

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 16—The Child Care Safety Charter
(Community Child Care Standards Act
Amended)**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 16, The Child Care Safety Charter (Community Child Care Standards Act Amended); Charte sur la sécurité des enfants en garderie (modification de la Loi sur la garde d'enfants), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: This bill proposes Canada's first comprehensive legislated safety charter for child care, which is part of our five-year child-care agenda released yesterday called Family Choices. The bill sets out that each facility must put in place a safety plan and a code of conduct, and the bill sets out what safety issues those must address.

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

**Bill 34—The Child and Family Services
Amendment and Child and Family Services
Authorities Amendment Act (Safety of Children)**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 34, The Child and Family Services Amendment and Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act (Safety of Children); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille et la Loi sur les régies de services à l'enfant et à la famille (sécurité des enfants), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the main focus of this bill is to reinforce, for greater certainty, that safety is the paramount consideration when determining the best interests of a child and requires specific standards for the nature and frequency of contact with a child.

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

**Bill 33—The Salvation Army Grace General
Hospital Incorporation Amendment Act**

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 33, The Salvation Army Grace General Hospital Incorporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi constituant en corporation « The Salvation Army Grace General Hospital », be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this bill is the administrative change of the thriving Grace Hospital to continue to be a thriving hospital within the system and the province of Manitoba. This bill is the administrative changeover of that with respect to the region despite comments that have been made in this Chamber for a long time to the contrary by members opposite. Thank you.

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

**Bill 229—The Manitoba Public Insurance
Corporation Amendment Act
(Elimination of Benefits for Auto Thieves)**

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), that Bill 229, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (Elimination of Benefits for Auto Thieves), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, this bill denies benefits, under part 2, to a person for injuries received in an accident whether or not the person was at fault if he or she is convicted of stealing a motor vehicle involved in the accident or of taking it without the owner's consent.

Benefits are also denied to a person in circumstances where they would otherwise be subject only to a reduction if the person was operating a motor vehicle that he or she knew to be stolen and taken without consent, Mr. Speaker.

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

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Attorney General, on a point of order?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): No, on an introduction of bill.

Mr. Speaker: On the introduction of a bill.

Bill 35—The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 35, The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008; Loi corrective de 2008, be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 208—The Crown Appointment Review Act (Various Acts Amended)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 208, The Crown Appointment Review Act (Various Acts Amended); Loi sur l'examen des nominations au sein des sociétés d'état (modification de diverses lois), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this bill provides for improved accountability of Crown corporations and of Crown corporation boards by requiring a person to be publicly interviewed by a committee of the Legislative Assembly before being appointed to the board of the Liquor Control Commission, the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation or Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

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

PETITIONS

Lake Dauphin Fishery

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition, and these are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This is signed by Laurent Magnet, Lorraine Magnet, Irene Brunel 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.

Manitoba Liquor Control Commission—Liquor Licence Fees

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission has substantially raised the cost of annual liquor licences for restaurants, cocktail lounges and other Manitoba businesses.

The MLCC justifies this increase by stating that the cost of an annual licence is being increased to better reflect rising administration costs.

For some small-business owners the cost of an annual liquor licence has more than doubled. These fee hikes are a significant burden for business owners.

The decision to increase the annual licence fee, while at the same time eliminating the 2 percent supplementary licence fee payable on the purchase of

spirits, wine and coolers, has the effect of greatly disadvantaging smaller businesses. Small business which do not purchase liquor from MLCC in large volumes will not receive the same benefit from the elimination of this supplementary fee. Instead, they are facing substantially increased costs simply to keep their doors open.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister responsible for the administration of The Liquor Control Act to consider working with MLCC to find alternative means of addressing rising administrative costs.

To request the Minister responsible for the administration of The Liquor Control Act to consider working with MLCC to revise the decision to implement a significant annual licence fee increase.

To urge the Minister responsible for the administration of The Liquor Control Act to consider ensuring that the unique challenges faced by small businesses are better taken into account in the future.

This petition is signed by Andrea Gilling, Becky Cianflone and Shawna Stroud and many, many other Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Colleen Friesen, Helen Fast, Ross Thompson and many, many others.

Bill 200—The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Will Norton, D. Clyde, Jacquie Nicholson and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The government needs to uncover the whole truth as to what ultimately led to over 33,000 Crocus shareholders to lose tens of millions of dollars.

The provincial Auditor's report, the Manitoba Securities Commission investigation, the RCMP investigation and the involvement of our courts, collectively, will not answer the questions that must be answered in regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Manitobans need to know why the government ignored the many warnings that could have saved the Crocus Investment Fund.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to co-operate in uncovering the truth in why the government did not act on what it knew and to consider calling a public inquiry on the Crocus Fund fiasco.

This is signed by Rick Allan, B. Hosea, A. Dinos and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Personal Care Homes—Viriden

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Mark Cassidy, Bertha Cassidy Brian Mytopher and many, many other residents of Viriden.

Lake Dauphin Fishery

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by Robert Moore, Don Dunfield, John Therrien and many, many other Manitobans.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development First Report

Ms. Erna Braun (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your committee met on Monday, April 28, 2008, at 7 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

Bill No. 8—The Phosphorus Reduction Act (Water Protection Act Amended)/Loi sur la réduction du phosphore (modification de la Loi sur la protection des eaux)

Bill No. 9—The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des personnes recevant des soins

Bill No. 11—The Optometry Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'optométrie

Bill No. 12—The Securities Transfer Act/Loi sur le transfert des valeurs mobilières

Bill No. 18—The Testing of Bodily Fluids and Disclosure Act/Loi sur l'analyse de fluides corporels et la communication des résultats d'analyse

Committee Membership

Ms. Braun (Chairperson)

Mr. Cullen

Mrs. Driedger

Mr. Faurschou

Mr. Goertzen

Ms. Korzeniowski (Vice-Chairperson)

Hon. Ms. Melnick

Mr. Nevakshonoff

Hon. Ms. Oswald

Ms. Selby

Hon. Mr. Selinger

Public Presentations

Your committee heard three presentations on Bill No. 8—The Phosphorus Reduction Act (Water Protection Act Amended)/Loi sur la réduction du phosphore (modification de la Loi sur la protection des eaux), from:

Darren Praznik, Canadian Cosmetic Toiletry and Fragrance Association

James Beddome, Private Citizen

Paul Walsh, Private Citizen

Your committee heard one presentation on Bill No. 11—The Optometry Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'optométrie, from:

David Cochrane, Manitoba Association of Optometrists

Your committee heard five presentations on Bill No. 18—The Testing of Bodily Fluids and Disclosure Act/Loi sur l'analyse de fluides corporels et la communication des résultats d'analyse, from:

Jodi Possia, Paramedic Association of Manitoba

Alex Forrest, United Firefighters of Winnipeg

Mike Sutherland, President, The Winnipeg Police Association

Keith Atkinson, Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police

Ken Mandzwick, Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties

Written Submissions

Your committee received one written submission on Bill No. 18—The Testing of Bodily Fluids and Disclosure Act/Loi sur l'analyse de fluides corporels et la communication des résultats d'analyse, from:

Richard Elliott, Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

Bills Considered and Reported

Bill No. 8—The Phosphorus Reduction Act (Water Protection Act Amended)/Loi sur la réduction du phosphore (modification de la Loi sur la protection des eaux)

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 9—The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des personnes recevant des soins

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 11—The Optometry Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'optométrie

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 12—The Securities Transfer Act/Loi sur le transfert des valeurs mobilières

Your committee agreed to report this bill, with the following amendment:

THAT Clause 139 of the Bill be replaced with the following:

Coming into force

139 This Act comes into force on the day it receives royal assent.

Bill No. 18—The Testing of Bodily Fluids and Disclosure Act/Loi sur l'analyse de fluides corporels et la communication des résultats d'analyse

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Ms. Braun: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Justice
First Report**

Mr. Daryl Reid (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Justice presents—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your committee met on Monday, April 28, 2008, at 7 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

Bill No. 3—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code de la route

Bill No. 4—The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Family Mediators and Evaluators)/Loi modifiant la

Loi sur la Cour provinciale (médiateurs et enquêteurs familiaux)

Bill No. 5—The Witness Security Act/Loi sur la sécurité des témoins

Bill No. 7—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Pornography Reporting)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille (obligation de signaler la pornographie juvénile)

Bill No. 20—The Gunshot and Stab Wounds Mandatory Reporting Act/Loi sur la déclaration obligatoire des blessures par balle et par arme blanche

Committee Membership

Mr. Briese

Mr. Caldwell

Hon. Mr. Chomiak

Mr. Eichler

Mr. Hawranik

Mr. Maguire

Ms. Marcelino (Vice-Chair)

Mr. Reid

Mr. Saran

Hon. Mr. Swan

Hon. Ms. Wowchuk

Your committee elected Mr. Reid as the Chairperson.

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

Mr. Dyck for Mr. Maguire

Public Presentations

Your committee heard the following three presentations on Bill No. 7—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Pornography Reporting)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille (obligation de signaler la pornographie juvénile):

Garry Boyachek, Private Citizen

Edward Lipsett, Manitoba Association for Rights & Liberties

Lianna McDonald & Signy Arnason, The Canadian Centre for Child Protection

Bills Considered and Reported

Bill No. 3—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act/Loi modifiant le Code de la route

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 4—The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Family Mediators and Evaluators)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour provinciale (médiateurs et enquêteurs familiaux)

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 5—The Witness Security Act/Loi sur la sécurité des témoins

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Bill No. 7—The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Pornography Reporting)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfant et à la famille (obligation de signaler la pornographie juvénile)

Your committee agreed to report this bill, with the following amendments:

THAT the proposed definition "child pornography", as set out in Clause 2 of the Bill, be amended

(a) in clause (b), by striking out "or visual representation" and substituting ", visual representation or audio recording"; and

(b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (a)(ii) and adding the following after clause (b):

(c) any written material whose dominant characteristic is the description, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a child that would be an offence under the Criminal Code (Canada), or

(d) any audio recording that has as its dominant characteristic the description, presentation or representation, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a child that would be an offence under the Criminal Code (Canada);

THAT the proposed subsection 18(1.0.1), as set out in Clause 4(1) of the Bill, be amended by striking out "or material" and substituting ", material or recording".

THAT the proposed clause 18.1(2)(b), as set out in Clause 5(1) of the Bill, be amended by striking out "or material" and substituting ", material or recording".

THAT the proposed subsection 18.7(1), as set out in Clause 8 of the Bill, be amended by striking out "or material" and substituting ", material or recording".

