the Cattle Enhancement Council and the need for slaughter capacity in this province. Again, I would ask him to talk to some of his colleagues, his predecessor, in fact, from Emerson who said that there was no need for slaughter capacity in this province and, indeed, that the facilities in Alberta were under capacity. In fact, my critic has also said there is no need for more slaughter capacity.

We are committed to increasing slaughter capacity in this province. We will continue to work with those facilities who have an interest to build a federally-inspected plant in this province, and I would hope that the members opposite would get on

board and recognize how important it is that we have a federally inspected plant in this—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): For many ranchers it's too late to keep them in business. Mr. Speaker, 700 have given up hope that the provincial government is capable of preserving their industry. We know that the government has confiscated over \$600,000 from the ranchers in this province, and rather than put these hard-earned dollars towards more slaughter capacity the NDP government spent the money on administration costs.

Mr. Speaker, did the government put its share of funding into the Enhancement Council? Is there an increase in slaughter capacity or will it spend more money on administration costs ahead?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the producers' money has not been spent on administration. The producers' money is there, and the producers' money will be invested in a facility when a project is ready.

The member asks if the government's money is there. Yes, the government's money is there when there is a project that is ready to go. But I want to ensure the member opposite that it is not producers' money that has been spent on administration. The government has paid for the administration.

The government has established a fund, Mr. Speaker. Too bad the members opposite want to destroy it if they would have been in government and not allowed the producers to be part of a solution for more slaughter capacity in this province.

Crown Lands Offices Staff Replacement

Mr. Stu Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the livelihood of many farm families in Manitoba depends on access to Crown land for crop production and livestock grazing. Some producers have had to face delays of up to eight months when looking to buy or sell leases. Farmers in Manitoba already face inefficiencies with the process under Crown lands legislation. These problems have been further compounded by the loss of experienced Crown land administrators.

Can the Minister of Agriculture update the House on the efforts to replace the 15 personnel who have resigned?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): I know that the Member for Ste. Rose wants an answer and wants to be able to hear it, so maybe some of his friends on that side of the House can allow that to happen.

The Crown lands issue, making available for production and for farmers, is a priority of this government. We've re-evaluated over a period of time the procedures for Crown lands, and we've made some very tangible improvements to our process. We've also made sure that we've seen some very tangible results come from that so that we can make sure the farmers in Manitoba actually are able to participate in the economy.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, delays in lease transactions are being made considerably worse as a result of having to hire a new contingent of Crown lands administrators. The NDP government's decision to centralize positions led to almost everyone in the field quitting rather than move away from their home towns.

Mr. Speaker, it already takes the better part of a year to deal with lease transactions. What does the minister have to say to those frustrated producers out there who depend on Crown lands for their livelihood?

Mr. Struthers: What I say, Mr. Speaker, is thank goodness we took a look at this whole situation because what was left to us was a mess.

A few short years ago the situation was much worse from what the Member for Ste. Rose puts forward today, and we've improved it, Mr. Speaker. We've improved the amount of time that it takes for farmers to make their applications and receive decisions on Crown lands.

We've got some work to do. We're going to continue to do that. We're going to make improvements to the administration. We're going to make sure that the prime focus of this re-evaluation

of our program is a betterment for farmers in Manitoba.

The Apology Act Government's Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased before the election to hear the Minister of Health say that she's considering supporting our party's Apology Act, which would make it easier for health-care providers to apologize at the time when a medical error occurs. This move is an important one in terms of helping us to move away from a culture which has been defend and cover up to one which is more open and allows for better discussion when a medical error or problem occurs.

I ask today: Is the Minister of Health prepared to support our Apology Act and use it as part of a more comprehensive program like Sorry Works! in other jurisdictions which provides for open discussion of what has happened, what went wrong and for compensation when appropriate?

* (14:10)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Indeed, I did signal to the member opposite that we were open and willing to look at this particular act. I would suggest to the member and to other members of the House that when we talk about a culture of openness and of sharing information, we know that really this was born out of the Sinclair report in 2000 when we know prior to that medical error was essentially swept under the carpet.

As a result of that Sinclair report and the following of recommendations from that, we know that we can work together with health providers to ensure that we can learn from any errors that occur in the system and that we can make sure that our system improves every single day. The Sinclair report really paved the way for that here in Manitoba. I think the member opposite has one piece of a very complex organization we need to look at.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Minister of Health is referring to the Sinclair report. Let me quote, May 24, 2001, the then-health care minister, the MLA for Kildonan, in response to the report of the review and implementation committee, the report of the Sinclair report said, and I quote: Manitoba Health will be reorganized in recognition of its new role in a regionalized health delivery system. The new role will focus on ensuring accountability of the health-care system to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask the Minister of Health, we've presented today a bill that would do that, provide for accountability in our health-care system, as recommended by the Romanow report. I ask the minister: Will she fulfil the commitment of one of her predecessors and support Bill 200?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad today is one of the days when the member of the Liberal Party is interested in conducting House business rather than obstructionism. But what I can tell the member opposite is that we've been working on those recommendations, including the enshrining in legislation with the RHA amendment act, the importance of having family members and patients be informed when there is medical error. In fact, it's up to the regional health authority and up to the doctors to let families know when these things happen.

Certainly, as the member would well know, an apology is one thing but families need to understand what it is they're receiving an apology for. That's why we've enshrined it in legislation. That's part of the accountability we're working towards, not to mention publishing all of our information on wait times, et cetera, on our Web sites.

Candidate Nomination (Wellington) Premier's Actions

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I'd like to quote Kaur Sidhu, who ran for the NDP nomination in The Maples, and it goes: This is another example of intimidation and bullying plus non-democratically favouring a candidate over the other. Where are the democratic and ethical values of our party?

I'd like to put a quote from Angie Ramos, yet another candidate in another constituency, and it states: I was forced to resign because of bullying, coercion and intimidation by the NDP. The following day after Angie resigned, this Premier phoned her.

My question to the Premier is: Will he tell this Chamber why Angie Ramos resigned as a candidate for the NDP in the last provincial election?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the scourge continues. I wonder, since the member's leader talked about The Apology Act, on one of the amendments, I think it would be appropriate, it would be a specific

amendment for comments made by the Member for Inkster which were wrong in this House, which were inflammatory.

I daresay, there were words used by the member opposite that in the hallway were libellous, and I believe there are charges or things that are pending and litigation pending. I would suggest to the Member for Inkster that he get on with the business of the House and the business of Manitobans and what happened instead of worrying about things like elections.

And I might add, if he wants to look at political parties, he ought to look at his own political party and some of its failures and some of its excesses. We all have something to learn, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope the Member for Inkster would learn from that.

Support for Mobility-Disadvantaged People Municipalities' Initiatives

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, the challenges that mobility-disadvantaged people face in our province are many and varied. As a former Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, I know that a great many initiatives have been undertaken by our government to assist people wherever they live in Manitoba.

Can the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs inform the House of recent steps taken to assist municipal governments in making the lives of mobility-disadvantaged people easier in this province?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Speaker, It's nice to see that some members of this House, I notice on this side, actually do care about working with our municipalities.

I was very pleased this morning, Mr. Speaker, in the beautiful community of Morden, Manitoba, to speak to the AMM district meeting and announce that we are going to be providing \$5.4 million to renew our handi-transit system across the province of Manitoba.

If I could, Mr. Speaker, as we renew that handi-transit system, I want to say how excited I am, and I know all members of our caucus are, at the fact we're soon going to have proper access to the Manitoba Legislature for the mobility disadvantaged. We care about Manitobans. That's why we're doing it.

Biofuel Industry Government Initiatives

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has put forward a number of initiatives to defer development in the biofuel industry. At least two of these programs are aimed at allowing agriculture producers the opportunity to become directly involved in local projects. To date, we have heard empty promises from this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, what initiatives will this government take to foster development by local entrepreneurs?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there are many ministers that could answer this question. I'll take the first one.

First of all, on ethanol, we were the first province in Canada to mandate ethanol, and we're seeing the results of that with a \$160-million investment in the Minnedosa region. Secondly, we've taken the sales tax off biofuels in this province. Thirdly, in the election, there was an announcement that there will be a mandate for biofuels on government vehicles in Manitoba.

So we're seeing very significant initiatives taken, and I've noted that many of those initiatives have been copied, but in a weaker form, by the federal government.

Mr. Cullen: We recognize the dismal record of this NDP government in developing and maintaining value-added businesses in Manitoba. In fact, I challenge the minister to come up with one new biofuel industry in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we do not want to squander this opportunity in biofuels. The U.S. already has over 200 plants either operating or under construction with 100 more plants announced. That's a total of 300 plants.

What assurances can the minister provide that our agriculture producers will not be left out of this important industry?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, we've provided a sales tax exemption on biofuels. We've provided a mandate for biodiesel. We've provided a mandate for ethanol. Manitoba farmers are definitely ahead of the curve on this with the policies we've put in place. Those policies are now being imitated in a weaker form by the federal government when it comes to ethanol. They're at 5 percent, we're at 10 percent.

Biofuel operations are being developed as we speak. There are many good proposals out there, and they will come forward due to the entrepreneurship and the spirited energy shown by Manitoba farmers.

* (14:20)

Agriculture Industry BSE Recovery Loans

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, the 2006 agricultural census reports that Manitoba has suffered the loss of over 2,000 farms, the third highest in Canada. The realized net income for Manitoba farmers fell by a staggering \$237 million in a single year. Producers have experienced the lowest income since the BSE crisis hit in 2003, and 700 Manitoba ranchers have given up and left the business.

Mr. Speaker, our producers continue to face incredible financial challenges. Will the minister today commit to offering an interest relief period for all outstanding BSE recovery loans?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the member recognizes at this point that those BSE recovery loans were important because there was a time when they said that they shouldn't be loaned. I can assure the member opposite that our staff at MASC is working very closely with people who have those BSE loans, and will continue to work with them.

There is a difficulty. There is no doubt that our producers in this province, along with many other provinces, are facing great hardship. It's too bad the members opposite couldn't support more. When we were trying to increase slaughter capacity in this province, they instead chose to support the slaughter capacity of processors in Alberta, saying that there was room there and we shouldn't bother to build.

An Honourable Member: Same as the Wheat Board.

Ms. Wowchuk: Same as the Wheat Board. They'll stand with Albertans. They will not support the Manitoba producers who have voted in favour of the report.

Mrs. Rowat: You know, Mr. Speaker, the minister could've just said: I don't know.

The interest on the BSE recovery loans is well over 6 percent for many ranchers. Meanwhile, cattle prices have not recovered and continue to be

negatively affected by the high price for livestock feed. Demanding that our ranchers pay interest on these loans when they are still not fully recovered from the effects of the BSE is unfair and will only result in farmers incurring more debt. Where is the slaughter capacity?

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister unwilling to help our ranchers continue their recovery? Why is she standing in the way of relief that can benefit our operators? Answer the question, please.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have stood by the producers. Despite the fact that there is huge difficulty and many producers are facing great challenges, we have stood by them. We've put loans in place. We are renegotiating those loans with each of those individuals.

The member opposite asks a question. Would you ask her to come to order, Mr. Speaker? The member opposite asks a question and rather than listening, she just chirps from her chair. Chirps away from her chair with no respect at all for the fact that farmers are facing very big challenges.

Mr. Speaker, our farmers are facing challenges on the Wheat Board. The members opposite would not defend it. The members opposite are facing the challenges of slaughter capacity. Members opposite said: Let Alberta do the slaughtering.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Karen Carey

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I would like to take the opportunity to recognize a constituent of mine who was recently awarded the Judy Aiken Memorial Award. This year's recipient is Karen Carey who was nominated by the Hazelridge School Parent Council.

The Judy Aiken Memorial Award is granted annually and was created in 2004 to honour the memory of Judy Aiken, who was a long-standing member of the Manitoba Home and School Parent-Teacher Federation. This award is given to exceptional individuals whose actions and efforts have made a significant contribution to their school community on behalf of their parent association.