Bill No. 20—The Gunshot and Stab Wounds Mandatory Reporting Act/Loi sur la déclaration

obligatoire des blessures par balle et par arme blanche

Your committee agreed to report this bill without amendment.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Wellington (Ms. Marcelino), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for 2008-2009 for the Water Stewardship Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the five-year Wildlife Report for the members of the House.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Eoghan O'Neil who is from Winnipeg.

Also in the public gallery we have from Christian Faith Academy 14 grades 1 to 12 students under the direction of Celine Mederis. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

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

* (13:50)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Student Assessment Reports Provincial Results

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we know that in the world that we live in today that the answers to the biggest challenges we face, whether it be economic challenges or challenges related to climate change or other major issues, are a function of our ability to educate children who can understand the basics in terms of mathematics, science and reading.

Mr. Speaker, six years ago the then-Minister of Education, the current Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) said after disappointing test results were released that we had to do better, that there was work to be done. Here we are six years later and a

report has just come out showing that, in spite of the excellent work by Manitoba teachers, the lack of political leadership in this province has resulted in Manitoba students falling below the national average in all three categories of reading, sciences and mathematics.

My question to the Premier is: Why in the last six years since the Member for Brandon East identified this as a problem has he not done anything about it?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Again, I want to say we were relatively higher in our placement with the international tests that came out just recently. In terms of the ratings on reading and math, we're very close to the curve on those two tests. I would say, Mr. Speaker, we were fourth in the PISA tests on science. We're eighth in this test. That's not satisfactory. We're asking our Department of Education, what is the discrepancy between the fourth-place results and the eighth-place results because certainly I would acknowledge that there's action in terms of science results with these tests today.

Mr. McFadyen: It's not just science. In reading, we fall below the national average. We fall behind the Yukon and Québec among other provinces. In mathematics, we fall below the national average. As the Premier has mentioned, we're eighth place in science.

I want to ask the Premier who says he's close to the curve, which could perhaps be a metaphor for just about everything his government does, why not strive for something a little better than the curve.

Mr. Doer: The international test results, and there are comments about the participation rate in the province of Québec on those tests, but, Mr. Speaker, the international tests had us doing better than these test results.

I'm particularly worried or concerned about the science results. I want to find out from the Department of Education why we have fourth place for science in the PISA results and why it's eighth in these results.

Obviously, as a parent whose children are in school and are taking science, I feel very positive about the teachers and the programs that they are conducting.

I do want to know why one test result had us in fourth place in science and one had us at eighth

place. I think those are legitimate questions and we certainly want answers to that.

Mr. McFadyen: The Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) identified this as a problem six years ago. I want to ask the Premier, it's not good enough to today stand up and feign concern about why it is that Manitoba students fall behind Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, Ontario, Québec and Alberta when it comes to science.

My question to the Premier is: He is expressing concern about this today. What's he been doing about this for the last six years since the alarm bell was sounded by the Member for Brandon East?

Mr. Doer: Of course, Mr. Speaker, members opposite would note that the international tests, and I have a number of the international tests that ranked Manitoba in a positive way and also rank Canada in a very positive way relative to other countries.

What I can't get an adequate explanation for, I've been told that Québec had less students participating in the science test but that is still not a good enough explanation in my view on the gap between fourth place in the international tests and eighth place in this test.

Moratorium on School Closures Costs

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): With the heavy-handed approach to education that this Doer government is known for, Bill 28 was introduced yesterday. With no consultations, this NDP government has forced front-line teachers, children and property taxpayers to suffer.

I ask the minister: Who will pay for Bill 28? Teachers who will be expected to do less, who will be doing less with less? Will it be the children, or property taxpayers who will see their taxes increase? I ask the minister: Who will pay for Bill 28?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I am really quite fascinated by the question. It really has nothing to do with the legislation, quite frankly. I'm actually very surprised that members are concerned about this piece of legislation when they're standing up and requesting us to build schools in their communities, but they're not standing up for community schools in rural Manitoba.

I'm surprised the members aren't supportive of a bill that would mean that school divisions take their

best efforts to reduce the travel time to schools on buses, which are currently unacceptable for many students who travel more than an hour and a half either way, to school or back. This bill also deals with getting school divisions to address that. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, our government has supported a lot of the initiatives we've introduced and will continue to do so.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, it's kind of like in a classroom; we need the minister to pay attention. The questions are about who pays for Bill 28. With Bill 28, the minister indicated that he supports boards becoming innovative with empty schools so that they can generate income. What the minister proposes is making our schools glorified strip malls in an attempt to make the school buildings generate cash. The minister mentioned community services, which may include doctors' offices, pharmacies, 7-Elevens or fast-food outlets. Does Archwood School now become the Golden Arches?

We ask the minister directly: Who pays for Bill 28? Please answer the question.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member should've paid attention to the issue yesterday when we dealt with the early childhood education initiative where we said there's \$2.5 million this year, a total of \$22.5 million over the next five years to make renovations where schools have capacity to allow early childhood education centres and day cares. I can't see how the member could possibly stand up and say having a day care in a school is a bad thing. We are supporting now with \$22.5 million. We are looking at the implications of the bus requirements for transportation, and we will be supporting that as well.

We are the government that cares for education and invests in education. Their promise is \$10 million for elite schools. They said, we don't have to increase funding for education because of declining enrolment or flat enrolment. They don't understand education, Mr. Speaker. We understand it in urban centres—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, the minister is terribly confused. This is about Bill 28 and the hardship that he's imposing on school boards. Why is the minister asking once again—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: Classroom teachers do more with less, children in the end get less with less, and schools become commercial strip malls.

Why is he forcing this to happen under his watch? Why is he not putting his money where his mouth is? Who is going to pay for Bill 28? Why doesn't he get up and answer that question?

Mr. Bjornson: The member should be aware that the way it works in Manitoba is when we build a school, we pay for the construction of that school, Mr. Speaker. We pay for the operations of the school. We support the programming in the school. In partnership with the school divisions, we support the programming in that school, and, quite frankly, the member should perhaps listen to what parents have to say about Bill 28.

The *Brandon Sun* reported: This is a payoff I can honestly say I did not imagine in my wildest dreams, the fact that this government is standing up for schools in rural Manitoba.

This government is standing up for schools in communities throughout the city of Winnipeg and that is our commitment.

Moratorium on School Closures Costs

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I've listened carefully to the minister's answers, and he has not provided any hope or any idea of a plan that he has in place in order to be able to compensate for the costs of the schools that have to stay open.

I want to ask the minister whether he's to date prepared to table, for school divisions, for communities, for the Legislature, his plan in terms of how he is going to continue to fund schools that are facing closure, that were facing closure, schools that cannot operate because of a restriction and a shortage of funds.

* (14:00)

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, the real shortage of funds for education in Manitoba took place in the 1990s.

What we have done since 1999, we increased the declining enrolment grant from \$1.2 million to \$5.8 million to allow divisions with declining enrolment to make schools viable.

The intent of the bill, Mr. Speaker, is to maintain schools in the community, to keep them viable for

the community and, after reviewing the guidelines for closure at the request of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, not only did we talk about the process but we talked about the outcomes, and what are the outcomes for closing schools in rural Manitoba. Members opposite should know, because as soon as one closes they'd be the first ones to stand up and say, why didn't you do anything about it?

But we are standing up for rural Manitoban schools today. We'll stand up for them tomorrow.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, it's not very difficult for a minister—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers in case there's a breach of a rule here. The honourable Member for Russell has the floor.

Mr. Derkach: Well, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's not very difficult for a minister to come into this House and lay a bill on the table, but before considering that bill, surely a minister, in showing leadership in this province, would have consulted with school divisions as to how this plan will be implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Ray Johnson of Park West School Division was shocked by the legislation because he said he had never been consulted and the fact that he is now going to have to find \$2 million somewhere in order to run his schools.

I want to ask the minister whether he consulted with Park West School Division, because he knows the controversy that has broiled in that school division for the last two months regarding school closures. Did the minister talk to Park West School Division? Did he talk to the superintendent, and did he put a plan in place in order to be able to fund this bill, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did talk to Park West School Division. I did talk to Park West parents. I had the opportunity to travel out there this past winter, stayed at the Russell Inn, a fine establishment in the member's constituency, and I met with the school division. I met with the community, I met with parents.

This is not an easy issue, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of conflict within the school divisions themselves over what is best for the community, and they were

very conflicted in the decision-making process that they had been engaged in, but we've reviewed the process, and we've looked at the outcomes. The outcomes are quite profound in terms of shutting down schools in rural Manitoba.

So we are supporting keeping schools open. We build the schools, we support the schools and continue to do so, Mr. Speaker. We've done so with unprecedented funding this year alone and will continue to find ways to support our schools throughout Manitoba whether they're at capacity or whether they're—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that if you're going to bring legislation of this kind into the House it has a significant impact.

Now what the minister has said today is how the cost of keeping these schools open is going to be downloaded on to school boards and on to the local taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, because he does not have a plan in place and how he's going to fund his bill.

I want to ask the minister: When he was out in Russell and stayed at the beautiful Russell Inn, congratulations, Mr. Minister, but did you talk to the Park West School Division about this bill and about the impact of this bill? Did you specifically address this bill and your plan with regard to funding the impact of this bill with Park West School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: What I did talk to Park West School Division about was the difficulties they were having with the decisions that they are faced with in light of declining enrolment, Mr. Speaker. That's what I talked to Park West School Division about. That's what I talked to parents about. That's what I talked to community leaders about, and, quite frankly, the feedback that we've been receiving from the community is that they're extremely pleased that we are going to be continuing to invest in small schools in Manitoba and keeping small schools viable in Manitoba.

That's the feedback we're hearing from the community. That's what we're committed to do, and I'm surprised the member opposite would be advocating for school closures, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to remind members that we have guests up in the gallery that came all the way down here to hear the questions and the answers, and they should have the right. So I ask

some co-operation of all members for a little bit of decorum here.

The honourable Member for Minnedosa has the floor.

Avastin Medication Coverage

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Manitobans were disappointed that the Minister of Health did not include coverage for Avastin in budget 2008. One of those Manitobans is retired Judge Allan James. I'll pose his question verbatim to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald): Are the lives of colorectal cancer patients in Manitoba less valued compared with patients in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Québec and Newfoundland?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, all of these issues are obviously of extreme importance and considered with respect to the medical implications. I want to say to the member opposite that one of the very advanced things that we've done is we were the first jurisdiction, I believe, to do colorectal screening which has been something that has been asked for for years with respect to dealing with a surge of colon cancer.