This year's recipient, Karen Carey, was recognized in particular for her work in raising \$100,000 in funds for a brand-new play structure for Hazelridge School through the Playground

Rejuvenation Program. She was also instrumental in launching the drive for a \$30,000 computer lab which has significantly increased rural access to computers. Karen Carey has been described as a person who not only comes up with great ideas but also invests the time and energy required to turn an idea into successful reality.

Through the countless hours of meetings, fundraising events and writing of proposals, Ms. Carey maintained her high level of energy and organization that allows her to spend many hours volunteering on top of raising four children with her husband. Ms. Carey is also warmly described as someone who works incredibly hard but is not looking for recognition; a truly genuine individual.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take the opportunity to recognize many other individuals who received nominations for this award from their respective school councils including Bill and Wendy Brenner, Lori Carpenter and Dawn Froese. To all those who were nominated, and especially to Karen Carey, I congratulate you on your deserved recognition. Your hard work and contribution through communities has not gone unnoticed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Philippine Heritage Week

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, it was my honour to represent the Premier (Mr. Doer) last Saturday at the flag-raising ceremony marking the beginning of a week of events in celebration of Philippine Heritage Week.

It should also be mentioned that today, June 12, is Philippine's Independence Day. These events help display the dynamism and vitality of Manitoba's Filipino community. Philippine Heritage Week highlights the many contributions Filipinos have made to this province since the first immigrants arrived in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These members have left a lasting mark in our province with a population that is 40,000 strong. Manitoba's Filipino community is now an essential link in our multicultural province.

Philippine Independence Day recalls the momentous events in 1898 when the Philippines declared its independence and sovereignty from its colonial rulers. Unfortunately, despite the great progress that has been made, we should be mindful that today in the Philippines our brothers and sisters do not enjoy the level of democracy that we do have here in Manitoba. According to international

advocates such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, over 750 social activists, lawyers, church workers and journalists have been killed in the Philippines, allegedly by military or allied military groups. But despite these struggles for democratic freedom in the Philippines, Mr. Speaker, the passion and commitment of the Filipino people have served the province of Manitoba well.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Philippine Heritage Council Coordinating Committee and the many dedicated volunteers and participating groups for organizing this week of celebrations. I also thank the members of this House, to join me in celebrating Philippine Independence Day and invite them to attend the events surrounding the Philippine Heritage Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ALS Awareness Month

Mr. Stu Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize that June is ALS Awareness Month. This devastating disease affects over 2,500 Canadians and approximately 150 Manitobans.

ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a debilitating and fatal disease that unfortunately means sufferers lose voluntary control of their muscles. As a result, approximately 80 percent of ALS patients die within the first two to five years of diagnosis. This is a sad reality that we are fighting against.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend those that work to raise awareness of and find a cure for ALS. This makes the work of groups such as the ALS Society of Manitoba of paramount importance. I strongly urge my colleagues and fellow Manitobans to support their efforts.

On June 10, I had the pleasure of attending a walk for ALS in Gladstone. I would like to congratulate and thank all the participants, sponsors and volunteers in the Gladstone fundraising walk as well as across the Ste. Rose constituency of Manitoba. It is encouraging to see our community gathering together to support this worthwhile cause.

Special thanks to Amy Redekopp for organizing the Gladstone event and Lanny McInness, president of the ALS Society of Manitoba.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I know we all greatly respect the individuals living with ALS and support

the ALS Society of Manitoba in their efforts to fight this terrible disease. Thank you.

* (14:30)

Seven Oaks Hospital ER

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak today about the redevelopment of the Seven Oaks emergency department. Seven Oaks Hospital is an important institution in my constituency of The Maples, serving residents of the entire Winnipeg region as well as the Selkirk, Stonewall and Interlake areas.

Through the redevelopment of the emergency department, Seven Oaks continues to respond to the needs of the community. The original emergency department was designed to treat less than 20,000 people in a year that currently sees approximately 35,000 people a year. Once the \$14-million project is completed the spaces to see patients will double from 12 to 25. There will also be a new three-vehicle ambulance bay; improvements to existing treatment rooms; improved cardiac monitoring capabilities; development of a six-bed reassessment unit; a new minor injury treatment unit; a secure room for aggressive patients; improved space for drugs, supplies and equipment; a new decontamination area and isolation room; new space for support services; the expansion of the pharmacy and the relocation of the cast clinic.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Seven Oaks for its achievements and its continuing efforts to provide quality care. I am proud to have such an impressive facility in my constituency. I would like to thank both the provincial government and the Seven Oaks Hospital Foundation for committing the resources to such an important project. Their support will help improve the quality of services this hospital provides for The Maples and surrounding areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hybrid Car Rebates

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to highlight the question that I had posed to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) yesterday in regard to the hybrid program.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the Minister of Finance is off tune in terms of what's really important for Manitobans in speaking in terms of the environment and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, we need to realize that an individual, and this applies to more than just one individual who is trying to do the right thing, who belongs within the taxi industry in which he was attempting to be able to drive a hybrid 2007 Toyota Prius, a car which the taxi industry has somewhat adopted and is moving forward on, and has put an actual deposit down and has been waiting for months, needed to get a vehicle registered and as a result of the need was able to locate one in Edmonton, Alberta.

The individual then purchased the vehicle and brought it to the province of Manitoba and was told then that he would not be able to qualify because he didn't buy the vehicle in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister needs to revisit the issue in terms of the policy. How healthy is it for competition? How healthy is it for our environment when the minister is so closed-minded that he does not take a look at what the real needs are here in the province in trying to facilitate a better working program.

I think the minister was too quick to jump to conclusions, and I appeal to the minister to rethink this particular issue, allow for an individual that has in fact been patiently waiting for virtually two months, was not able to get it here, had to go abroad. He should not be penalized because he did attempt to get one here in Manitoba.

If you don't reform or change the policy, what message you're saying is that you can create the backlog and create a demand for it, and it doesn't really matter, you'll be able to charge whatever price you want because, at the end of the day, we're not having open competition.

So I appeal to the minister's sense of fairness on the issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe that we will be moving into Interim Supply procedure. Correct?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move that the—

Mr. Speaker: No, no.

Order. The House will resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolutions respecting Interim Supply.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us, for our consideration, two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply Bill.

The first resolution respecting operating expenditures for Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$5,401,597,200, being 60 percent of the total amount to be voted as set forth in Part A (Operating Expenditure) of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2008.

Does the Minister of Finance have any comments?

Does the official opposition Finance critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I'd like to go straight into questioning if possible.

Madam Chairperson: I'm sorry, the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet.

* (14:40)

Mr. Hawranik: No opening statement itself, but I'd certainly like to go straight into questions to the Finance Minister.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has indicated that he's committed to GAAP as recommended by the Auditor General, both with respect to financial statements and budgets. The Minister of Finance commissioned and received a report prepared by Deloitte & Touche regarding the effect of GAAP on provincial budgets and the move to summary budgets and summary financial statements from our existing framework of operating budgets and operating financial statements.

Madam Chairperson, I'd like to ask the minister whether he's fully committed to fulfilling all of the recommendations of the report. If he's not committed to fulfilling all the recommendations, can he

highlight which recommendations that he's not prepared to follow?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): The interim report recommendations are now—I think the consultant did another round of discussions and has yet to submit a final letter based on those other consultations. But from what I can see up to now, the recommendations seemed reasonable, and as far as I can tell, we'll be implementing them all. That would be the idea.

Mr. Hawranik: With respect to the request for the report from Deloitte & Touche, presumably the minister would have provided some frame of reference for Deloitte & Touche. Would he commit to providing us with a copy of the terms or frames of reference for that study and report that's being conducted by Deloitte & Touche?

Mr. Selinger: I'll take the member's question, and I will endeavour to provide him with the frame of reference for the review that the consultant did.

Mr. Hawranik: Is it the intention of the minister to produce—and I know that the Deloitte & Touche report indicated that it would be best to move to summary budgets and summary financial statements for the Province; but, having said that, will the minister commit to continue to produce operating budgets and operating financial statements in this House?

Mr. Selinger: The format that we used in this spring's budget would be the operative format as we go ahead. We produced this budget in a full summary form. As the member will know, there is operating revenue and expenditure information provided in the appropriate sections that we've put it in now.

So there will be information on the full summary budget, as well as information on the operating expenditure and revenues, but there's only one budget. It's a full summary budget now.

Mr. Hawranik: The minister has stated that he will strengthen balanced budget legislation. I believe that's his words that were, in fact, reported by the media, that he was going to strengthen balanced budget legislation.

Can the minister indicate when he intends to introduce legislation with respect to any amendment to the balanced budget legislation as it currently exists?

Mr. Selinger: Well, first of all, we need the final report from the consultant. Then, subject to that final report, we would proceed with preparing legislation. Depending on what arrangements are made in the House here between the various House leaders, if we have a legislative session this fall, that would be the first opportunity to introduce it. We'll see where it goes from there.

Mr. Hawranik: Given the commitment to ensure that we have GAAP in our financial statements, being the summary financial statements and summary budget for next year, for 2008, will the minister confirm, then, that he intends to change balanced budget legislation to strengthen it, as he calls it, before the next budget?

Mr. Selinger: We presented this year's budget in a full summary form. The Public Accounts have been presented in full summary form for at least three years now. The consultant will table a final set of recommendations based on his consultations. That will be taken under advisement in the preparation of changes to balanced budget legislation to bring it into conformity with full summary budgeting GAAP requirements as recommended by the Auditor General.

As soon as all that work's prepared and there's the opportunity in the House to present new legislation, we'll bring it forward.

Mr. Hawranik: Will the minister be leaving the balanced budget legislation as it currently exists for the operating financial statements and operating budget that he presents each and every year, since he indicated that he intends to continue to present an operating budget to this Legislature?

Mr. Selinger: I would refer the member to the Auditor General's recommendations in that regard. The Auditor General has made it very clear that there should be only one budget. It should be a full summary budget based on GAAP principles. That was the type of budget we presented this year. That's the way we've been doing the public accounts for several years. The Auditor General's recommendations will be followed, as we've committed to doing publicly and has been demanded by the members opposite, and within the full summary budget there will be, as there was this year, information with respect to operational revenues and operational expenditures in a way that is easily understood.

Mr. Hawranik: The minister previously indicated that he's going to continue to present operating budgets along with the summary budget and operating financial statement, along with the summary financial statements, every year as they continued, as they occurred this year in 2007-2008. So, given that he's going to continue to produce those operating statements, financial statements and operating budgets together with the summary ones, will he commit then to leave the balanced budget legislation in place with respect to those operating statements and budgets?

Mr. Selinger: The member will know, as demanded, that I respond to the Auditor General. The Auditor General severely criticized the balanced budget legislation in its present form and demanded that we change it to a full summary budget based on GAAP principles. We have committed to doing that. We've done that as a prototype this year in the Legislature. There's only one budget now; it's a full summary budget.

Within that budget is information on operational and expenditures and revenues, but there's only one budget, and that's how we presented it this year. The public accounts were presented on a full summary basis for at least three years and that practice will continue as well. The Auditor General made it very clear, the legislation as it presently existed had to change.

Mr. Hawranik: Balanced budget legislation will need to be changed for the summary budget and financial statements. There's no doubt about that, and that's exactly what the Auditor General has recommended when we go to summary budgets and summary financial statements. But the minister indicated that the operating statements and operating budget will continue to be presented at the same time as our summary statements and budgets.

If he's going to do that, there's absolutely no need then to change the balanced budget legislation as it affects our operating statements and budgets as he presents them each year in this House. As a result of that, would he commit then to leaving the balanced budget legislation as it is for any operating statements or budgets that he presents to the Legislature?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Chair, I've answered that question. The Auditor General has severely criticized the existing balanced budget legislation. They have recommended that there be only one full summary budget following GAAP principles. That type of

budget was presented this spring in the Legislature. The member might recall that we had an election on that budget. We passed that budget in principle. All the information is there on a full summary basis.

In addition, there are schedules that show operating revenue and expenditures within the full summary budget. The Auditor General has also made it very clear there can only be one budget, and the balanced budget legislation had to change to meet GAAP principles and requirements. We have committed to doing that. The member has demanded that I do that, the Member for Lac du Bonnet, and we will be following through on all the commitments we make.

* (14:50)

Mr. Hawranik: I think it's in the answer by the minister, then, that he will not be allowing the balanced budget legislation as it currently exists to remain. However, he has indicated that he's going to be introducing new balanced budget legislation with respect to the summary budgets and summary operating statements.

So I ask the minister: In the new balanced budget legislation that he may be proposing later this year, would he at least leave the penalties in place should a balanced budget not be produced, such as the reduction of ministerial salaries to a dollar, in the event that he does not meet balanced budget requirements?

Mr. Selinger: The member is discussing legislation which is not yet in front of the Legislature. These are hypothetical questions. Hypothetical questions are usually out of order. In any kind of questioning, we're discussing something that hasn't been produced yet.

We will await the final recommendations from the consultant, Madam Chair. We will follow the overall recommendations made by the Auditor General, and we will table legislation in due course once all of that information is in front of us, and then the member can decide whether he's happy with whatever penalty provisions are in the new legislation.

Certainly, Madam Chair, we're committed to accountability in how we manage the public affairs in Manitoba with respect to financial affairs, and increased transparency and information being made available to all members of the public according to GAAP principles.

Mr. Hawranik: I asked the Minister of Finance whether he is in favour or against having penalties in place for ministers should the balanced budget not be produced and putting that in balanced budget legislation.

Mr. Selinger: Well, as I've said, under the existing legislation, we've balanced the budget eight times, and we followed all the provisions of it, including any penalty provisions, which have never had to be invoked because we've always balanced the budget. So we will ensure that there's full accountability consistent with the recommendations of the Auditor General and the consultant's report, which is intended to go out and follow up on the Auditor General's recommendations.

Mr. Hawranik: Existing balanced budget legislation requires a minimum requirement of \$110 million to be paid against the operating budget of the province each year. Is the minister in favour or against including a provision like that in any new legislation with respect to new balanced budget legislation?

Mr. Selinger: Well, it is important to have a strategy to manage the liabilities and debt obligations of the province of Manitoba, and when we came into office, the contribution was \$75 million. The amount that we contribute towards dealing with both the pension liability and the general purpose debt is at a record high. We have had five credit rating upgrades since we've come to office. We've also, for the first time ever in the history of the province, recognized the pension liability, put it on the books instead of hiding it and ignoring it, and we've put a plan in place, a long-term plan in place, to reduce the pension liability.

The long-term plan has several features to it. The first one was to use some of the additional money that we had budgeted for debt and pension liabilities towards paying down that every year into the TRAF and the civil service fund. Secondly, there were provisions to start making employer contributions in the public service to civil service towards pensions as new employees came on, and similarly with teachers. Thirdly, there was the commitment that we've made to put \$1.5 billion additional into the teachers' retirement fund based on an analysis that shows that that will generate positive returns for the teachers who are going to retire, as well as avoid additional cost to the province in the future. So, yes, we will have a commitment to fully addressing pension and general purpose debt liabilities as we go

forward, and that commitment will be made clearer as we go forward.

But I expect us to continue to have balanced budgets, debt repayment, pension liability repayments for the first time ever in the history of the province so that we can keep the finances of the province on the route that we've taken so far which has generated five credit rating upgrades.

Mr. Hawranik: I take note of the minister indicating he's had five credit upgrades, but the reality is that the province has had, to a great extent, five credit upgrades because of reduced interest rates. Our ability to pay that debt, of course, is a function of not only revenues that come in but interest rates that are there so I don't think he should be too quick to take credit for credit upgrades when we've had a falling interest rate, particularly since 1999.

The report itself, Deloitte & Touche report, at least the preliminary report, indicates that they recommend that the budget be balanced over a four-year period.

I ask the Minister of Finance, is he in favour, personally in favour, of that recommendation, or would he be more in favour of balancing the budget on a yearly basis as he has to, at this point?

Mr. Selinger: The member always discounts and dismisses anything we've done with respect to being prudent in managing public resources. But the fact of the matter is that the costs in the budget toward the debt now are about 7.5 cents on the dollar. Under the Conservatives, they were 13.5 cents on the dollar, at the same time as we've grown the economy by about \$14 billion, \$12 to \$14 billion.

We have had five credit rating upgrades. The credit rating agencies, in particular, had for many years complained about the outright refusal of the Conservative government to address the pension liability, to even recognize the pension liability, and put it on the books. We've done that. We've acknowledged that it's an issue. We've identified it as a liability. We've put long-term plans in place to reduce that liability. We've demonstrated that we have the discipline to follow through on that. The credit rating agencies have been very pleased with that.

We've reduced our debt-to-GDP ratio by over 20 percent since we've come into office, and the member should try to be fair in his comments and

not just dismiss everything as if he actually knew what he was talking about.

On the issue of balancing the budget, we've balanced the budget every year since we've been in office. The balanced budget requirements did not require the budget to be balanced on a summary basis at all. It had completely ignored summary budgeting principles. It dismissed them entirely out of hand and thought that their non-GAAP-compliant approach to balancing the budget was the only approach that was viable because they put it in law.

The reality is that we will balance the budget under full summary GAAP requirements, and we will do it in a way that maintains and enhances the credit rating of the Province.

Mr. Hawranik: Obviously, the minister is aware that the economy, our economy, grew as did every economy across the country. We're not alone in that respect, and economies grow with inflation alone. But the fact remains that we've barely kept up with other provinces. In fact, we've been left behind in our economy.

His comment about balancing the budget every year—well, let's take a look at it. In 2002, he forced Manitoba Hydro to give him \$201 million; otherwise, we would have had a substantial deficit in this province, without \$201 million coming out of Manitoba Hydro at a time when transfer payments are at an all-time high and continuing to increase in this province.

We've also had year-in and year-out transfers from the rainy day fund, just simply to balance the budget. So he's used every possible loophole that he could find within balanced budget legislation to try to balance the budget, even going so far as to indicate that almost every unanticipated cost, every unanticipated cost to government, when they passed their budget was an emergency expenditure and therefore qualified under balanced budget legislation to be excluded to ensure that the budget was balanced. So, you know, the minister has done everything he can to try to stay within the terms of the legislation and has used every possible loophole he could find. Whether or not it was valid didn't seem to matter.

I'm concerned about the recommendation by Deloitte & Touche to balance the budget over a four-year period rather than on an annual basis, which is done currently under our operating budgets and also done on our summary budget as was presented this

year. I know that one of the concerns in the Deloitte & Touche report is that we, as a government, don't have any real control over Hydro profits and losses because a lot of time, of course, Hydro profits depend on water volumes going through our rivers and our lakes. There are times when there are droughts in Manitoba. It's cyclical, and therefore Hydro could lose money as it did several years ago. But there are times when Hydro, of course, reaps in great profits because of flows of water as well.

So, given that Hydro seems to be the biggest concern by Deloitte & Touche in terms of being able to control summary budgets, rather than balancing our budgets over a four-year period as recommended by Deloitte & Touche, would the minister consider balancing our budget on a yearly basis and perhaps excluding Manitoba Hydro profits and losses from the summary budget process?

* (15:00)

Mr. Selinger: Under existing legislation, we have balanced the budget every year. The member knows that. He seems to be unhappy about that. He seems to think that the legislation, as crafted by the former government, was somehow defective because we've been able to comply with it. We've followed the legislation to the letter of the law. There's never been any penalties for not following that legislation. I don't know what the member has a problem with when we follow the law, just because they broke the law when they illegally borrowed \$100 million for the casinos. I think that they should be honest about that.

Secondly, the draws from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, the largest draw from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was by the members opposite in the '99-2000 period when they took over \$190 million out to balance the budget in an election year, a far higher proportion than we've ever taken out. In addition, they signed a contract with the nurses for which they didn't budget. They signed off a whole bunch of expenditure that they had no budgeting for.

So, when it comes to loopholes, the members opposite have exploited every one of them and then claim that they're righteous when it comes to financial management. It's a joke.

With respect to Hydro, they claim that we took a dividend from Hydro. That was a bill presented to the House and debated in the House and passed by the House. Compare and contrast that to how the Conservatives operated with Hydro. They took

money out the backdoor. Hydro, by secret agreement that was not disclosed in the Legislature in any public way, was financing government projects. In exchange for a water power rental freeze, Hydro was paying for government infrastructure projects in the north of Manitoba, and that was not made clear to the Legislature in any tangible way. So the member has a lot of lessons to learn when it comes to openness and transparency.

With respect to his question, would we exclude Hydro and balance the budget, that would not be GAAP-compliant? The member has demanded on many occasions that we follow GAAP. Now he wants to change GAAP. He wants to have a new set of rules just to suit his own particular political interests. The Auditor General has been very clear: You follow GAAP. You have to be fully compliant with GAAP. You can't exclude a Crown utility. The Crowns have to be part of GAAP. So if the member has any problem with that, he should discuss it with the people that make up the GAAP rules.

Mr. Hawranik: The Minister of Finance knows that my only political interest is to make sure he balances the budget every year, not once every four years. It is GAAP-compliant. I'm not saying that Manitoba Hydro has to produce financial statements that are not GAAP-compliant. What I'm saying is that if the concern is that Manitoba Hydro will lose money on a particular year and therefore throw our finances out of whack because of that, then one of the obvious solutions would be to eliminate them from our summary financial statements but ensure that, of course, Manitoba Hydro continues to be GAAP-compliant as the Province is.

In terms of the Finance Minister indicating that he balanced the budget every year, he's simply wrong. I refer to the Auditor General and, of course, the Finance Minister has respect for the Auditor General, as I do, absolutely. In 2003-2004 the Auditor General said he had a \$614-million deficit in the province. He didn't balance the budget. I refer the minister to the Auditor General's report of '03-04 where he indicated so, that he ran a \$614-million deficit in the province in '03-04.

In terms of what you're taking out of Manitoba Hydro, you've doubled the water rental rates for Manitoba Hydro. You doubled the loan guarantee fees and, plus, took \$203 million out of Manitoba Hydro in 2003. Certainly you haven't been forthright in terms of how you've tried to balance your budget. I would refer the minister to '03-04, in particular to

the '03-04 Auditor's report on the finances of the province, a \$614-million deficit. Those are the words of the Auditor General, not mine.

So I ask the Minister of Finance—he has indicated that Deloitte & Touche has held consultations for input on the recommendations and they continue to do so—my question to the minister is: How much further has he been in consultation with Deloitte & Touche? Has he spoken to Deloitte & Touche about how much longer those consultations will be held and where they're going to be held, and will they, in fact, be publicly reported back to this House?

Mr. Selinger: The member is saying that we didn't balance the budget. We have always balanced the budget under the balanced-budget legislation. The Auditor General said in '03-04, we should balance, not only under balanced-budget legislation, but we should also balance under GAAP. That was the year that Hydro had the unfortunate financial consequences of the second-most severe drought we've ever had in the province.

So now the member is saying, you didn't balance under GAAP, but he doesn't acknowledge that we balanced under balanced-budget legislation. The Auditor criticized us for not having GAAP-compliant balanced-budget legislation. We committed to do that, partially as demanded by the member opposite. Now, we're saying we'll balance under GAAP, and have balanced under GAAP.

GAAP includes Hydro. Now, the member wants to exclude Hydro, so he's trying to have it both ways. He's trying to say: you should balance without complying with GAAP, but you should comply with GAAP, because if you don't comply with GAAP, then the Auditor will complain. He's so twisted in his logic, in his thinking, it's unbelievable. You either balance under GAAP, or you don't balance under GAAP. You can't balance under GAAP and then have an exclusion and say you're balancing under GAAP, but for Hydro. That's the way the legislation works now.

It's completely ridiculous, his analysis. It goes both ways at once and completely ties himself in knots. You either balance under GAAP or you don't balance under GAAP. You can't balance under GAAP and have an exception and escape criticism from the Auditor. If you balance with an exception, the Auditor will criticize you and note that and make

that a point, which is the whole point and the basis for the criticism of the old balanced-budget legislation as brought in by the members opposite.