With respect to drug coverage, Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated, we have the most comprehensive drug coverage in the country. With respect to specific cancer drugs, we look at them on—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is one of the last provinces in this country to cover the costs on this. What does the minister have to say to Allan James who believes, and I quote: if funding had been made available when Health Canada approved it, many people in Manitoba with colorectal cancer would still be alive today. That's a quote from Mr. Allan James.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we do have cancer doctors who decide on a case-by-case basis when Avastin can be applied. So don't let the member leave the impression, as the member often does, of issues that are in fact being reviewed very seriously. The member does have a history of standing up in this House and saying inappropriate things and they're not being true. Doctors cover Avastin and it is covered. Everyone in this House cares as much about

people's lives on an individual basis and on a group basis as does the Member for Minnedosa.

Gage Guimond Death Public Inquiry

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, two-year-old Gage Guimond died while in the care of this NDP government. For almost three weeks I've been asking the Minister of Family Services and Housing to do the right thing and call an inquest.

If he is serious about preventing tragedies like this from happening again, why won't he call the inquest? What is he hiding from?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, and indeed, over years and years of history, the answer first and foremost is that inquests are not called until after the disposition of criminal proceedings. That is extremely important that there be justice served, particularly in tragedies of child deaths. When I think of the life of Gage Guimond, it's critical that we learn lessons from that tragic loss.

As part of that, the question in terms of an inquest report is an open question that is one that is examined by the Children's Inquest Review Committee, by professionals and the Chief Medical Examiner.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, I quote from The Fatalities Inquiries Act, section 25, which states: "The minister may direct a provincial judge to conduct an inquest with respect to a death to which this Act applies."

This isn't about politics. This is about Gage Guimond, who was only two years old when he died in the care of this NDP government. If the minister won't call the inquest, will he at the very least assure this House today, all Child and Family Services agencies are putting safety ahead of everything else in all cases?

* (14:10)

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if the member would read that legislation he would see there that the Minister of Family Services is not empowered as the member states in this House. But, indeed, there is an ability in law, but the practice, of course, over many, many years across political parties, and indeed, reiterated by the former Minister of Family Services under the Filmon government in this House has stated that, of course, that question is one that the Chief Medical Examiner is respected for

making a decision around to make a professional judgment.

Mr. Speaker, legislation has just been tabled in this House. I hope members opposite will support it. I know they say one thing one day, like the education bill yesterday. The Leader of the—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Bill 229 Government Support

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, Progressive Conservatives are declaring war on auto thieves in Manitoba. I've introduced Bill 229, which will eliminate MPI benefits for auto thieves who are killed or injured while stealing a motor vehicle.

So, I ask the Minister of Justice, it's a simple question: Will he be supporting this bill or will he continue to pay MPI benefits to auto thieves?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, we've already taken provisions with respect to the MPI act dealing with auto thieves, and I'd remind the member that if MPI doesn't cover third party or related coverage, the health-care system will have to pay for that same individual, regardless. I want to add to the member—or welfare. I want to add to the member opposite that it was his minister, Treasury Board, who said on Saturday night, in front of 700 police, what a great job Manitoba had done in concert with the federal—and I want to thank the federal government and not blame them for working with us on auto theft and our other crime-fighting strategies.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, under current MPI legislation, auto thieves are entitled to income-replacement benefits, death benefits, compensation for permanent impairment and many other benefits paid for by the very person whose car he has stolen.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Will he recommend that his caucus vote for this bill?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Speaker, every single initiative that we brought forward—locks, immobilizers—every initiative we brought forward has been opposed by members opposite. Now that auto theft is down 40 percent, now that it's down 40 percent, they want to say now we want to get tough. We brought in the legislation that restricted benefits paid to survivors and others under MPI. The problem is of a 15-year-old, or a 14-year-old involved in an

accident, either the health-care system or the welfare system is going to have to pay regardless.

So it's symbolism and typical Tory, just symbolism, Mr. Speaker, without regard to the consequences. We're fighting auto theft, not just saying stuff.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, let me simplify this for the minister. The Winnipeg cab driver, who died as a result of a motor vehicle accident with an auto thief, through his MPI premiums will be paying for benefits for that auto thief. Why should MPI policyholders pay benefits to the criminal who stole their car? It's a slap in the face to victims. It's a very simple issue.

I ask the Minister of Justice, once again: Why does he refuse to eliminate MPI benefits for auto thieves? Why is he so soft on criminals?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, first off, the assumption that the member makes is not accurate. Secondly, we've curtailed benefits for impaired drivers and related benefits. Thirdly, the member ought to recognize that the restrictions and the general third-party provisions, if not paid for by MPI, will be paid for by the health-care system or by the welfare system.

So, in typical Tory meanness, Mr. Speaker, and an attempt to show, symbolically, something they didn't do anything about when auto theft started increasing in 1993, and which we brought in legislation and which we have been—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: They opposed our measures, Mr. Speaker, and now they try to flop it off on to either the health-care system, which they say they would only fund at inflation, or on the welfare—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Crown Corporations Board Member Screenings

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Board members of Crown corporations, like the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation and the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation have a very important role to play in ensuring the direction and the accountability of our Crown corporations.

Mr. Speaker, it's past time to bring better accountability to Manitobans for the actions of the corporations. Manitoba Liberals are calling for screening of appointments to the boards of these Crown corporations by a legislative committee, so that all prospective board members can put on the public record their vision for the corporation, their abilities, their qualifications and their commitment to make sure that the corporation is accountable to ordinary Manitobans.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer): Will he support more accountability for Crown corporations?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think if you look at the people that are sitting on Crown corporations, you'll find a quite diverse and stellar group of people with a wide range of backgrounds. The member's proposal has not worked out that well at the federal level when they've tried to do it. When we saw this type of strategy, just at the federal level, it actually resulted in high-quality people refusing appointments to Crown corporations because they did not want to go through a public inquisition where people, like members opposite, would try to make political hay out of their community service.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, what a twisted mind the MLA has for St. Boniface.

The fact of the matter is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

All members in this House are honourable members. I ask the honourable Member for River Heights to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that comment. What I think is important here today is that we have honest and open accounting from board members of corporations before they take their positions. We have had problems in this province with boards appointed in part by this government. The Crocus Investment Fund board—and the government has paid millions of dollars to settle a lawsuit because of the problem with that investment fund.

I ask the Premier: When will he stand up and have better accountability for the appointment of board members and for board members in Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the board structure was contained within legislation introduced

in this House in 1992 and 1993 for the entity that the member cites and was documented. If the member opposite would be accountable and read the receiver's report that was made public in the fall of '07, he would note that. It's right there in the report. In terms of accountability, it's a two-way street. People who have been given reports in the public arena, when reports are transparent, they have to also read them so they too can be accountable to the people of Manitoba.

Government Advertisements Cost

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, being honest is, indeed, very important. On April 21, I asked the Minister of Finance in regard to the propaganda campaign that related to its budget. I quote what the minister said: I can tell the member right now that the amount of money spent this year is 16 percent less than it was in '99-2000.

Mr. Speaker, in '99-2000, the actual amount was \$173,000; this year, it's \$196,000. There is some discrepancy on honesty that's being put on the record from the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, the Gomery inquiry suggests that what we need to see and I quote, that we need to have an Ontario, or he's making a suggestion in regard to public advertising that we follow the Ontario model of a total prohibition on all partisan advertising which would be enforced by the Auditor General's office should be adopted.

Would the Minister of Finance recognize that there is a need for us to recognize that there is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:20)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is remarkable for his ability to take information which I tabled with him yesterday so he'd have an accurate picture of what has transpired with respect to what's happened with budgets, and I gave him the total story. I indicated to him yesterday that, in '99-2000, the total bill, all costs that included—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: —the cost of research, which means a poll was \$239,000, and the bill, this year, was \$236,000. Now, the member wants to say that when I give him accurate information, somehow I'm being dishonest. Well, all I can tell him is this: If he reads

the Gomery report, it will put more Liberals in jail than any other member of any political party in this country.

Economic Growth Government Record

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): We have been hearing from the members opposite about a gloomy picture of our economy, and particularly the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) paints so gloomy a picture that we're kind of suspicious. But, today, in the *Free Press*, I read with great delight that we are doing very, very well.

Could the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade inform all the members of the House about the economic position of Manitoba?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): I'd certainly like to thank my friend, the Member for Radisson. It's a pleasure to get up and answer a question about Competitiveness, Training and Trade in this House.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that, just yesterday, Statistics Canada told us that Manitoba's gross domestic product grew 3.3 percent in 2007, tied for the second-highest growth in the country, well above the national average and, indeed, well above our cousins in Saskatchewan.

I'm also very pleased on the manufacturing front that, indeed, Manitoba experienced manufacturing growth, second place in Canada, a growth of 4.6 percent, well above Saskatchewan, well above Alberta and well above the 3 percent decline for our friends out in British Columbia.

I'm also very pleased, of course, there's so much more I could talk of. I hope we'll get another question someday.

Rural Emergency Services Government Strategies

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): The propaganda from that side of the House just never seems to end.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that all Manitobans should have access to quality health-care services, and this includes timely access to lab and x-ray services. There are already warning signs out in southern Manitoba that this summer we could see some short-staff issues.

Mr. Speaker, we're asking this government: What is their plan to fill pending vacancies in the lab and x-ray portfolios just so these ERs will not be closed this summer?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Health): All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is just watch us because we increased the funding and the positions for lab and x-ray technicians when we came into office.

Manitoba's rural and northern general hospitals have 20 more full-time doctors, a 50 percent increase. There are 86 more doctors working in rural and northern Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, 265 rural and northern nursing positions have been filled through a new program; newer renovated hospitals in Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden-Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake; CT scanners in Brandon, Steinbach, Thompson, The Pas, Selkirk, Morden-Winkler, Portage la Prairie, and the first MRI ever opened outside of the city of Winnipeg in Brandon, in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: We know this government can spend. We, on this side of the House, are interested in having real concrete results.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are making their plans for summer vacations. Many of them anticipate spending time out in our parks in rural Manitoba, and they also anticipate health-care services will be available. However, we know, last summer, many ERs were closed across western Manitoba.

Manitobans are planning ahead. Does this government have a plan to deal with these pending vacancies in ER positions in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, about this time last year during a provincial election, we committed to expanding medical training, nurse training, lab training, et cetera.

As I recall, the member, led by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), stated that health care was not a priority. They went further, Mr. Speaker. They were spreading rumours that things like Grace Hospital was going to close forever. They kept saying that. Not only is the hospital expanding and developing, not only do we have 200 more doctors, not only do we have 1,700 more nurses employed now than when we came into office, but we're continuing to plan for the summer ahead and make sure that vacancies are dealt with appropriately.