Because it was balanced-budget legislation that was based on no principles recognizable in the accounting profession, it was unique to Manitoba. The Auditor General said, you really should change that and get in synch with the standards which are being set on an international basis right now. There is no standard on an international basis that says you can exclude one of your Crown corporations. That is not a standard under GAAP. So it's very difficult to follow the member's logic when he tries to have it all ways at once. We've always balanced under balanced-budget legislation. That's absolutely clear. There have been no penalties invoked because the law has never been breached.

Now, the member asks a question about whether we'll balance annually or every four years. We will wait the final comments of the consultant. I've been informed that the consultant has concluded his consultations and is drafting his final letter, or final set of recommendations or communication with the government. Presumably, that letter will come to me. Then we will proceed. We will proceed after that to look at those recommendations and see how we can follow through on our commitment made in this House and demanded by members opposite that we have GAAP-compliant balanced-budget legislation.

Mr. Hawranik: It's obvious the minister only hears what he wants to hear and excludes all the rest, but I really don't think he understands GAAP, to be honest. I really don't think he understands GAAP.

My question to the minister is, what reporting entities that are crucial to the summary budget and financial reporting have still not fully implemented GAAP? Can he indicate which ones have not fully implemented GAAP and when they will comply?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: This was identified in last year's Public Accounts report. The requirement to include school divisions in full summary budgeting is a major shift in the way school divisions do their accounting. They're working diligently away in co-operation with the government and with the accounting profession to bring their financial statements into GAAP compliance. That is a work in progress. I don't think they've completely arrived there yet, but they've made significant progress on it. I understand that they've been co-operating with the

accounting profession in government to bring their financial statements into GAAP compliance, but they're not there yet.

Mr. Hawranik: School divisions are the only reporting entity that is not GAAP-compliant at this point, and if so, has the minister provided them with a target date as to when they should be GAAP-compliant?

Mr. Selinger: That's the only major entity that comes under full summary budgeting and GAAP requirements that I'm aware of that has not been able to meet the full GAAP compliance test at the moment. I know that government and the Department of Education have been heavily engaged working with the school divisions to achieve GAAP compliance, and they're going at it as rapidly as they can. As to a specific date when they will be completed, I'm hopeful that it'll be done for next year, but I haven't had a final report on that yet.

Mr. Hawranik: I noted from the Deloitte & Touche report that they have recommended at least that there will be a direct comparison of actual results for the current year with any measurable financial objectives set out in the financial management strategy that accompanies the budget for that year.

Is this something that the minister will be supporting, and if he does support it, will those measurable financial objectives remain constant? In other words, will they be continued to be brought forward year after year, or will they be changed depending on whether the government complies with those objectives? I'm asking, if he's going to be setting up measurable financial objectives, whether or not that's going to be consistent from year to year.

Mr. Selinger: The member asked a good question. Yes, we would like to have measurable financial objectives that we measure and compare the budget results against every year. We would like them to be consistent.

Will they be carved in stone for all eternity? It is possible that over time those measures will become refined, Madam Chair. It is possible that there will be recommendations for better measures, but, when we make improvements, we try to have an equivalency or a translation that allows comparability between old and new standards. The basic idea that the member is driving at is that we have some consistency so we can see over a long period of time how we're doing against a set of benchmarks, and I think that is exactly the appropriate way to go.

But I also believe that—and I haven't foreseen anything specific here yet—over time there will be changes and refinements, and there may be from time to time even recommendations for new measures that are more appropriate. But in all cases we would try to provide some form of comparability or consistency or a clear rationale for why the change has to occur. But certainly you want to have every year the ability to compare one year to the other as you go forward on these benchmarks to make sure that people can have a clearer understanding of how we're doing.

Mr. Hawranik: I think it was about a month or a month and a half ago, the minister indicated that the government was borrowing \$1.5 billion to cover about 75 percent of the unfunded liability for the teachers' pension plan.

I ask the minister whether the full \$1.5 billion has been advanced.

Mr. Selinger: No, the full \$1.5 billion has not yet been completely brought into the trust account for the teachers' retirement fund. I believe a half billion has been put in place, and arrangements are in place for an additional billion. I think that transaction or that process concludes this fall, in about the early part of October.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate for that \$1.5 billion loan what the interest rate is, and perhaps some of the repayment terms?

Mr. Selinger: Generally speaking, the rate of interest is targeted to come in under 5 percent, and the repayment terms, I believe, were over a period of about 30 years. It's a long-term financing of the pension liability at very favourable rates of interest in the marketplace. When the transaction is concluded, we can give firm numbers on the final rate of interest, but so far it looks like it's going to be able to meet the objective of bringing it in under 5 percent. It also looks like it's going to be over a long period of time, a horizon of up to 30 years.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate whether the interest rate will be constant for that full 30-year term, or are there escalation clauses at various points depending on what kind of interest rate is being charged in the market?

Mr. Selinger: Generally speaking the idea is to lock down the interest rate for a long period of time, for as long a period as possible. That would probably be a minimum of 15 years but I'm looking for my officials to find a way to lock that period down for

up to 30 years so that there's predictability in the costs of servicing that obligation.

Right now the pension liability can fluctuate in its costs and this transaction allows us to get greater predictability and control over the cost of that liability by financing in this way.

Mr. Hawranik: Will the minister commit to providing, once he knows what the interest is and over what period of time that interest time is locked in, would he commit to providing me with some detail on that?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'd be happy to provide those terms to the member once all the details are nailed down.

Mr. Hawranik: Out of that \$1.5 billion that is being borrowed, is any of this money being targeted to fund COLA, cost of living allowance for current retired teachers?

Mr. Selinger: The money is intended to fund the unfunded liability that the employer is responsible for for the teachers' retirement fund. That's the liability that was the responsibility of the Province. I believe the Province stopped paying that in around 1962-63, and that obligation was growing. When we came into office it was—I believe had grown to over \$2 billion. Actually, I think it was closer to \$3 billion and we started making payments on that to bring it down. We had a 35-year plan to do that. This will allow us to have greater certainty in what the cost of that liability will be.

We did very careful third-party analysis of whether this was a prudent financial move. We believe that based on this third-party analysis by an actuarial firm that it is a prudent move. It follows experience in other jurisdictions where they have funded the liability because of their ability to get long-term money at a low cost in the marketplace.

The member should note that in the last 30 years the teachers' retirement fund has, on average, had a return of over 10 percent. So if we can get the money at under 5 percent and the teachers' retirement fund can continue to perform at a rate of return, let's say at an assumption of over 6 percent or 6.25 percent, that will provide more benefit to teachers and reduce the liability to the employer, which is the Government of Manitoba, as we go forward.

So it can be a win for teachers by giving them greater security in their pension plan and potentially stronger returns, and it could be a positive for the taxpayers and the citizens of Manitoba in reducing

future liability costs and at the same time having greater predictability in what the future costs are.

Mr. Hawranik: Will the minister clarify the effect of that \$1.5-billion loan, what effect it's going to have on total debt and total obligations to the province and what effect it might have on the net debt of the province?

Mr. Selinger: There is no change in the net debt. The net debt stays exactly the same, but an unpredictable, uncertain cost pension liability has been translated into a specific cost and knowable expense as debt from pension liability, but the total net liability and debt obligations of the Province remain exactly the same.

It does actually provide the opportunity to reduce the go-forward. It avoids potential costs going forward of up to \$250 million. So there is the potential with this measure to avoid future pension liability costs on behalf of the citizens of Manitoba of up to \$250 million.

Mr. Hawranik: I'd like to defer the next question to the Member for Springfield.

*(15:20)

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Chair, I want to congratulate you on being appointed to your new position.

My question to the minister is: Could he please give us a current estimate of the downtown Hydro tower in cost?

Mr. Selinger: The total project budget is now in the order of \$280 million.

Mr. Schuler: I just want to confirm that the original budget for the Hydro tower was \$75 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: No.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell us what the original budget was for the new Hydro tower?

Mr. Selinger: The member will know that the price for the project in the early days was never really a hundred percent pinned down because all the due diligence hadn't been done on the size of the project and what the architectural plans for the project would be and the actual cost of doing it. As the member knows, there has been a fairly dramatic increase in

some of the hard materials used in the project so that has seen all construction projects throughout the country have price escalation and inflation in them.

The base building budget—I'm just looking at this here, skimming it over very quickly—95 percent complete at this stage of the game, and we've got all the bidders here. I'd have to get information for the member opposite on what the original estimates were. They don't seem to be jumping out at me here. I do have information about why there's been cost escalation. For example, cement prices have increased 30 percent since 2003. Steel has increased by 175 percent since 2003. Copper has increased by 280 percent since 2003. By way of comparison, the city's water treatment plant has gone up 30 percent.

This project has gone up—it looks like—this project has gone up less than that so it's an increase of \$20 million from the budget approved in June 2005, or it's a 7.8 percent increase from the budget approved in 2005. It seems that the increase is well within the inflationary pressures being experienced by other projects in the same jurisdiction.

Mr. Schuler: In the \$280 million for the now-revised cost of the downtown Hydro tower, does that include the land acquisition cost?

Mr. Selinger: I'll check that fact to make certain for the member. I'm assuming it does, but I'll check and make that clear to the member. I don't have the information in front of me here, but it would seem to me that when you estimate a project, you usually try to put everything in, but I'll confirm that and get back to the member. I'll take that as a point of notice.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, thank you very much, and I certainly would appreciate that information back.

I have another question. In the estimated \$280-million cost of the downtown Hydro tower, does that include the clearing of the land? That means the demolition of the existing buildings on-site including environmental work, the clean-up, and the digging down of the site. Is that all included in the \$280 million?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get that information for the member. It's not available to me in my notes here, but we'll find out. Does it include the cost of the land in the \$280 million? Does it include the cost of clearing the land and any environmental work that has to be done on the land, and the member also asked if it includes the cost of excavation? I'll find out about all that for the member.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell us, the geothermal system that's being put into place, have there been any concerns raised with the minister on the viability of the geothermal for that building?

Mr. Selinger: I understand, anecdotally, that the geothermal installation has been proceeded with. It's going to produce long-term savings on the energy costs of the building. But it was a challenge to install it, that some of the excavation challenges drove up some of the costs. So it was a challenge.

As you know, Winnipeg has a very interesting geology. There are sometimes in downtown Winnipeg underground rivers, et cetera, and water table issues that can create challenges when you do these projects, but the geothermal installation has successfully been proceeded with.

Mr. Schuler: Once again, just to be very clear, is it the minister's understanding that the geothermal that was dug and that's being put in for the building, for the Hydro tower, is it sustainable? Can that geothermal system do what it is supposed to do or will it have to take a supplementary heating and ventilation system to keep the building either heated or cooled?

Mr. Selinger: I understand that the geothermal will do what it was intended to do, but it was not the only system for heating and cooling the building. The building is also designed—if the member goes to the Web site, I think he'll find that the building has passive solar designed into it. It has, for example, windows that open, unlike most modern buildings. It allows for opportunities for fresh air to ventilate the building. It also has, in the passive heating system, the ability to convect the warmth of the sun into the building and move it up through the various floors of the building.

So there are a variety of design features in the building that allow the geothermal to complement the passive solar and the use of the natural environment both to heat and cool the building. There's lighting in the building which also is a source of heat. So the design of the building was intended to ensure that the energy footprint of the building is one of the most efficient in North America.

That design has been widely regarded as being a good design, and all those plans are being proceeded with in the design and construction of the building.

Mr. Schuler: Will the building also have a traditional HVAC system? That's H-V-A-C.

Mr. Selinger: I don't know if an HVAC is intended as a backup system or whether it's being installed in the building. I will endeavour to find out for the member. But, as I understand it, the primary design of the building is intended to minimize the use of traditional forms of energy through geothermal heating, passive solar, innovative methods of ventilation, and I'll see if there's any backup systems, the lighting, et cetera.

I'll find out for the member if there's any traditional technology that's being installed as well, either as backup or as an integral part of the heating of the building.

Mr. Schuler: Another question for the minister: What is the projected completion date for the downtown Hydro tower?