Letellier Bridge Project Status

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): As I have risen in this House so often before, I rise again today on an economic and a safety issue in the Emerson constituency, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Infrastructure has continually skated around and provided non-answers to questions of when the bridge over the Red River at Letellier will be started and built.

Can the minister tell this House today if, in fact, he has the money for the bridge or he has to wait until his boss signs the Building Canada Fund?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): We take issues related to transportation very seriously, unlike the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) who should have showed a little leadership approximately a year ago when the MLA for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), the MLA for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) and other southern MLAs came to him and said, more sir, more, wanting more money for southern Manitoba for transportation: \$60 million for Highway 10; \$41 million for Highway 16; \$61 million for Highway 1; \$83 million for Highway 75; \$60 million for Highways 2 and 3. There they are, asking the Leader of the Opposition, give us more, give us more, should he become the Premier. No wonder Manitoba refused that vision.

Mr. Graydon: It's obvious that the minister didn't hear the question. Mr. Speaker, in the past he's blamed the federal government for not doing an environmental study; he blamed the First Nations for holding up the project. He blamed a fifth-generation dairy farmer on one side of the bridge for not co-operating. Money is an issue. There's been many excuses from this minister. He's stated in this House and repeatedly has stated that he has \$400 million more for infrastructure; however, he has not been able to deliver a positive answer to any of the questions.

Does he have a start date and a finish date for the bridge at Letellier?

Mr. Lemieux: With questions like that, he started and he is finished, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we more than tripled our budget with regard to bridges in the province of Manitoba. Unlike the members opposite, we do respect the environment and environmental issues that come forward, whether it's navigable waters or oceans. We believe in working

with people, the First Nation peoples or rural communities with regard to infrastructure projects [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lemieux: We're proud of our track record by putting [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lemieux: an unprecedented amount of money into infrastructure in this province.

Tabor Personal Care Home Renovation Requirements

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Fifty-six years ago, Tabor Home was built as a light-level seniors' housing complex. Today it is a personal care home and the majority of people are bedridden. There is no sprinkler system; the doorways are too narrow to move the residents in case of fire or any other emergency.

Should there be loss of life, what would the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) say to the families, knowing that the Tabor personal care home is in desperate need of replacement?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Health): I believe the member has asked the Minister of Health this question in Estimates. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to point out to the member that one of the things that we've really been able to do is to expand and renovate significant health-care facilities, and we have not been isolated to within the Perimeter. We looked far and wide: Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden, Winkler.

I was out at a personal care home opening myself when I was Minister of Health, with the member opposite, opening a facility. We continue to look at and improving—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Darfur Day of Recognition

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Today, April 29, marks the Darfur Day of Recognition as a day to raise public awareness about the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan. There are approximately six million

people living in Darfur, and they are amongst the poorest in Africa.

Through direct violence, disease and starvation, this genocide has already claimed as many as 400,000 lives, and this number is steadily rising. Darfurians live a constant nightmare. The human cost of this genocide is immense, and it is an absolute violation of human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Darfurians have been forced to flee their homes and seek shelter and safety in refugee camps and internally displaced persons camps. They are almost entirely dependent on the service of aid workers from the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations for their most basic needs of food, water, shelter and health care. However, there is still such a high demand for these aid workers there in horrible and dangerous conditions.

All Darfurians are not able to reach these camps, however. As many as one million more still live in the villages under the constant threat of bombings, raids, rape, torture and murder. Mr. Speaker, awareness is powerful and is a tool that we can and should use to combat this injustice against the people of Darfur.

All levels of government must work together to raise awareness of the underlying issues of this genocide and make peace a top priority. Dire conditions the inhabitants endure are an absolute violation of human rights and must end. Thank you.

R.M. of Bifrost

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the Chamber today to pay tribute to the Rural Municipality of Bifrost, which was recently commemorated with a celebration in the town of Arborg a short time ago.

The beginnings of the modern era for this region go back to 1875 when the Canadian government set aside a large portion of land on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg exclusively for Icelandic settlement. The following year, 1,200 people moved onto the land near Willow Point in what is now the R.M. of Gimli, which was incorporated in 1881. Residents of the north end of the R.M. soon realized they were too far removed from the government office so, on December 1, 1907, the R.M. of Bifrost was incorporated.

Bifrost is the Icelandic term for the rainbow bridge which joins the domain of humankind to Asgard, the land of the gods. It is noteworthy that

First Nations people who resided in the area had to make way for the settlers, but their generous nature becomes evident in the telling of the story of John Ramsay, a Saulteaux hunter who lived nearby.

A smallpox outbreak followed the settlement in 1876 which took the life of his wife, Betsey, and four of their five children. In that first hard winter, the settlers then experienced starvation, but John Ramsay applied his skills to supply them with moose meat which bridged them over to better days.

Over the years, other ethnic groups moved into the area leading to the diverse, cultural mosaic of today, which is the very essence of our country. The natural bounty of Lake Winnipeg and the surrounding rich farmland has been the base upon which this region has thrived.

Master of ceremonies for the Arborg event was Mr. David Gislason. Among other dignitaries, greetings were brought by the Honourable John Harvard, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, Mr. Atli Asmundsson, the Consul General of Iceland, Mr. James Bezan, the MP for Selkirk-Interlake, Mr. Harold Foster, the current Reeve of Bifrost and myself, for the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton).

On behalf of the people of the Interlake, I congratulate the people of the R.M. of Bifrost in achieving this milestone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MacGregor Elementary School Grade 5 Students

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, if the grade 5 class of MacGregor Elementary School is any indication, the next generation of Manitobans is likely to possess both excellent leadership skills as well as a strong sense of community responsibility.

Mr. McKinstry's grade 5 class, after learning the concepts of humanitarianism and citizenship, were inspired to put these ideas into practice. Leading the impetus to action was classroom president, Tamara McVannel, who, along with classmates, began the dedicated effort to raise both goods and money to help support Winnipeg Harvest.

Their drive, which they named Operation Donation Campaign, proved to be much more than a well-intentioned gesture of good faith. Through the concerted efforts on the part of the class, combined with a series of creative strategies to raise awareness that sounds more like the work of M.B.A.s than 5th graders, the campaign was successful in generating a

tremendous volume of goods for Winnipeg Harvest. In total, the class was able to raise the staggering figure of goods and money which translated into approximately four tonnes of food for the benefit of Winnipeg Harvest.

While the effort of the grade 5 students at MacGregor Elementary School has provided Winnipeg Harvest with much-needed supplies, the students themselves have benefited in a less material fashion. Their success garnered the attention of executive co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest, David Northcott, as well as Pat Isaac, president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, as well as a plethora of mainstream television and print media. However, the most lasting reward these students will no doubt derive from this incredible experience is the unmistakable gratification that comes from being able to offer their time and skills to those less fortunate and effect positive change at a community level.

On behalf of the PC caucus, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the 5th grade students of MacGregor Elementary School. As a member of the surrounding community, I am proud of what they have been able to accomplish and encourage you to continue to set an outstanding example for youth leadership. Thank you.

Father Denis Bourbonnais

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, a central figure in my riding and in the city of Flin Flon, Father Denis Bourbonnais, celebrated his 80th birthday on April 25.

Father Bourbonnais grew up in Winnipeg's north centre across the street from Steve Juba. After graduating in 1948, he spent a decade working for Trans Canada Airlines. In 1958, Father Bourbonnais started his seven-year journey as a seminarian, culminating in his ordination in 1965. Father Bourbonnais made his first trip to beautiful northern Manitoba in 1985 when he was transferred to Gillam. In 1987, he was transferred to Flin Flon.

For 21 years, with total commitment and energy, he has been the good shepherd, not only to his own flock, but to all the people of Flin Flon.

Pastoral care in the north is more colourful than in the south. For example, cemeteries are sometimes not accessible by road, and in one community Father Bourbonnais commented that the cemetery was accessible only by boat across the Weir River.

Anyone who wanted to get to the cemetery was forced to travel 15 miles by boat, regardless of wind or rain.

One of the memorable moments for Father Bourbonnais was when many of his colleagues travelled to Lac Brochet for a priests' retreat. Some of his colleagues travelled in a plane that had a 10-inch gap between the door and the rest of the fuselage. A strong, cold wind blew directly into the passenger cabin. Like so many northern priests, particularly Oblates, Father Denis Bourbonnais has become a central figure in the lives of countless northerners.

On behalf of all those northerners, I would ask all honourable members to join with me in celebrating Father Bourbonnais' 80th birthday. His endless energy, passion and dedication focussed on his parishioners is both outstanding and uplifting. He continues to be a pillar of strength in our times of need and a joyous participant in our times of happiness. He remains a great example for us all. We wish this man of inspiration, dignity and virtue many, many more years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

R.M. of Franklin 125th Anniversary

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the R.M. of Franklin on its recent celebration of its 125th anniversary.

Founded in 1883, the R.M. of Franklin has undergone considerable changes since its creation. It has grown from a small settlement in southeastern Manitoba, or the southeastern part of the province established as a postage stamp province, into a modern network of agriculturally based communities.

The R.M. of Franklin has successfully evolved while retaining much of its proud historical and cultural heritage. The R.M. of Franklin has always been home to hardworking friendly people, Mr. Speaker. The R.M., known for its strong German and Ukrainian heritage is also home to the Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation.

The R.M. of Franklin contains both the Red and the Roseau rivers and has always supported a strong agricultural sector of both grain and livestock. The communities of Dominion City, Arnaud, Killarney, Friedensfeld, Green Ridge, Ridgeville, Roseau River, Tolstoi and Woodmore have a proud history in the R.M. of Franklin and a hopeful future.

On April 12, 2008, the R.M. of Franklin hosted a celebration worthy of this historical event, attended by past and present residents. A plaque commemorating the anniversary was presented by federal MP Vic Toews. Words of praise were offered by Reeve Archie Hunter, and Jack Penner, former MLA for Emerson was among the locals to speak at the event. Gerry Mackekern [*phonetic*], manager of the local CIBC, presented a \$5,800 donation to local recreation and John Janzen, on behalf of the Agassiz Credit Union, offered \$2,500 for the celebration's activities.

Befitting an important component of the R.M.'s cultural heritage, the event was concluded by the Sardo Poliminy Dancers who performed an outstanding array of traditional Ukrainian dance.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the R.M. of Franklin on its 125th anniversary, thank everyone involved in making this celebration such a success. On behalf of the constituents of Emerson, I wish the residents of the R.M. of Franklin all the best. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 31(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be put forward by the honourable Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), and the title of the resolution is the 2008 Breast Cancer Conference.

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), and the title of the resolution is 2008 Breast Cancer Conference. That's the information for the House.

Mr. Chomiak: Shall the House resolve itself into Committee of Supply?

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Will the appropriate Chairs please go to their respective rooms. In the Chamber will be Education, Citizenship and Youth; Room 255 will be Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives; and Room 254 will be Infrastructure and Transportation.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections) INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (14:50)

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I believe that—

Madam Chairperson: Could you just bring your mike over just a little bit? I'm sorry.

Mr. Maguire: Yes. I'll try and bring it a little closer in that regard.

Yes, Madam Chair, there are a number of things I'd like to cover with the minister this afternoon and, hopefully, if everything works according to Hoyle, we can get through our allotted time or some of the time that we've had allotted to Infrastructure, Transportation, and government services. So I'm hoping to be able to move along with some of the issues that we talked about this morning and expand on some of those.

I know that the minister is very well aware of a number of the programs for funding and all of the funds that he has received, both from the federal government and from the budget of the Province of Manitoba that have been allotted to his department in Transportation, and I wonder if he could just give me a couple of numbers.

One was how many dollars will directly be going into new highway development this year.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, capital, preservation, winter roads, maintenance is \$415 million, I believe, but, out of that I believe just the capital side itself is \$249 million.

Mr. Maguire: Yes. Can the minister give me a breakdown of the amount that would be used for maintenance in the budget? Just strictly for maintenance of the highway system that we have today.

Mr. Lemieux: 104.1 million.

Mr. Maguire: The \$249 million number that the minister has given me. Is that for the building of new roads only in the province of Manitoba this year?

Mr. Lemieux: That also includes bridges as well.

Mr. Maguire: I know we talked before lunch about the 300 million being made available over five years for bridges. Can he elaborate as to—I don't know if it's a \$60-million breakdown per year. Can he give me the number for bridge construction for this year out of that 249?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes. Over the five years beginning in '07, it was \$341 million in funding to be spent on bridge construction, I believe it was. So what we're looking at is approximately 63 bridges to be built or rehabbed throughout the province as part of our plan. Of course, as we mentioned, there are over 2,000 bridges in the province of Manitoba. So it's a huge undertaking, but we're committed to it. We've also put millions and millions, hundreds of millions of dollars toward bridge rehabilitation. In some cases, regrettably, we have to build a whole new bridge or put a box culvert in or do something like that, but that's the determination that's made by the department.

Mr. Maguire: The 63 bridges that the minister talks about, are those for the budget that we're in, the '08-09 budget that are proposed, or was that what was spent on '07-08, or is that over the five-year period?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, that was over five years, but just this year alone it's over \$60 million in capital, alone, for bridges. Having said that, when we made the announcement with regard to the \$125 million extra dollars for bridges, whether they'd be construction or rehabilitation or inspections, that we stated that, depending on the year, you might gear up, you might be able to do more work than other years, but that amount would be spent at the end of that time period.

Mr. Maguire: So the \$249 million that the minister talked about for roads and bridges this year, 63 bridges will be looked at.

Mr. Lemieux: That's over five years.

Mr. Maguire: At over five years and approximately \$60 million that will be spent on bridges this year.

Mr. Lemieux: As I said, it's approximately \$60 million for bridges and could be, maybe, as much as even 64, depending on how the season goes.

So, again, this is capital projects we're talking about. So when you talk about new, it could be new work on a bridge, but it doesn't mean that the whole bridge, for example, is replaced, and it's new, but it's capital work.

Mr. Maguire: That's what I understood from the minister's previous answers is that there will be \$60 million to \$64 million spent this year on bridge work in the province of Manitoba this year, out of the 63 bridges, over five years, that he's looking at priority on. So the 64 comes out of the 249, as the minister had said earlier, leaving 185 left, approximately, for new highway development, for new roads in Manitoba for this year? Is that correct?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, approximately, give or take a million.

Mr. Maguire: I know he has a published list of the 63 bridges that are a priority for Manitoba for the five-year project. Can he just name me a few of the bridges, and maybe even get me a slate of those that he has a priority to look at in the '08-09 budget for this year? Can he offer me that at this time?

* (15:00)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I've just asked staff to look through and just to see, certainly, a partial list. We're taking a look at that right now, and within a couple of minutes I might be able to provide that. If we could just go to another question, and then allow me the opportunity to take a look through and see what I have before me.

Mr. Maguire: Certainly, Mr. Minister, that would be fine. I guess I'll look at the '07-08 and go back to the last year's budget.

I wonder if the minister can tell me how many bridges they worked on last year.

Mr. Lemieux: I don't have that number at my fingertips, but I'll get that for the MLA, for my critic.

Mr. Maguire: Can he just find out as well how many of those projects were completed, and how many are still outstanding?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, we will endeavour to see if we can find that and provide that for the MLA.

Mr. Maguire: Can he provide me with an outline of what's been done so far in regard to the bridges that they want to work on for '08-09?

How many of those projects have been tendered to date?

Mr. Lemieux: We do have, I think, on our Web site what has been tendered. I think we published that, I believe, for public record. People can look at the Web site, and it lists all the projects that were currently tendered. We're going to be tendering a number of other projects shortly. Generally, the months of May and June have a considerable amount of projects.

I would say that trying to endeavour to meet the requests from the Heavy Construction Association, Chris Lorenc and the good people at the Heavy Construction Association, part of the 20-20 vision document stated three things. One is that not only do you provide more money, it had to be in the billions. The 20-20 vision consultation process said \$3 billion; we put \$4 billion in over 10 years. The Heavy Construction Association asked that we have early tendering to try to—I use the Grey Cup weekend as kind of a mark that we would lay out what kind of projects we were looking at. Thirdly was \$4 billion, early tendering and a five-year capital plan or 10-year capital plan. They wanted a long-term vision, not going year by year, so what we did is we have addressed all three.

I know that this particular organization is very pleased with those recommendations that we have followed because that has really helped, I think, municipalities. Manitobans understand that (1) there's a plan in place, (2) there's money there, and (3) that we are trying to expedite the tendering.

The reason why I digress slightly to go into this is because most of the jobs have been tendered. As I understand it, the majority of the projects have been tendered for the '08 construction season. We still have some to come forward, but most of them have been tendered.

Mr. Maguire: If that's the case, whenever the minister gets that list of bridges for me, I'd appreciate it.

I just want to discuss in general terms with the minister for a few minutes the process then that they would go through. I believe from the Estimates that there have been more people to inspect bridges. The first question would be: You've hired more people to do bridge inspections, is that the case?

Mr. Lemieux: To try to address the question as accurately as possible, we've had to tender out inspections to outside agencies or agency in order to do the bridge inspections that we wanted. We would have to hire a considerable amount of new staff in

order to do that. In the short term, we've certainly looked at how we're going to get it done. I believe that we've addressed that through outside means.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister just indicate to me what company they're working with in the outside inspections?

Mr. Lemieux: There's a number of fine companies in Manitoba, but the companies that we're working with specifically related to bridges: UMA and Stantec.

Mr. Maguire: In what parameters, what sort of objectives, or what sort of parameters does the department ask for in regard to the type of report that they would get from those people as well as from his own staff, because I don't suppose there's a difference?

Mr. Lemieux: Just to answer the question that was put, and then I'll go into some of the highway projects.

An enhanced bridge inspection methodology was instituted and utilized, utilizing the Ontario bridge inspection methodology. It's OSIM, which helps our inspection process, and we do have categories one, two and three inspections, and those are what the companies we're working with are following. It's called the Ontario bridge inspection methodology.

Also, if I might, Madam Chairperson, just also touch on some of the projects that we're talking about. I hesitate, first of all, especially the ones that have not been tendered yet, to state that a certain project will be \$4 million, for example. The reason is because, when we put a tender out, guess what? You can almost guarantee yourself that the return on those tenders will be 4 million or more. I'm sure my critic understands that, so I'm really hesitant to do that, but I don't mind listing some of the projects that we're looking at without taking too much time.

On PTH 9, also known as Main Street, at the north Perimeter, overpass rehab; PTH 11 at Powerview Creek, a rehab; also on PTH 12 for the MLA for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) on PR 207, the Ste. Anne overpass on Highway 12, it's a rehab job; also La Rochelle drain bridge replacement, that's south on Highway 59. I know the MLA for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) will know that one because I believe that's in his constituency or possibly the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu). Also, PTH 59 at PTH 100, overpass rehab. Also, the Brandon 18th Street

bridge, for example, at Assiniboine River, twinning the structures.

We're looking at, of course, starting on the first bridge. A box culvert also, Brandon east access. We're looking at PTH 68, Hanson Drain; PTH 10, Big Island Lake, structure replacement; God's Lake Narrows, a new winter bridge structure, which I know the people up north in that community and near God's Lake or God's Lake Narrows will appreciate that particular structure. I was there just, I think, about a month ago to take a look and see how that was coming along and having an opportunity to consult and talk to the community.

Sherridon Road and Mistik Creek, well, there are many, many—as the member can appreciate, there are a lot of projects that were in the works that we're going to be doing and working on and that's all part of the '08-09 budget announcement. It's also part of our strategy to strengthen the province's infrastructure. As we talked about, over \$60-million investment has been planned for bridge rehab and replacement and also new construction as well.

*(15:10)

Mr. Maguire: You have those 63 bridges that the minister has talked about over the five-year program. How many will they be dealing with in this budget year?

Of the 63 bridges over the five years that you're going to work with, how many of those will you have as a priority in the '08-09 budget?

Mr. Lemieux: A point I should stress, and I've been advised by my department, is that many of the projects we're talking about, approximately, we'll do about half this particular year. But many of them are phased over sometimes two years, sometimes three construction seasons, in order to complete a bridge, depending on how much work needs to take place. So that's important to point out, even though we're starting on half of that, 60 some, they may carry over for two or three years, and that happens.

Also, this is just the capital side. There's also a preservation side that there's work that takes place, as I understand it, on bridges, as well, and structures and a number of projects are going to be happening on that.

Mr. Maguire: I know there's a process that the minister's department must go through in regard to the development of making the choices on these, I

believe he said, half a dozen bridges. I know you're dealing with 30 of them.