Mr. Selinger: I understand that the date is now in the first part of 2008, is the date that they hope to have it completed. But certainly 2008 is the target for trying to complete the building.

Now, that is if all things proceed without interruption and any variety of contingencies could occur. But, all things being equal, I think the intention is to have the building done in '08.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister—our honourable Member for Springfield.

* (15:30)

Mr. Schuler: Thank you, Madam Chairperson; not yet.

I would like to ask the minister: At the time that the building is then completed, is it included in the budget, or what will be the budget for the retrofitting of offices, for instance, new office furniture? Has there been a budget established for that part of the building to put in desks, chairs, that kind of stuff?

Mr. Selinger: Is that what the budget is for the office furniture for the member? Is the member also asking if it's part of the \$280 million? I'll find out that for the member.

Mr. Schuler: Just on that one, that's usually called TI or tenant improvements. Are the tenant improvements part of the \$280 million and that would be, whatever, demising walls? It's all the carpeting, all the painting, all of the things that are necessary to move in. In a lot of buildings now desks are simply part of tenant improvements. They are almost part of base building. They are built-ins, that kind of stuff. Is that also going to be part of the

\$280 million? The minister has indicated that he would look into that. I don't know if he has any comments on it.

Mr. Selinger: I would suspect some of the building is designed for commercial use. The member might know that. Some of the lower levels are designed for commercial use, so I suspect not all of the tenant improvements or office furniture would be in place for that because it would probably depend on who the tenants are, so I suspect there will be some additional interior improvements required depending on who rents up the space.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I am talking merely about the main tenant, and that would be Manitoba Hydro. Is that part of the \$280 million, or is that on top of that and—*[interjection]*

Mr. Selinger: It's a fair question, and I'll give him a clear answer.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister and if he could just give us an indication when we might be able to see that information. We do have several FOIs in front of him, and I was wondering if he could help expedite those. They basically deal with the information that I asked for right now, if he could look into those as well.

Mr. Selinger: I will.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister, just continuing on the concerns around geothermal. There were a lot of promises made by your government with regard to geothermal in Waverley West, which now seem to be rapidly backing away from. Can you give us an update on the status of the geothermal use in Waverley West?

Mr. Selinger: There is clearly a desire to provide geothermal alternatives in Waverley West as part of the plan for developing that site. The challenge there has been to get full collaboration and partnership with some of the home builders, some of whom want to do it, some of whom don't, and at the same time to get the land available at the earliest possible date so that home building activity in Winnipeg can continue without a shortage of land becoming an issue. So there are ongoing discussions between Manitoba Hydro, the developers, the homebuilders and the Department of Science, Technology and Energy to have geothermal as one of the features, not a hundred percent, but one of the features available for people that want to live in Waverley West.

Mr. Gerrard: I know that the government had promised lots of geothermal activity and clearly some of the promises haven't proved to be quite as practical it would appear as was originally intended, but let me move on to another subject, and that is the need to address pensions for retired teachers and retired health-care employees and the COLA, and I'm just wondering what the minister's plans are with respect to addressing this in an adequate fashion.

Mr. Selinger: Well, I think the member might have been here when I was answering questions from the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik). First of all, when we came into office, one of the first things we did to address pension liabilities was to amend the balanced budget legislation to allow the pension liability to be recognized and brought onto the books, and then to make a contribution towards that pension liability on behalf of the employer, the Government of Manitoba, for both teachers and civil servants. We did that.

Then the second move we made was, for all new teachers and public servants hired, there's a contribution towards their pension plan up front. That was the second major move.

The third major move: there are several amendments made, for example, to the teachers' plan that allows, for example, women that went on maternity leave to buy back time that they lost when they were on maternity leave so that they could have a fuller pension, a more complete pension, and have more choice of when they retire. So we've made moves in that regard.

We've also increased the contribution rate on behalf of the employer. First time in 25 years I believe it went up 1 percent, 1.1 percent to a total of 8 percent, which makes them the highest in the province now. So we've increased the contribution rate. We've improved the terms for people that have served as teachers and have had other obligations such as parenthood. We've put more general-purpose revenue into the liability to start paying it down. Then, of course, we borrowed the \$1.5 billion at a rate that we think will be below 5 percent to fund 75 percent of the plan. So, since we've been in office, we've put \$1.8 billion into the teachers' retirement plan.

With respect to the COLA issue, we have a joint committee. As you know, the board of the teachers' retirement plan is essentially a board—or, the control of the teachers' retirement plan is the essential end of

the control of the Manitoba Teachers' Society. We have a joint committee between the retired teachers, the Manitoba Teachers' Society and experts from government working on solutions to the COLA and bringing forward something that all parties can agree to. We're hopeful that that will generate some ideas that will allow us to be— to fund COLA more fulsomely as we go forward. Now this requires consensus, this requires everybody working together. As I understand, that joint committee has done a good job, and they've come up with some specific ideas. I haven't received a report on that yet. I don't believe the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) has received a report on that yet. But they are working away at it. I'm optimistic that they'll be able to come up with some good ideas on how to help COLA be paid out every year.

I should also mention that the HEPP plan has received an employer contribution increase as well of 1.1 percent, also bringing it up to 8 percent. That has helped all health-care professionals that participate in that plan have one of the better pension plans around, including the ability to retire once you reach the magic rule of 80 with no minimum age other than 50 years old. That plan is a good plan and we've ensured the future viability of it by an increase in our contributions.

Mr. Gerrard: The longer the answer, the less it will focus on the essence of the question which was the adequate COLA. But I take the minister's comments and I pass it on to, I think it's the Member for Charleswood.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Chair, I would like to ask the Minister of Health if she could indicate whether or not the review of regionalization is now under way.

* (15:40)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Madam Chair, I thought there was going to be some sort of ceremony in the changing of the chairs, but no parade.

Yes, indeed, the regional health authority review is currently under way. I believe the member is aware that the independent team that was put together to do this review is in place. Of course, we're very, very pleased with the calibre of the individuals that are indeed on that review. The member, I believe, knows that the members of the committee include Dr. Jerry Gray, of course, Dean Emeritus and senior scholar at the I. H. Asper School

of Business at the U of M; Ms. Shirley Delaquis, a recently retired registered nurse; and Mr. Tom Closson, who was formerly the president and CEO of major hospitals in Ontario and a health region in British Columbia. We believe that the combination of these individuals will be able to have a very close look at regionalization and to fulfil their mandate which includes, of course, it being an external and independent review first and foremost, and the areas of their mandate include identifying areas where RHAs have shown innovation, examining the performance of the RHA system as it exists, making recommendations on how best practices can be extended to all of the regions, reviewing administrative costs, including comparability with other jurisdictions, examining how RHAs can increase and improve accountability to the public, and, indeed, identifying ways to enhance community participation in regional decision making.

So that group has been formed. They have met on a number of occasions. They are doing their work, and, indeed, it is their goal to have their recommendations brought forward by year's end. It's a very big job. We know that, and so work is being done.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister tell us if there has been any further consideration by her in terms of having public consultations and opening up so that the people that are the recipients of care from regional health authorities can have their input in a very public way, through a public forum, and have those comments, basically, being made in a very open and transparent way?

Has the minister given any further thought to those types of public consultations?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, as we said when the review was announced, we certainly want to ensure that people have an opportunity to share their views about regionalization, whether those are individuals who have had experiences, negative and positive, with our regional systems, or whether it involves groups that are employed by the regions or have direct relationships with how regionalization works.

At the time of our announcement, we certainly did make clear that the committee would be receiving, both in written form or on a Web site, information from individuals and from groups. Indeed, I believe that there is an ad that will be going out in the coming days for people to have the appropriate information to make these submissions.

Now, having said that, which is what was said at the outset, we've also said that we have not closed the door on a kind of forum wherein people who wish to be heard in person can be heard. Certainly, any kind of movement forward of that nature would have to be very respectful of people's personal health information and situations, so we're examining those situations very closely as well. So we have not closed the door on an in-person kind of scenario; no, we haven't.

Mrs. Driedger: I would ask the minister if there is that same type of opportunity for front-line professionals to have an ability to comment and whether it would be through a public forum or through something even more private where health-care professionals can make appointments and speak with the committee. The reason I ask that is because there are a number of health-care professionals that are very, very concerned about what's happened with regionalization, with what they feel has become a very, very heavy hand in terms of bureaucracies.

They want to speak out. They want to share their concerns, but what, in fact, is happening is there is a huge amount of fear by many, many levels. What we see happening in instances with doctors, for instance—I was speaking with a specialist the other day who's very, very concerned about regionalization and problems they experience within the regional structure. In this case it's the WRHA.

They have a fear of speaking out, and so what ends up happening is doctors just leave. They're not prepared to risk their careers when threats are made to their jobs for speaking out. They do not have any ability to bring their comments, their fears about the health-care system or the lack of access. They don't have an ability to bring that forward, and so what a lot of the doctors do is they just up and leave. Their feet talk for them.

I would ask the minister: Is there an ability, if doctors, nurses, technologists, pharmacists, any health-care professional wants to have an ability to come forward and meet with this group and if their anonymity could be protected, is there opportunity for that to happen?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, certainly the very nature of the structure of the review in and of itself does allow for confidentiality. The ability for people to make written submissions or submissions on-line was designed for that very reason.

Again, we have said that we are not closing the door on in-person meetings. We do pay very mindful attention to the fact that we have set a budget for this RHA review that we hope not to exceed. We've also set a deadline for the return of recommendations. So, in balancing all of that, we have not closed the door on that, and, indeed, the very nature of the original structure of the review was to allow for people to take their thoughtful time to put their words on paper and to submit them in the greatest of confidence to these outstanding people.

Certainly, we have conversations, too, with doctors here in Manitoba who present us with challenges as a Department of Health or as a government, and we work to meet those challenges. We know that part of the mandate of this RHA review will be not only to hear the challenges of individuals who have had unfortunate circumstances in the system or who may not be satisfied with processes that exist within the system, but we also hear of great successes. We know that in many ways the success that we have been having in Manitoba—although there's still more work to do—with our emphasis on lowering wait times for orthopedics, we know that in great part this has to do with regionalization and the ability to build that Centre of Excellence at Concordia Hospital. We know that other jurisdictions are coming here to look at what's happening with the two-OR model and the use of clinical assists and how that is working to drastically reduce our wait times. We know that in Manitoba our focus has been on people that have been waiting for a long time. Where other provinces have indeed forsaken their long waiters, our focus has been on those primarily.

We know that that's just one example of where there has been success, and, Madam Chair, I would say that as far as the member opposite raising issues about fear within the context of this review, it's not the first time that the member opposite has been extreme in her statements about reactions of professionals. But we know that when they conducted a review of health care in Manitoba, unlike having people in the field, a retired nurse, for example, professionals from Manitoba and outside of Manitoba, we know that they spent \$4 million, not the half a million we're investing, to bring in an American consultant, Connie Curran, and we know what the results of that were. We know that the devastating recommendations and the loss of over a thousand nurses and the driving out of over a

hundred doctors in Manitoba are issues that we continue to recover from even today.

So, sure, health-care professionals may feel anxious about a review situation. They have good reason to. Look what happened to them before. Our structure is going to be different from that and our outcomes are going to be different from that as well.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Driedger: Seeing as the minister opened the topic, frequently over the last year and then again in the election, the minister has said that a thousand nurses were fired and then 1,500 nurses were fired. Which is it? Could the minister please explain because they've used both numbers intermittently? Could she please explain which numbers, I guess, she really means? Because she was mixing them up all the time, and it went from a thousand to 1,500 and pretty soon we were thinking that they were probably going to even ramp it up even higher. So could the minister please clarify? Is it a thousand or 1,500?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, our records indicate, and of course these are records that come from the colleges in Manitoba, 1,000 nurses were fired. An additional 573 left as a result of the treacherous work environment that existed in that culture. We know that, today, reporting on the college numbers, that we have, working in Manitoba, 1,589 nurses. This is, indeed, an excellent achievement on the part of doctors and nurses and nurse educators that have worked so hard to recover in a system that was so damaged by these bad decisions.