I understand that there can be some overlap, that you're not going to finish all the projects in one year. But, there's 64 million of the 300 million that we've talked about, 341 million over five years, to be used this year. I appreciate that perhaps he could help by actually mentioning some of the ones that have already been tendered. He's indicated a lot of them have been tendered for this year. How many have had tenders accepted, I guess might be the first question. Can he share with us, then, which ones are on the go?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, I don't have that with me at the moment, but I certainly can. Well, I'll let my critic have some of that information when I get it.

Mr. Maguire: I know that my colleague from Emerson certainly is correct when he says that we want to know some of the names of the bridges that will be built. I know he has a particular concern that he has raised from time to time. So, maybe, I'll just let him ask a few questions in that regard.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Minister, you've probably been asked this question before, but the Building Canada Fund, not being signed and may not be signed in time for the 2008 construction season; without that money, does the minister have the money in place to replace the Letellier Bridge?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, as the MLA knows, and I know I've had private discussions with him, but also public discussions through question period and other forums. Letellier Bridge is one—for the most part, people if they don't know where it is, it's off Highway 75, Highway 201, in southern Manitoba, and it's a very, very expensive project. I believe now, it's upwards of \$33 million, or thereabouts, and it's a very expensive project, but a worthwhile investment. I know I've had the opportunity to meet with many reeves and community leaders and business leaders in the area prior to the MLA being elected, the new MLA. So, we've had an opportunity to have very, very good discussions.

Now, there are, as was pointed out, concerns related to making sure we have the so-called ducks in a row, meaning navigable waters, meaning Fisheries and Oceans, also land, if there's any utilities that need to be addressed. All of those things have to be done before any bridge reconstruction will take place.

The bridge is being restricted now. The bridge is safe. I want to stress that, otherwise we wouldn't allow people to use it. I've been advised by my department that the bridge is safe, under restriction, and we certainly look forward to the day that people will be able to use a new bridge in that particular area.

As I mentioned, the amount that's to be invested in that particular structure is large. The construction—it doesn't look like construction will begin this summer, that's for sure, unless we get all those so-called ducks in a row or get all the issues dealt with that need to be dealt with.

But, having said that, there's a lot of money in our budget with regard to bridges and infrastructure overall. Just an aside from that, he raised the question about the Building Canada Fund. I'm not sure how much the MLA for Emerson knows about the Building Canada Fund, but, essentially, that was gas tax money that's supposed to go back into the province of Manitoba. The feds take about \$160 million out every year and give us back about, roughly, \$10 million to \$12 million. They made the decision in Ottawa that they would lump all of that together and spread that proportionately over all the provinces, meaning \$33 billion over seven years. Then they would spread that \$33 billion over seven years.

Now, I have to say the federal government should be congratulated on this because, for years, a lot of talk about how important transportation was and infrastructure was, but there were no dollars attached. Now they've parcelled together a number of different programs to put it into one fund; but, having said that, they should be congratulated for recognizing that infrastructure and transportation are important.

What I've been advised is that some of that money should be used for transportation infrastructure. That could be bridges or roads, also used for sewer and water projects, or green projects, but that, again, is part of the definition as to the criteria that the Building Canada Fund should be, how it should be used.

We do have a disagreement with the federal government right now, and I think most people, certainly, in this room, or most Manitobans, I believe, are aware of that. We believe that we had a firm commitment on those dollars, Building Canada Fund being used for infrastructure, whether that be transportation infrastructure, sewer and water, good,

potable water, waste water. We believe that using part of that fund was not part of the agreement, to use part of that fund for the floodway, to pay the feds half of their share for the floodway.

We disagree on that point, and yet, you know, Minister Toews is an honourable person. He will try to do the best he can for Manitoba. In my humble opinion, he's been pretty good as far as the lead minister for the federal government representing Prime Minister Harper in Manitoba, and I want to congratulate him here, publicly, that we do appreciate all the hard work that he is doing trying to get not only Asia-Pacific money to Manitoba but also the Building Canada Fund and trying to work with us so there's an amicable solution to this dilemma.

The challenge, of course, is that the longer we remain deadlocked on this project, there may be some projects that are either going to escalate in cost or, heaven forbid that they may not be able to go ahead for a while until the monies are firmed up. We believe there will be a settlement because we have Minister Toews working on our behalf, and I know all the federal members of Parliament have heard from their constituents and their R.M.s in their areas on how they want the federal government to move ahead and resolve this.

* (15:20)

We're willing to. The feds are, and we believe that we're going to resolve this amicably so the monies that were designated for infrastructure are going to take place, and yet the importance of the floodway to protect the city of Winnipeg, if a flood should ever happen, heaven forbid, and the city of Winnipeg be overtaken by a flood of massive proportion, and there is anywhere from \$12-billion to \$14-billion worth of damage. Without putting too fine a point on it, is that 90 percent of those costs are covered by the federal government; 90 percent of that \$12 billion would be covered by the feds if a natural disaster should ever take place like that.

So we know that we have to put our heads together and work hard together to solve this. There is a disagreement, obviously, on what the agreement initially was, but we're going to solve it and we're going to get going on this particular project.

The importance of the Letellier Bridge—it is important, but, as was mentioned before, we do have a lot of bridges in this province, over 2,000, that we're responsible for. Again, we're doing extra

inspections and so on, to ensure that they're all safe bridges. The Letellier Bridge is one of those bridges that is safe now, even though we know that the load restrictions that are on them. A lot of the farmers and businesses need to have more capacity to cross that bridge. I understand the urgency in the question coming from the MLA. The farming community wanted to be able to haul—it's seeding time, or about to be seeding time, and whether it's hauling pigs to the U.S., crossing that bridge, going from the east side and going to 75, or whether or not it's hauling seed, whatever the examples are, I think we're all on the same page in recognizing the importance of this Letellier Bridge.

Mr. Graydon: I'd like to thank the minister for his answer and his concern that we all are concerned about the importance of the bridge. However, I might point out that, in the past couple of years, first of all, that the bridge has been restricted for six years. That's an economic disadvantage for the whole area. It's not something that just happened yesterday. This bridge has been talked about by the former MLA and by the reeves, as the minister has pointed out. He's had numerous meetings with the reeves on both sides. I'm sure he's had them with the Anishinabe First Nations as well.

However, being that it is a safety issue, as well—and I'm sure that his people are more than competent when they are checking out the bridge—we have found in the last couple of years, one bridge fell in the river that we thought was restricted. In Dominion City, it fell in the river. That prompted the next bridge, just downstream a short distance, to be checked, and my goodness, it was ready to fall in the river. It was closed immediately. So now we have a restricted exit or access to the municipality while that bridge was being repaired. So, when this one goes down, we're just going to put a whole bunch more pressure, or when it's closed, not goes down. I don't want to say that. When it's closed, because it does become a safety issue, then the only exit is over this other bridge that's had a temporary repair, which will lead us, then, up to the St. Jean crossing, which was closed last year for a week for repairs and for safety reasons.

So I point out to the minister that this is a very, very important issue with that particular bridge, not just for the safety factor, of course, which is very important, and which is acknowledged, and I appreciate that, but the economic development within the Rural Municipality of Franklin and within the Anishinabe First Nations, which are adjacent to

the bridge. Now, if there is some way to move this ahead, and I've made this offer privately with the minister in the past. If there is an issue with the environmental impact study by the federal government, which is necessitated because it's navigable waters, I'd be more than happy to work with him on that. If there is a letter, I would like to see the letter. I'll follow it up. I'll follow that up with our federal counterparts. We'd just like to move that ahead.

It also brings up another point. I know the minister has been approached by a number of people for floodproofing the valley in the future. How he would go about that, as we do periodically and more frequently have floods throughout the valley. The 75 highway has gone under water more than once now and becomes closed, which makes the port at Emerson—it needs to be closed, as well. However, if the bridge was completed, does the minister consider the 201 highway to 59, which is all out of water. Would that be an alternate flood route to distribute the produce that needs to come to the hub of Canada. The port at Emerson being the largest port west of Fort Erie now with the most traffic, I believe. It's important to our economy as a province, but also to the economy of the country that there is a plausible alternate flood route should that happen. So the question is that not only is the bridge just for economic benefits to the Municipality of Franklin, but because it's been on the books or been restricted for six years, I would like to see it moved ahead and, if there's anything that I can do.

I would ask the minister today to tell me that, when he applied for the environmental impact study, did he send a letter to the federal government? If he did, could I have a copy of that letter?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, just a couple of recaps on a couple of things with regard to the Building Canada Fund, just a point of clarification. Just so we all understand that the moment an agreement is acceptable to the Province of Manitoba and it's signed, it doesn't mean that Minister Toews' Brink's truck shows up at the Legislature and we have all the cash.

There are all kinds of agreements that would still need to be signed, large projects, community agreements. So it's a little bit cumbersome, even though the agreement is signed. So that will take some time, but, with regard to the Letellier Bridge itself, we will be completing some minor repairs to the existing bridge this summer to ensure, of course, that it's going to be operational and until we get all

the other issues taken care of. The bridge project is a complicated project, as he rightfully mentioned. There are local concerns and First Nations concerns. There's an environmental approval process, as he touched on as well, land acquisition issues, the dairy farm. There's a dairy farmer there that, you know, he wants to sell all of his land. He doesn't want to sell part of it, as I understand it. He feels that you might as well take all of it instead of just a part of it.

There's also a bit of a complicated design. It's not that it's new to us, but the span, for example, is a large span. It's a larger bridge due to the larger river and also the soil conditions there, I've been advised. So there are a lot of challenges, is what I'm trying to say, and when we encountered, for example, the bridge at Portage la Prairie, that bridge was designated a cause for urgent repair, immediately. It wasn't a case of Letellier Bridge that was still able to be used. The one at Portage that we had to replace and spent \$19 million on, that particular bridge needed to be addressed, or that overpass needed to be addressed immediately, so we had to shut it down, as well as No. 2 highway bridge on Wawanesa. I believe it's the Souris River.

As I mentioned before to the MLA, the Letellier Bridge, he has heard, and I have heard, from many of the residents and others on how they would like to be able to carry much greater weights and loads across that particular bridge. I don't think anyone disagrees with that. Of course, there are economics related to this particular structure. It's an important crossover, but we are, and have been, looking at an alternative route as everyone is aware and taking a look at how you bypass Morris, for example. When I say bypass, I mean when there is a large flood.

How do you keep the traffic going? I don't mean just putting a bypass around the town of Morris. That may be an option too because I know the MLA for Morris, when I asked her whether or not she was in favour of a bypass going around that community, she couldn't answer that because the community was split. To bypass a community, she felt, would be a decision a community would have to make. Do they want a bypass going around it, or do they want the Main Street improved going through the community?