We know that it's a great achievement, but, when you look at a net loss of 1,573 and a net gain of 1,589, we still have a lot more work to do, Madam Chair, and that's why we're committed to doing that. We've committed to hiring 700 more nurses in the coming days. We've committed to adding an additional hundred training spaces. Not to rub salt in the wound, but we know how many spaces for training the members opposite made mention of during their election campaign, and that was zero.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicates that that information came from the colleges. A previous Minister of Health indicated that that information came from the Manitoba Nurses' Union. Could the minister then clarify again where those numbers actually did come from?

Ms. Oswald: For clarification, Madam Chair, 1,589 nurses is a number that does come from the colleges; 1,573, I do believe, in fact, is a combined number

from the Manitoba Nurses' Union and the colleges, so she's quite right in correcting that point.

Mrs. Driedger: The numbers I have seen from the college actually dispute what the minister is saying, and I wonder if she would be prepared to table the documents she is referencing that give her this information.

Ms. Oswald: I would be happy to get those numbers for the member opposite.

Mrs. Driedger: In an April 23 news release from this government, the statistic was used that over 1,500 nurses left the province in 1999. Can the minister tell us where that specific information comes from? Because it was very, very specific that 1,500 left in 1999. Can the minister indicate where that's from?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I would certainly want to look directly at the April release to which the member is referring and certainly have a look at the grammar in the sentence, whether it was "since '99" or "in '99." The member opposite is indicating it says in. I would be pleased to have a look at that release and be able to answer the member's question more directly whether it was a grammatical oversight of "since" rather than "in," but I think the overarching message is clear, that since 1999 when the NDP came into government and began to deal with, you know, the devastating decisions that occurred over the course of their reign through the '90s, whether it was the loss of over 1,500 nurses, whether it was the wrong-headed decision to cut the spaces in medical school and, of course, leave us today with shortages of doctors. Whether it was that issue or the issue of the nurses, you know, our message has been consistent over time that since '99, we have worked very diligently to build our health human resources up from a place that was very, very troubling indeed during their time in the '90s.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us whether or not she has ever sat down with the Department of Health to talk about the various factors that were affecting nurse mobility or immobility in the '90s? Has she ever sat down with the deputy minister and actually asked the department to provide the briefing notes that were prepared in the '90s about what actually was happening with health-care reform and how union contracts disallowed mobility and how in fact, 850 nurses, while they may have had a pink slip, were rehired immediately just as this minister had to do with the VON when 350 VONs were fired

and rehired, or when the Boundary Trails nurses from Morden-Winkler were all fired? There were about 200 of those that were fired by this government and rehired into Boundary Trails. So, right off the hop, there are 500 nurses that this particular government, just in those small examples, this government fired 500 nurses.

So, has the minister, and I know she's trying to play a lot of games with this and is quite prepared to put out misinformation and create this urban myth about what is really going on out there, but there are serious numbers of nurses right now going through bumping processes. There's a very serious number of cases like that where, through the bumping process, because of the union contracts the way they're set up, very experienced nurses, some 25 year—you know, a nurse that's worked in a particular area for 25 years is actually getting bumped by somebody that isn't even as qualified as that same nurse, but because of the way the union contracts are set up, this type of thing happens.

Has the minister taken any of that into account with her continuing promotion of this situation? Does she not feel some discomfort in putting forward misleading comments that she has so frequently made on this issue?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, to answer the member's question, certainly I meet with the deputy minister of Health virtually every day, you know, sometimes several times a day. We talk about issues concerning health human resources. We talk about doctors. We talk about health-care aides. We talk about technologists. We talk about specialists and what we can be doing to build our health work force. I will be entirely frank with the member opposite, that, you know, when I speak with members of the nursing union or I speak with members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, I certainly do get a historical account of where we have been and where we are going.

I don't think it will come as an enormous surprise to members opposite that I don't spend a great portion of my day looking at the ideas and the movements made in health care by members opposite. I don't think that Manitobans would want us to do that. I think that we saw, you know, so many poor decisions being made on the health human resource side, on health capital, on programs that we would not want to be spending a great deal of our time trying to, you know, learn the nuances of really bad decisions. Yes, I meet with the deputy minister

virtually every day, and yes, we talk about how we're going to move forward and ensure that those 700 more nurses that our health-care system so desperately needs are going to come forward.

* (16:00)

We meet every day and talk about how we're not only going to sustain the increase in spaces to medical school that we've brought back from a devastating low of 70, back to 85, and up to 100; and, indeed, we've committed to add an additional 10 seats. So we have conversations about how we're going to work together with the educators in this province to move forward to build those resources. We have conversations every day about what it means in our community hospitals and in our tertiary hospitals to ensure that there are people at the bedsides of Manitoba patients when they need them.

The member opposite has been, you know, negative on the issue of nurses, has been negative on the issue of emergency rooms, has been negative on issues of the building of our system, and, really, with that in mind, I don't spend a lot of time looking at bad decisions that were made in the '90s, but rather moving forward to build our health-care system, which is exactly what we've done.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Chairperson: Order. I would just ask for a little consideration. I can assure you the acoustics are far different here than they are in Question Period. It's very difficult for me to hear, and I think there are people sitting here who also would like to hear the answers, so if people want to have discussions, perhaps move to the loge.

Mrs. Driedger: Madam Chair, the minister is indicating that often there are negative questions coming forward from our side of the House, and let me tell the minister right now that the negative questions, and that's certainly her choice of words, are all based on meetings with doctors, nurses, lab technologists, patients. There is a huge amount of fear and criticism of this government in terms of what is actually happening within health care out there.

The minister would do well, instead of trying to play politics with everything all the time, and I've been warned about that. I've been warned that this minister turns everything into politics even when she's meeting with bureaucrats. I would urge this

minister to put aside the politics. There's some very serious issues that are going on in health care right now, and if she continues to want to play the little games that she's been playing since she's become the minister, we're not going to see progress in health care. We're not going to see the kind of changes and direction that need to be taken.

There are some huge fears out there, and everybody has a legitimate right to those fears because, and as the minister said, and she said publicly on a number of occasions, she says, I don't know health care, I don't understand health care, I've come into the job, and she says, I'm a teacher, and she's probably been a very, very good teacher, and she's right. She doesn't understand health care. That's why her rhetoric and her partisan attacks and her game playing about health care are very, very disconcerting because maybe if she'd spend a little bit more time instead of trying to play games with some of these issues, really learn about it.

She's admitted publicly on a number of occasions she doesn't understand health care. Spend some time and learn about it because there is a lot to be learned. There's a good reason to be a humble Health Minister, as other provinces have seen, where people really have the best interests of patients at heart, rather than them playing politics with some of the issues. I think she would get a lot further in terms of what she wants to achieve because that's what it should be about.

Madam Chair, with some of the problems out there and some of the fears which are valid because this government has had a tendency not to react until there is a crisis, or until something hits the front lines of the paper. Whether it was patients dying waiting for heart surgery, whether it was Dorothy Madden dying because of waiting to see a doctor in an ER, whether it was a leaked orthopedic report that has driven changes in orthopedics, many of the significant changes that have come in health care have been after this government has ignored red flags, and, unfortunately, after patients have died because this government has not done what it should have done.

Instead of playing politics, I really urge the minister: Please pay more attention to what is actually needed in health care, and let's try to move the agenda forward and try to deal with some of the concerns that are very, very serious that are out there.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: In the election that just passed, there was a promise to increase nurses' training by 100 seats. I would ask the minister: Is it the intent that those 100 seats be available starting this September?

Ms. Oswald: Such a sage piece of advice from the member opposite, you know, certainly would inspire one to respond, and I'll really only respond to one part of it. It's true, I have said that I'm not a doctor when it comes to discussions about health care. The reason I've said that, Madam Chair, is because it's true.

I am, however, someone that lives and works and raises a family in Manitoba and, therefore, I think that that makes me eminently qualified to say that I do know some things about health care. So for the member opposite to suggest that I have said otherwise is a false statement being put on the record.

I certainly do know that there's lots to learn for anybody that would sit in this Chair, and that's why we are so very fortunate to have the excellent people that we do in our senior staff in Health, our deputy minister and the support staff that are there to help us and support us every single day as we go forward. The day I think that anyone would sit and suggest that because of their training as a nurse or a doctor would qualify them to not have to learn more about how health care can be improved is going to be a sad day for Manitoba. We all need to be lifelong learners, Madam Chair, in any portfolio that we're privileged to undertake.

Certainly, as we work with our staff, our senior executive, the CEOs of regional health authorities, members of the nursing profession, doctors, health-care aides, technologists, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, anyone who comes to the Legislature or to whom we go out and seek advice, there's plenty to be learned about what it is that we can do to improve our system.

I don't think that that's playing games, Madam Chair. I think that that is a commitment to lifelong learning, and I think that anybody that claims to know all the answers about how to keep Manitoba families healthy and safe and well is kidding themselves because we've got lots to learn every day.

Again, on the subject of nurses, we have committed to hire an additional 700 nurses here in Manitoba and we're going to increase 100 seats. We

are working very diligently to make that happen as quickly as possible. Whether or not those seats would be in place immediately this fall, I do not believe that that would be the case, but it's going to be phased in and happening as soon as possible.

We know that we have, since our last mandate, Madam Chair, been able to hire some 700 or more or educate 700 or more, if I can just clarify. We feel very confident that we're going to be able to achieve that again, and we're going to get those seats in place as soon as we can.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what the current shortage of ER doctors is in Winnipeg hospitals, and could she break it down hospital by hospital?

Ms. Oswald: I'd be happy to get that information for the member opposite.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister indicate when she might be tabling that information?

Ms. Oswald: I'll give her that information as soon as I'm able to get an accurate representation of it.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: I guess I'm a little bit surprised that the minister wouldn't have this kind of information readily available as it is probably the biggest issue facing health care in Winnipeg right now in terms of the shortages in Winnipeg ERs. I am a little bit surprised the minister does not have that information easily accessible.

Can the minister tell us how many new ER medical grads are graduating right now from the two ER programs, and what efforts have been made to keep those new grads in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I know that the member opposite would expect that I give her as accurate and up-to-date numerical information as possible. She has a right to expect that, and that's why I would want to know up to date as of today what those vacancy numbers are. I will also secure for her what the current status is of doctors who are going to be graduating, whether it's a Royal College kind of graduation or family doc graduation, I'll get the number for the member.

Certainly, I can tell the member opposite that the work that we're doing to ensure that our doctors stay here in Manitoba and work in ERs is comprehensive. She knows that we have announced that we will be

working to increase our work force in the ERs. We know that it's very challenging work for doctors and for nurses, and that's why we're working to build that work force, and by opening up the agreements with the MMA early so that we can do some negotiations so that we can ensure that that very challenging work that's done in ERs is being compensated comparably and fairly on a national scale.

She knows that we have announced that we're going to be introducing additional supports at the Grace, for example, with the introduction of clinical assists, which will be the first time in Canada that this kind of procedure will exist. There is money in place for that and recruitment efforts are ongoing.

She also knows that we have committed to work with the Faculty of Medicine to really put ER medicine at a level that it so rightly deserves by having its own department, and we've worked to more than double the number of seats that will exist for emergency medicine, which will, by its very nature, increase that work force.

Another important thing I think that the member opposite can be reminded of is, as she herself has said, it's not always about financial compensation for emergency room doctors. It's about workload and work life, and we have taken very good advice from doctors that have worked in emergency situations and outside of them for things like how a new construction and a redevelopment of an ER might look and how it might feel. That would include things, Madam Chair, like ensuring that there are places in a new ER where more privacy can be afforded to a patient and to a doctor. New construction would be designed in such a way that there would be more privacy. We've taken advice from doctors, for example, about including very specific and private situations where women that might be experiencing a miscarriage may be able to go and have more privacy and more opportunity to receive that care.

We know we've listened to doctors and nurses across the system as well as academics that have studied closely the effects that families feel when they present in an ER with a loved one who may be living with a mental health issue. That's why we have committed to construct the first mental health ER in Canada, and we'll be doing that at HSC. We know that that's going to go a long way to help families.