* (15:30)

One thing the member can do for sure is that, saying what can I do, well on the Building Canada Fund I would ask that the MLA for Emerson speak to his federal cousins in Ottawa about the Building Canada Fund, and how imperative it is that we get it

signed. He has heard me say how, yes, there is a disagreement on what we believe to be the original agreement. The Premier (Mr. Doer) has stated himself that—and electronic media, print media, other sources of media—we've had the federal ministers stating that it's a project of national significance and it would not detract or take away from the Building Canada Fund. There was another pot of money there that they would be tapping into, huge sums of money to pay for their half of the floodway. So, we do have disagreement. We believe that it's well-documented, showing that we are correct, but we are going to solve it, and I know Minister Toews is the person to do that.

Alternate routes: We've looked at a number of different alternate routes, as the MLA stated, to keep 75 dry and if it can't be kept dry, how does traffic go around? Well, there's PR 205 to 200. We've talked about that stretch, how they can just go right around the flooded areas. PR 200 to PR 201. Also, PR 201 back to PTH 75. So there are a number of ways to get around the high water; we are looking at many different options on how to do that.

There are probably over two dozen different combinations or solutions on what people use. Right now people use Highway 3 and then 14 to essentially bypass the flooded area. When they're coming from Portage la Prairie, let's say they're coming from the west, they might go down Highway 13, down to Highway 23—or Highway, sorry 14, 13 to 14. Or, coming out of Winnipeg where a lot our trucking industry is, they take No. 13—I'm sorry, No. 3—I'm looking at a map here, so they take No. 3 down to 14 and then go to Winkler and then come across to Highway 75 and then go down south. Or, coming up from the south, they take Highway 14 to No. 3.

So that is a bit of a larger detour around the low spots, but there are many combinations that people are looking at. It's something that our department has been looking at for a short while, but it's something that we will have to make our decision with regard to, what we do because we're rehabbing or, quite frankly, reconstructing Highway 75 and fixing it up. So that's something that we'll have to take into consideration as we're fixing this highway.

Sorry for the long answer.

Mr. Graydon: That's fine, Mr. Minister, I thank you for your answer. The answer was probably much shorter than the detour that you need to take to get to Winnipeg when you're in a flood situation.

However, looking at some of the options that you've put out and because you have a five-year and a 10-year program—I'm sure that we all agree that you need to have this type of vision—and you're doing 75 highway, does it then make sense to bring 75 highway above the flood level? Is that an option, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, just a point of clarification.

When we announced the \$4-billion, 10-year commitment those are a commitment of dollars that we have. It's actually more than \$4 billion now, but we do have the allocation. We have to go budget-to-budget, year-to-year to pass our budget, but we have made that commitment that I believe, no matter who the government is, they would absolutely be foolish to detract from those numbers now. The public is aware of it. There is a commitment made and I believe the public also recognized the need for this kind of money. There are large sums to be put in. So there's not 10 years of money locked in if he knows what I mean. We go year-to-year, budget-to-budget. But the commitment is there and it's going to happen and we have committed, over five years, for the first five-year part of that 10-year, and we've laid out as many projects as we can over that five-year period.

We've completed year one. We're into year two now, and, as was mentioned to the previous questioner, my critic on Infrastructure and Transportation, we laid out some of those numbers on bridges and roads, and so on, that we'll be investing this year.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that. The question remains: Is there a possibility that while you're redoing 75 highway that you will bring that up above the flood level, negating any need for an alternate flood route through the valley?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question which is a good one, not that his previous questions, or the previous questions from his colleagues, were not. *[interjection]* Maybe they weren't. But his question's a good one, a good one related to this particular topic because there are a number of challenges related to this.

If you raise 75, you have the Morris River, for example, coming in at Morris and it does raise some challenges with regard to the hydraulics related to the Red River also. If you do raise it—the department has considered that, you know, they're looking at that option of raising that particular stretch of road instead of looking at taking 201 to 200 and then

going to the east of Morris and getting back to dry land because there is a spot around Morris that is a lot lower than other levels.

So you could raise Highway 75 south of Morris to the kind of the St. Jean area and raise that portion, but it should—now, the MLA raised the question which is a good one. Actually, it was a suggestion more than a question: what if you take 201 and you go to Highway 59? Highway 59, for the most part, has always been dry. I mean, you know, our records point to this. It was covered with water during the '97 flood right around the Grand Point area as you get closer to Winnipeg, not that that can't be fixed because we did raise—it's part of the dike now to the east of Grand Point. Highway 59 was raised there when we did the four-laning to the south of Ile des Chênes. But that's another option. That's another good option, but it would mean more work, of course, would have to happen on 59.

No matter what option it is, there's going to have to be more investment made into 75 or those other routes that we're looking at. No matter what, at least I've been advised that we can't raise it to the '97 flood level. And the reason why for this, which makes a lot of sense actually, is because I-29 is closed anyway. That route for 75 going down to the United States, I-29 is shut. It's much lower and the geography of the terrain, I've been advised, I-29 under a '97 flood would be under water anyway. You could raise 75 up, but it wouldn't do us any good unless the United States were to raise the I-29 up. Then, you know, there would have to be the connection; otherwise, we could raise 75 all we want, but our trucks wouldn't be going into the States, nor would we be getting any traffic from the U.S. *[interjection]* So, no, yes. I won't repeat a comment that one of the MLAs said, but it's an option.

There are a lot of options. Having said that, I just wanted to say that I thank the MLA for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) for those suggestions and I do appreciate his comments with regard to this stretch of road.

* (15:40)

Let me just say that overall, Highway 75, if I might just comment, a huge investment has gone into Highway 75 by this government. We acknowledge it. I mean, we've heard so many anecdotal stories about truckers having a telephone on their dash and phoning the radio stations. It was pretty bad, but we're making some huge inroads at Highway 75 and fixing it up. I don't know if anyone in this room has

driven Highway 75 lately, but there is a real difference happening there. I believe that, overall, we're going to look at getting some really good positive results on the tourism side, but the trucking side. Last year we spent over \$35 million on Highway 75. I believe this summer we're going to spend another \$16 million also on Highway 75. I'm sure the MLA notices the big difference himself, driving that particular stretch of road.

Mr. Graydon: I'll certainly acknowledge that there are a lot fewer fuel tanks after you've redone it. It was certainly overdue; it needed to be done, there's no question. Because the port of Emerson, as I've stated before, is the largest port west of Fort Erie, there is a tremendous amount of truck traffic.

I just want to clarify one little thing about the port or I-29 being under the '97 flood. There were people still coming through I-29, through the border, taking the detour through Winkler, over 13, up 13 to No. 3 and coming into Winnipeg. There was still traffic when 75 was closed. Whether it was 75 under water or whether it was the bridge at Morris, whatever it was, 75 was closed and there was still traffic coming. I just wanted to clarify that. I don't know exactly how much of 29 was under water, if it was one lane, two lanes, whatever.

However, going back to the port of Emerson, I would like to just talk about the Building Canada Fund. If I understand right, Minister Toews has indicated to us that there is \$75 million for the Asia-Pacific corridor, a gateway and corridor initiative that is on the table.

I want to ask the minister if he expects that money to sit there, if the Building Canada Fund isn't signed in the near future. What would that money be earmarked for right now at the border?

Mr. Lemieux: Could the MLA for Emerson provide me with a letter or something to show me the \$75 million?

Mr. Graydon: I can provide you with information that was imparted to me. I will ask for that letter. I'm sure that I can get it probably quicker than I got the letter from the minister asking the federal government for their environmental study on navigable waters.

However, I want to point out that the duty-free shop that's on the Canadian side of the border at the Emerson crossing, when it was constructed by Mr. Resch, one in three cars stopped. One in three cars stopped at the duty-free; I think that's fairly

important. Today, one in 33 cars stops. The amount of traffic has increased exponentially; however, because of the holdups at the border, because of the long waiting time at the border, people are reluctant to get out of line to go to the duty-free shop.

If there is \$75 million on the table, I ask the minister why he would not access that money to rebuild a port or to, at least, expedite the traffic that needs to come through. I'll point out that the railroads are being ripped up in our province and throughout the country. More and more trucking is going to be the order of the day. We need and have an opportunity to have one of the premium ports in western Canada. Why would we not move ahead with that?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, let me say a couple of things. There was a lot in that question from the MLA for Emerson, so I'll try to answer some of it—hopefully, all of it.

An Honourable Member: He's very thorough.

Mr. Lemieux: He's very thorough, and I appreciate that very much.

Well, let's start with the Asia-Pacific Gateway. Let me, first of all, give credit where credit's due. Minister Emerson, David Emerson, should be congratulated for his vision of improving the Port of Prince Rupert and the Port of Vancouver. This has been long overdue: backlogs of these ships sitting out off the coast of Vancouver, waiting to get in; all kinds of demurrage charges and, you know, product not getting to where it needs to go. Where does it need to go, generally? Either Ontario or into the Midwest, being Chicago, primarily, but also Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis.

Minister Emerson, No. 1, should be congratulated for his vision on an Asia-Pacific Gateway strategy. Manitoba was pleased to go to Vancouver when Prime Minister Harper, Minister Cannon and Minister Emerson made the announcement and, I believe, the four western premiers—sorry, four western ministers were there, including myself, to approve of this plan.

There is money in a fund that's available for all provinces. We've been fortunate to tap into a piece of this.

Number 1, the federal government has agreed to do a cloverleaf or an interchange at the intersection of Highway 1 and Highway 16. This project is a

\$50-million project out of the Asia-Pacific Gateway money, as I understand it.

Let me step back two steps. There's a corridor in Gateway's fund of money; there's an Asia-Pacific fund of money; and there's a Building Canada Fund. The three different funds all provinces can tap into.

On the Asia-Pacific fund, we have Inkster Boulevard. Inkster Boulevard, Keewatin, is being looked at. We're changing the route. That ties into our inland port vision near the airport. That is about an approximately \$65-million project. The federal government's putting in \$33 million out of the Asia-Pacific Gateway pot of money.

The Portage cloverleaf or interchange is a \$50-million project, and the federal government's putting in 21 million. Now I understand that's out of the gateways and under the gateways and border fund. The gateways and border fund is under the Asia-Pacific initiative overall.

You have a number of different funds that are available to us. The Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) understands that there is a dispute with regard to the Building Canada Fund. We're going to resolve that, and there will be dollars that will flow after many different other subagreements are signed.