So, when we're talking, and that's not everything, Madam Chair, but I know that members opposite

will not like me to speak longer on one answer. But looking at a comprehensive approach that concerns remuneration and concerns work life, these are the kinds of things we're taking into account to recruit and retain doctors in the ER and otherwise.

Mrs. Driedger: Concerning the critical shortage of ER doctors and that this has been building for a couple of years—the Grace Hospital has been short doctors for two years—this government has had a lot of time to look at bringing about the kind of changes that might keep doctors in place. The problems in the ER started long before even two years ago.

Considering the critical shortage of ER doctors, why does the minister not know how many new grads are graduating right now from the two ER programs?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I just want to confirm that I give you an accurate number, and that's what I'm committed to do, so I'll be happy to get the information as quickly as possible to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: I can tell the minister there are four, and not all of them are staying in Winnipeg. I would think that this should have been something being directed by her in terms of trying to stay on top of issues and lead a department rather than just getting information from her staff. It's asking those kinds of questions and being aware of what's happening that drives the leadership around this issue.

I guess it leads to another question because this problem has been evolving for several years. How is it that the NDP, including this minister and the one before her, how is it that they have allowed this problem to get to such a critical stage that I understand we've even just lost another doctor, or are losing one from the Victoria Hospital, a part-timer?

How can it get so bad that we are—you know, we've gone from a problem to a crisis and are heading to a catastrophe. As I said the other day, it doesn't take a brain surgeon or a rocket scientist to make those kinds of accusations; they are true. It's not fearmongering; it is absolutely true, and people have a right to be afraid when we're seeing this continue to happen.

Now, it is very irresponsible in my view that the minister talks about fearmongering. Maybe if she and her government were more on top of the issue, we wouldn't be here. How could they have allowed this to get so bad that the problem is now so beyond an easy fix? The horse is so far out of the barn; the

door has slammed shut. She is in a pickle because right now there is no easy answer. How could they have allowed this to go on for so long and become such a mess, or is there a hidden agenda here to close an ER like Dr. Brian Postl wants to see happen?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, certainly I will respond again to the minister by saying that she wants me to provide her with accurate numbers. I certainly didn't suggest to her that I didn't know exactly how many or how many are or aren't or staying in Winnipeg or are not staying in Winnipeg or whatever their dreams and hopes are. I want to provide the member with the accurate numbers and that's exactly what I'm going to do.

Certainly, when the member opposite speaks about emergency rooms broadly and uses words like "catastrophe" and "crisis" and other colourful phrases that she likes to use, the people on this side of the House, whether it's the previous minister, you know, whether I'm speaking, or really anybody on this side of the House is speaking about it, there's absolutely no question that consistently our message is that there are challenges in the system. We admit that openly and, in fact, we want to tackle those challenges head-on.

* (16:20)

We know that one year ago the member used expressions like "catastrophe" and "crisis" and spoke about the closure of ERs in Winnipeg. Through the incredible dedication of the staff at the Department of Health, the incredible work of people in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, including Dr. Brian Postl and his leadership, and let it not be unnoticed that the incredible dedication of doctors in our system working with incentive programs that were put in place and working together as teams, no ERs closed in Winnipeg last year. So we know the member opposite has a history of saying such things. We have never denied that there are challenges in the system, and why wouldn't there be, Madam Chair, when we are in an environment where what might have been, had those seats in the medical school not been slashed by the government of the day, the Conservative government? The basic arithmetic tells us that there would be 90 more doctors through that system today, had that really, really wrong-headed decision not been made.

Having said that, we're moving forward with increasing those seats. We've pledged in the election to increase those seats to 110, down from the

despicable 70 that was decided by members opposite. Again, when we're talking about, you know, how did situations get to be as they are today, there are challenges before us.

We know that in the time when the opposition was making poor decisions about cutting seats in medical school, they were also making decisions about what to do about ERs in Winnipeg. We know, it's clearly on the record historically, that the only ER in Winnipeg that was ever closed, the Misericordia, was closed by the Conservative Party.

We also know, Madam Chair, that in the name of trying to deal with some really wrong-headed decisions that were being made about medical spaces and about nurse employment, decisions were made to close ERs in Winnipeg overnight. When pressed about that decision, the minister of the day, Jim McCrae, said, and I'm quoting: It doesn't make sense to keep them open 24 hours.

Well, I know that the member opposite has had a history in the health-care profession, and I know that she knows well that emergencies occur at 7 o'clock in the morning. They occur at noon. They occur at dinner time, and they occur at 2 o'clock in the morning. That was the decision-making that occurred on the other side of the floor, Madam Chair. So, while we admit wholeheartedly that there are challenges before us with health human resources, we're going to meet those challenges head-on, whether it's through the early opening of the MMA agreement for ER doctors or whether it's improving the work life of ER doctors. Our commitment to ensuring that the Grace ER stays open is very real, and their record on closing of ERs in Winnipeg is very real as well.

Mrs. Driedger: I would remind the minister that this ER doctor shortage is happening under her watch, that the doctors are bailing from our ERs under her watch, and this is not happening elsewhere in the country. Last summer, the *Winnipeg Free Press* phoned around to Canadian hospitals and found out that we are in the worst situation of any of those hospitals that the *Winnipeg Free Press* spoke with.

If you look in journals that also state vacancies in ERs, Winnipeg is right up there. We have a reputation across the country where ER doctors do not want to come here and work because of the various environments here. This is happening under this minister's watch. I would urge this minister to

look forward. It's fine to look back, and I know she has a real tendency to do that, but she's had eight years. This government has had eight years. This doctor crisis is happening under her watch.

We've got the ER doctors here. We had them here. They're bailing under her watch because they do not want to work here in our ERs. She should be very concerned about that, concerned enough that a direction should have been given that, when ER doctors quit, they should be given exit interviews. I asked an ER doctor, why are you not getting exit interviews, and he said, well, why would anybody want to give us an exit interview. Nobody wants to know why we're leaving.

This is happening under the NDP. It's not happening, you know, 10 years ago or 15 years ago. This is happening under this particular government. This mess is created by the NDP, and it is an NDP mess.

I would ask this minister, look forward; it's happening under you. Pay attention to what is going on now and look at how we can solve this problem. These doctors are bailing now because of the circumstances that are in place or not in place now. It has nothing to do with years and years ago. A lot of them want to work here. A lot of them want to be in our ERs, but some of them are very, very concerned about liability issues.

The minister is saying that she is very aware of what is happening and is very informed about what is going on in the ERs. Is the minister aware of the number of incorrect medical diagnoses that have been made at the Grace Hospital since the start of this mess? Has she gone far enough? You know, she's saying, yes, well we won't close it.

Is the minister aware of the number of incorrect diagnoses that have been made on patients in the last year at the Grace ER?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I think it was a couple of minutes ago that the member opposite was accusing me of not having my facts on an issue, and then moments later she's citing her research on the state of emergency rooms across Canada from a reporter from the *Free Press*. Now, hey, don't get me wrong. I've got a lot of respect for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, but when we're talking about what's happening on a national stage with a national doctor shortage and we look very closely at what's

happening in emergency rooms to our brothers and sisters to the west, we know that there are any number of challenges that exist in those environments.

We recognize that we have challenges here too as well. There's no question about that. The member opposite asks a question, you know, using phrases like "doctors fleeing" and that we're not speaking to doctors about their concerns. She's just absolutely wrong about that, and of course, we have people in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority specifically in our regions across the province that are communicating with their health professionals all the time to work on improvements.

You know, I mentioned earlier today that we've enshrined in legislation now that critical occurrences, of course, need to be reported by law in Manitoba to patients and to families and that a culture of openness is being created here in Manitoba where we can learn from any situations where errors occur. We know that this came on the heels of the Sinclair report. For members that aren't aware, that's the report that dealt with the baby deaths, the pediatric cardiac baby deaths, and we know that there was a time prior to that report where medical error and medical mistakes were swept under the carpet and that's just the way it was.

We know now that we are working to create a culture where people can come forward when things happen so that we can ensure, and work very hard, that similar occurrences don't happen again. That's how you improve in a system, and that's why we've enshrined that in legislation as well.

I know the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has tabled The Apology Act that he wants us to take a close look at, because it has, in other jurisdictions, in a slightly different way—you know, we'd like to talk to that member about some potential amendments, but it has worked in other environments where that culture of openness is a culture that's about learning and about improving a system. We think that that's a very good thing.

We know that investments that we're making every day here in Manitoba are working to build our system. The member opposite talks about doctors fleeing. Well, we know that according to the College of Physicians and Surgeons there are almost 200 more doctors in Manitoba today than in 1999, and we know that there's close to 60 more doctors in

rural areas. We know that, according to the same source, 116 doctors left under the Tories.

* (16:30)

So, yes, the member opposite doesn't like me to bring up the past. She likes to talk about what's happening today. Again, we know that there are challenges.

On the subject of ER doctors, we know that, for example, our investment to the Faculty of Medicine to more than double the number of training seats from five to 13 is going to go a long way. Our discussion with them concerning making the community hospitals teaching sites is a very exciting one. The faculty is very excited about that. In fact, Dean Sandham said on CBC Radio in March that this emergency medicine program expansion is of a very significant magnitude of investment by the Province.

So I suppose that we could sit here for the next 29 minutes or so, Madam Chair, and she can say what one doctor said and I can say what another doctor said and so it will go, but we are committed here in Manitoba, this government, to building our health human resources. We have challenges. That's why we're looking at issues of remuneration. That's why we're looking at issues of work life, and that's why we're pressing forward to ensure that we build and not tear down our health-care system in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister should be very aware that the health-care system is crumbling in many aspects around her, in large part because, in fact, this government is, you know, pulling away some of that foundation. The minister has a lot of great rhetoric and is really good at that. She's saying that, you know, doctors are being listened to. I really wonder if the minister is even aware that doctors were threatened not to talk about what is going on in the ERs or they will lose their jobs. I don't know if the minister is getting that kind of feedback, or the number of misdiagnoses that there are out there, and that doctors have great fear of liability, that we now have new grads working in ERs where that never used to happen. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen.

I don't know if the minister really is getting the level of information that she needs to ensure that we have a safe emergency system in place. I fear with all of this rhetoric that—and she's so good at it, you know—it's a great cover-up; it's a great cover-up for perhaps lack of knowledge about what is really happening, whether or not the minister even knows

that there are over 1,100 doctors that have left since the NDP came here. That destabilizes the system. We may get others in, but over 1,100 doctors have left in eight years. What does that say about Manitoba? How do we attract doctors and want to keep them here if over 1,100 doctors don't want to stay here? That's very, very destabilizing.

So, you know what, there are some serious issues going on in health care. There are crumbling aspects to what is happening under her watch. You know, while rhetoric may buy her a few minutes here, the chickens will soon come home to roost because this is going to certainly not be able to be sustained the way it is.

I'll just end—and before I turn it over to my colleagues—to hope that patient safety, the minister likes to talk about it out of one side of her mouth. I hope out of the other side comes the fact that patient safety will be paramount in any decisions that are made about our ERs and the staffing of our ERs. The patients need to be ensured patient safety by ensuring that the doctors that are working in the ERs are qualified ER doctors, not just warm bodies that are coming in and covering off a shift just to say, oh, we kept it open. I hope that patient safety becomes a paramount issue in any of these decisions that this minister is going to be making in the next little while.

I will turn this over to my colleague from Portage.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie—[*interjection*]

The honourable Minister of Health, you wanted to respond?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

Well, thank you very much. Contrary to the tone in the room, I do appreciate the questions from the member opposite. While we don't always agree on the how of getting things done, I do believe that every member of this Chamber, and I would include the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), cares deeply about the health and well-being of people in Manitoba. Certainly, if there are issues, if it's an issue about patient safety, an issue about patient care that the member may believe that I might not be aware of, I certainly do encourage the member to bring those issues forward.

Indeed, we have had conversations in the past that have been very educational. I acknowledge that openly to the member opposite. We had, you know, of course, probably the most significant one that comes to mind was a very thoughtful and informative conversation that we had with a constituent. I believe a constituent of the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), and we shared in a discussion together about the loss of that individual's husband to colorectal cancer.

Certainly, it has been a commitment of our government to work on cancer treatment and on cancer prevention, but I will concede openly that the member opposite had many thoughtful things to say about colorectal cancer screening. I listened intently and I learned. If that makes me a bad politician to sit in the House and say I learned from somebody on the opposite side of the floor, well, then, so be it, but I did learn. We were able to move forward in being only the second jurisdiction in Canada to have a colorectal cancer screening program starting this spring.

We know that doctors have always had the ability to do those tests, but one of the most impassioned pleas that that constituent made was the importance of working together to help refresh and re-educate doctors on that very, very important task that people at CancerCare will tell us is so important in the prevention of colorectal cancer.

So, while we may be at odds from time to time, there are also opportunities for us to learn and work together, Madam Chair. I will openly concede that that was one of those times. I think together, in combination with the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) here on this side of the House, that we have worked to create something really important here in Manitoba. So we can go to combat day to day, but we can also work together. I hope that that's an environment that continues into the future. Patient safety, that would be, I think, the priority of every member of this House.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, sorry about that little misunderstanding.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson.

I just would very much appreciate short snappers of answers, or taking of it under advisement, because I know the time is short and I believe that there are a

number of colleagues on this side of the House with very, very important matters in the area of health care to ask of the minister this afternoon.

In Portage la Prairie during the election campaign I heard from a number of health-care providers who expressed concern that government was paying a great deal of attention to nurses and doctors and front-line health-care providers, but was perhaps not as in tune or understanding of the supports that make our health system work here in the province of Manitoba. I speak specifically of the laboratory technicians who do the analytical work for the tests that are vital to diagnosis.

I would like to ask the minister if she and her department are consciously evaluating continuously the standard of remuneration for all personnel engaged in health-care services here in the province of Manitoba. I just wanted to have the minister's acknowledgement that that is an ongoing process, because I do know our lab technicians are significantly lower than the fourth, fifth place positioning that they had held in previous years.

* (16:40)

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, we would agree on this side of the House that certainly the professionals who exist in our health-care system really work together to make it stronger, whether it's a doctor or a nurse or a technician or a technologist or our health-care aides. It really does take a combined effort. While it wouldn't be appropriate to do bargaining on the floor of the Legislature, it would be reasonable to certainly say that we have to acknowledge, you know, when we make an investment like ensuring that there's a CT scanner in Portage la Prairie, and we were very happy to be out there some months ago with the member to provide funding for fluoroscopy and other technological improvements to the hospital, that we need to acknowledge that we not only need to have fair compensation for those individuals who are working, but we need to ensure that we're training them. That's why we have ensured that we've trained 200 technologists in our last mandate, and we're committed to ensuring that, as technology advances at lightning speed, there's training available for those individuals, and that those individuals are there in place to do those tests when we need them done.

Mr. Faurchou: I thank the minister for her response. Yes, we are training technologists. My terminology was in error when I placed the question

earlier. It was a concern, though, to the technologists that I spoke with that those who are being trained are not staying here in Manitoba because we're not competitive with other jurisdictions in our nation in the area of remuneration.

The next question I'd like to ask is that during the campaign it was a commitment made by the New Democratic Party to invest \$5 million in the redevelopment of the OR and ER areas of the Portage District General Hospital. However, I would like to draw attention, to the minister, that her own department, through three comprehensive studies of whether or not to invest more monies into the aging hospital or whether to construct a new, regional hospital, the resounding answer to that question was to build a new hospital. The department itself said further expenditures on an aged building such as the Portage District General Hospital was, indeed, folly. I appeal to the minister at this time to re-evaluate the campaign promise and to give the needed valuation of the merits of a new regional hospital facility and to not throw additional monies into an aged facility that desperately needs to be replaced.

Ms. Oswald: Indeed, there was a commitment to invest \$5 million to redevelop the emergency department at Portage District General Hospital. That commitment did include the redevelopment of improved ambulance access, more treatment rooms, improvements to existing treatment rooms, improved space for drugs, for supplies and equipment, and, very importantly, a new decontamination area and isolation rooms. These improvements are really consistent with the kinds of improvements that are being made elsewhere in the province to emergency departments. Having said that, I will take the member's comments as advice and, certainly, we'll consider them as we go forward.

Mr. Faurchou: I do appreciate the minister's recognition of that. It has been at the top of the regional health authority's capital request as well as the top of the list for the foundation in support of a new facility. There are seven jurisdictions in and around Portage la Prairie that have committed their support for the community portion of a new hospital.

Last question is in regard to communications with other entities in a co-operative fashion to construct new facilities such as assisted living. The doctors of Portage la Prairie recently constructed a new doctors' clinic for 18-hour-a-day availability for patient service, but it was not acknowledged at the

time of design that there was needed assisted living. It was after thought that we missed the opportunity to potentially merge an assisted living facility that is desperately required in Portage la Prairie and a new doctors' clinic.

If there had been a channel, conduit, if you will, of communication where like entities could potentially have discussed the possibility of a facility that would've provided both the synergies for services as well as the economy of a combined capital venture, it would have been of significance to not only the doctors and their budget but also to the province and the need for capital expenditure in the wisest of fashion. So I appeal to the minister, no need for a response, but I do ask that there needs to be a mechanism of discussion, whether it would be the Lions Club, Rotary, doctors' organizations, other entities, that are all focussed on providing better services to Manitobans.

Ms. Oswald: I am not 100 percent clear on what the member is asking regarding a conduit for information coming forward or synergy for putting resources together. I may just be misunderstanding what the question is.

I can tell the member opposite that in our long-term care strategy, a multi-pronged approach that really is listening loud and clear to seniors and to their families and what their needs are regarding their loved ones—you know, we have seen in the past that there haven't been as many options available as we might wish for our loved ones where people are placed in a personal care home environment, perhaps prematurely, when in fact what they need are supports in the community to help them live with their families, live among their neighbours and their friends. We know that we are working with community sponsors and with regional health authorities to respond to the needs of individual communities, and there is a communication infrastructure, if you will, set up in that way to look at individual ideas and projects and how community groups in partnership with Manitoba Health might make these kinds of arrangements happen. So, certainly, it's my belief that that communication infrastructure may, indeed, be there already.

If the member has some suggestions about how that can be improved through the regions, I would be happy to hear that, but, indeed, we would agree that as many options that can be available out there for our seniors, the better we all will fare with our aging loved ones here in Manitoba.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I have a yes-no question for you, Madam Minister. You know that the Teulon personal care home has been on the agenda, on the bill list for the Interlake Regional Health for a number of years, and the promissory note is coming due for \$425,000 on October of next year.

Will the minister commit to building the personal care home? If not, will she give a 10-year extension on the promissory note in order that the foundation doesn't lose their \$425,000 commitment?

Ms. Oswald: I'm sorry I didn't hear the beginning of the question. Did you say Teulon?

*(16:50)

Mr. Eichler: Yes. Teulon is the right question, Madam Minister.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I will be happy to forward any details that I have on capital investments from Manitoba Health to Teulon. In that regard, I would want to seek the details of that before answering the member.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Madam Chair, my question is also regarding capital. The community of Rivers has personally invested, through community contributions and other initiatives have raised over \$450,000 and have been working really proactively in trying to get the ear of government in moving forward on their phase 2 project to enhance the working space for the physicians in their facility. Their examining rooms for physicians are quite inadequate.

The community has worked really hard to attract and have actually retained physicians and nurses in their facility as a training centre, and, actually, have done everything in their power to continue to be a proactive community in providing supports for rural experience. It appears that, you know, I'm looking through my correspondence here, there've been letters in July of 2006 encouraging government to make a decision on that facility. I'm just wanting to know if the minister would be so kind as to provide an update, so that I can then go back to my community and give them some assurances that there is still an interest in that facility.

Ms. Oswald: I have seen some correspondence on this issue of phase 2 at Rivers. I may not have seen the correspondence to which you are currently referring, but I will have a look. I would agree wholeheartedly with the member that the work that

the community of Rivers has done regarding health-care professionals' recruitment, retention, and indeed the work that's going on in Rivers in its innovative programming is a model, I think, for many communities in Manitoba, urban and rural. I can commit to the member that I will investigate the status of that capital project and get back to her as soon as I can.

Mrs. Rowat: I do appreciate the minister's words, and I will hold her to them. The community right now hosts three physicians. Those physicians are working in fairly—how did one individual indicate, a woefully inadequate work environment. They're very concerned that all their hard work will go to the wayside. They've raised almost half a million dollars and they're very concerned that they're not going to be able to put that toward a project that they've been working very hard to see happen.

Also, Madam Chair, keeping in mind that this project is probably very much in line to what the recommendations were in the rural physician and health services recruitment report in April 2004. So the community is following the guidelines, is doing what it can to address the recommendations that communities need to work with the RHAs and the Province in moving forward. So the community really does need to hear soon. They do have other community issues and they would really like to get this off their plate.

I guess their concern also is with technologists. They do have technologists working with their facility. When there seems to be a record number of them leaving the province, they are very concerned that they will be looking at a possible shortage in that area as well.

That is also an issue that Wawanesa is facing. Technologists are not only leaving urban centres, but they are also leaving the smaller communities. One technologist had indicated to me that the average age of a technologist is 50 plus. So a lot of them are looking at retirement, and we need to be recruiting to replace those individuals.

On that note, I would like to ask the minister: At one point, the former minister had indicated that they had recruited seven technologists to the Westman Laboratory in Brandon. I believe that that number did not come to fruition. There was a number of the people identified who have left the province, and more have even left the lab. So I would like to know

what strategy the minister has in place to address some of those issues that I've just presented to her.

Ms. Oswald: Again, I have committed to the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) to get back to her in a timely manner about the status of the capital development in Rivers and appreciate what she's saying about the community's efforts and work that they've done with fundraising and their broad needs, you know, and need to have information in a timely manner.

On the subject of technologists, there's no question, as we look across the health-care system, we know that we need to continue to build our Health human resources. Our commitment in our last mandate to train and hire 200 more technologists was one that we were able to meet, but I would agree with the member opposite that we need to keep moving. Now is not the time to rest. We know that there are retirements coming, and we know that, as we have even more incredible scientific advancements in the world of medicine, we need to be fleet of foot in training our technologists to be able to complete those tasks and to use those technologies. So that's a very, very important part of what we're doing. Efforts that can be made to recruit and retain health-care professionals, whether they're doctors or nurses or technologists, to our rural environments cannot wane. We need to continue to work with our communities through our regents to make sure that recruitment efforts continue in a very aggressive manner.

As I said to the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou), while it's not appropriate for us to be doing negotiations on the floor of the Legislature—we know that there are appropriate bargaining environments for that—we certainly have seen, recently, discussions that have been very fruitful on the front of remuneration for technologists and for people who are doing the really, really important front-line work in our labs and with other kinds of technology. So I would agree that we need to have a multi-pronged approach on this issue of technologists. I would agree that we have to be taking a close look at what is happening competitively across our nation when it comes to technologists. We don't want our technologists to leave Manitoba; that's for sure. So we need to be looking very closely at fair and equitable compensation for the very important work that they're doing.

We also need to ensure that we are investing in training opportunities for our technologists on an ongoing basis, building on the success of hiring 200 technologists, which we have done, but it's not time to rest. We need to continue to ensure that there are people in our health-care system that can, indeed, work very diligently to read the tests, to be on the front line with our patients and with their families when they're in times that, you know, they're waiting for those test results, and they know how very, very important it is for those tests and those results to get to doctors and to physicians who can read them.

So I would agree with the member opposite that we have to look extremely closely at this issue, as we have to do with doctors and with nurses, and we need to build that work force.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Just a quick question. This is on a capital project for Tabor Home. I know

the minister is aware of the needs out there, but in '99 and 2000 it was actually approved. Because of some of the things that took place within Morden, they were not able to proceed on that project.

I'm just wondering if the minister could indicate where they are at with Tabor Home. I believe that they have met with her and her department. I know they've done that through the RHA. So where are you at with Tabor Home?

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 12, 2007

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