The MLA mentioned the \$75-million fund. I have to tell him that this was never raised to me by Minister Cannon with regard to this fund, the federal minister. I have not heard of this fund. Now, possibly the federal government have raised this with others; this has not been raised to me, to the best of my recollection. No one ever raised to me that there was 75 million. Even if there was 75 million—even if there was 75 million—this is a small amount compared to the money that they're planning on taking out of the Building Canada Fund to pay for half their share of the floodway.

How are they still going to make up even another amount, possibly double that, in a way to make up for the money taken out of the Building Canada Fund for the floodway?

Anyway, I digressed slightly, but I'm just, you know, throwing out these questions.

* (15:50)

Now, as I mentioned, I know the MLA—I thank him—is going to provide me with a letter that that 75 million is on the table for the port of Emerson. You know, I have to tell him that, as the MLA, the people at that port need to be thanked for a lot of

reasons. For the first time in our history, I believe, the value of goods shipped crossing that crossing or that border or that gateway, Manitoba is now the leader in western Canada with the value of goods shipped going across into the United States, which is tremendous. So it just shows you that our port or our gateway is very, very important to trade in Canada. We have some of the largest trucking companies in the province. I believe it's anywhere from 65 percent to 70 percent of the goods that we ship into the United States they ship by truck. So it's hugely important.

Now, I don't stop at the duty-free shop, I don't know the gentleman or the people that own the shop, but I hope he doesn't think, because we're looking at fixing the port, that somehow he's won a lottery and he's going to expect huge amounts of money for his duty-free shop. But I don't know the circumstances behind that. I just know that we're looking at making some changes there. It's in a discussion phase, but there's a lot of conversation we're having with many of our neighbours to the south of us going through the United States into Mexico with regard to improving trade.

There are a lot of security issues that people are discussing on an ongoing basis, not only through the Department of Trade, but also Transportation. But I have to say that we're having some really encouraging conversations with our friends in NASCO and people in the United States and into Mexico on looking at security, securing that cargo because one thing that the people and our trading partner in the United States want is ensuring that those goods that come, for example, from Asia into Vancouver by train to Winnipeg, by truck to the United States, that they're secure.

But, just to conclude my answer, is that we're looking at a joint RFP with North Dakota to take a look at the long-range plan for the border. I think that's really imperative to do that, to work with our good friends and neighbours to the south of us to improve that port overall. Coming from the U.S. side and going into the U.S., we need to improve it, but we have to work with our good friends and neighbours to the south of us to make improvements there. Thank you.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Minister, as you congratulated me for covering so many points, I congratulate you for answers to questions that weren't asked. But I certainly appreciate it.

One of the points that you'd brought up, I just need a little bit of clarification when you talk about the different funds—the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative. If my information is correct, that one is together and that the province of Manitoba would have \$175 million. Is that accurate or am I misunderstanding that?

Mr. Lemieux: Just a clarification: No. 1, hallelujah, there is money for infrastructure in Canada. It's been a long time coming. Health care and education got all the attention. Rightfully so; they should, but transportation, infrastructure, infrastructure meaning cleaning up the lakes, and sewer and water, and so on, need the attention as well.

Asia-Pacific Gateway, about \$1 billion, is a merit-based program. Then there's the gateways and borders and corridors, which is a merit-based program. In other words, there's no allocation to provinces based on per capita or anything like that. You have to submit a proposal, and if it has merit, then the feds will either accept it or not accept it, and it's cost-sharing. That's where Highway 16 and No. 1 came out of is the gateways, borders and corridors fund, and it's merit-based again. So it has to be a good program which you make application for.

Now, we are very fortunate that we have, for example, Minister Toews working on our behalf in ensuring that we are heard by the federal government, but secondly, because it's merit based, we also have our own department and others within our government to thank because of the good proposals they've put forward that we've been able to access some of the federal money. But the Building Canada Fund is a separate entity, which I mentioned previously that we're working on. Hopefully, it will be amicably solved, and we'll be able to move on and do a lot more infrastructure projects in the province.

Mr. Graydon: I have a number of other questions, but I also have a colleague that has a burning desire to question the minister. So I'll turn that over to my colleague.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Well, it's always very difficult to follow the act of the Member for Emerson, but I will do my best to do that.

I do have a couple of questions for the minister with respect to the waste-water treatment facilities in the city of Winnipeg. As we know, it was mandated some five years ago at a Clean Environment Commission that the City of Winnipeg upgrade its—

do significant upgrades to the waste-water treatment facilities in the city.

To date, up until lately, there has been no real announcement and commitment on the part of this government with respect to putting some money towards upgrading the facilities, and, as I understand, I'm just wondering if the minister could indicate how much the provincial government is allocating towards this project for this year within this budget.

Mr. Lemieux: The Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) is probably the one these questions should be going to, and I'm not sure if the MLA has had an opportunity to ask the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, who has been dealing with this file, but I can endeavour to find these answers for the MLA.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there any money allocated in this budget for this project for this year?

Mr. Lemieux: As I mentioned previously, I know that there was \$150 million allocated for rural and north with regard to waste water and cleaning up Manitoba's lakes and rivers. As I mentioned, the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs has been dealing with this primarily. I don't have the numbers at my fingertips, but I certainly can endeavour to get that answer.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I'm just asking, actually, just what is within your budget. As I understood, do the entire monies come out of a different government department, or I would have thought that some of the monies would have come from your department with respect to the upgrading of these waste-water treatment facilities. Are you saying that none of the monies come from your department specifically for this project?

* (16:00)

Mr. Lemieux: As I mentioned previously, that No. 1, we're certainly pleased with regard to a number of different initiatives, and this budget, which members opposite voted against with regard to cleaning up Lake Winnipeg. I know their commitment must be just as great as ours to ensure that Lake Winnipeg is taken care of, but we talked about the kind of dollars that are involved. But all the dollars that the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) talked about was always related to partnering with the federal government, as I understand it, and municipal governments, as well. I know, the 150 million I mentioned for rural and northern Manitoba, and as I understand it, there's always an expectation that this

would be a three-way split between municipal governments, as well as the federal government and the provincial government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, absolutely, and it was mandated some five years ago by the Clean Environment Commission, and the recommendation within that report was that it would be shared one-third, one-third, one-third between the Province, the City of Winnipeg and the federal government. It's just that the announcement wasn't made until more recently. Again, this report came out five years ago and the city's been trying to sort of scramble to come up with their portion of this. But the provincial government has made no announcement that they will cover that one-third. More recently, they say they are covering one-third, but I'm just wondering where that money is coming from.

I don't want to get into an argument here. I just want to simply find out what money is allocated within this budget, because it was announced in this budget when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) tabled his budget in the Legislature. Because what ends up happening is that we go around to these different Estimates and we find out, well, no it's not within our government department, it's within another government department, it's within another government department. So I find I have to come to find how much money is actually being allocated by the government within each government department.

So, are you saying that no money is coming from your government department, going towards the upgrading of the waste-water treatment facilities, as announced in this budget by the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, as I mentioned, the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs has been, primarily, the lead minister with regard to this file. We've been talking to, of course, the federal government related to infrastructure, taking a look at their Building Canada Fund and taking a look at the criteria based on their Building Canada Fund. A part of that Building Canada Fund talks about infrastructure related to transportation. It also talks about waste water; not only waste water, but also sewage treatment, and so on. So there are many different pots of money, and also many departments. It's not unusual, of course, for many different departments to split or to look at partnering, internally, on many different projects.

As I mentioned before, and the question was raised by the MLA for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) with

regard to the Building Canada Fund and the kind of dollars that were there. I mentioned that we are in a disagreement with regard to those dollars that the feds, the federal government, I should say, feel that some of that Building Canada Fund money should be used for the floodway, which is incorrect, as we know it. We believe, through all of our sources, that a commitment was made to that total amount of money going to Manitoba in the Building Canada Fund for waste-water treatment, potable water, highways, infrastructure, and so on.

As I mentioned before, if the MLA could certainly pose those questions to the minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs that is related, too, in part, talking to the federal government with regard to the Building Canada Fund, but also with regard to the specifics on dealing with Winnipeg, overall, on many different issues, the City of Winnipeg, that is.

Manitoba Water Services Board, which is in my department, does not fund projects in Winnipeg. They just deal with projects, as I understand it, outside the Perimeter. That is a body that I'm directly responsible for. We have been working, as I mentioned, with the federal government on a Building Canada Fund, which has not been concluded yet. Of course, there are multi-millions of dollars in that particular fund, which has criteria associated with it that deals with waste-water and treatment.

Mrs. Stefanson: The government has recently announced, and there are various numbers as reported in the *Free Press*, or overall numbers that are coming out, but, roughly, it's somewhere around the \$235-million mark that's been announced by the provincial government toward the upgrading of the waste-water treatment facilities in the city of Winnipeg.

My only question for the minister is: Of that \$235 million, is any of it coming from his government department, and how much of it and where would I find that within the Estimates books?

Mr. Lemieux: As the MLA pointed out, this is a multi-year program with different levels of government involved, with negotiations having to take place between the different levels of government.

As a government, we've committed X amount of dollars toward cleaning up Lake Winnipeg. We're expecting that our partners, being the City of

Winnipeg and the federal government, will come forward.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

There are discussions happening on an ongoing basis with regard to resolving the Building Canada Fund itself. There are large amounts of money in this particular fund. We would have to take into consideration those particular dollars and we—as at least I understand it—but, again, I mentioned that the minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs is the one who is the lead minister on this particular file, who is working with the federal government on the Building Canada Fund in trying to resolve those issues and who also works with the City of Winnipeg directly on a plan, working toward cleaning up their waste water and their waste-water treatment.

So it's one that is a little bit more complicated than gives us the opportunity to address here. Having said that, the government of Manitoba has committed X amount of dollars so far, to try to address some of those challenges. I understand that, not necessarily in negotiations, but discussions are happening with other levels of government to try to address the challenges we have, which are huge.

Mrs. Stefanson: My only question for the minister is with respect to—I understand that there have been X number of dollars that the minister has announced. His Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), I think, has announced about \$235 million. I'm just trying to figure out where, within this budget, it's coming from. Is it not at all within the purview of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), within his government department?

Does your department not allocate money towards the City of Winnipeg, or is it just strictly rural and northern Manitoba?

* (16:10)

Mr. Lemieux: Again, I don't think there's any dispute or—well, I don't know. I'm not sure where the MLA stands or their party stands with regard to waste water in the city of Winnipeg. Maybe that's a better question put to her or to their party, where they stand on it. But I know that we've made a commitment with regard to monies to clean up Lake Winnipeg, and not only are we dealing with nitrogen and phosphates with regard to Lake Winnipeg but our intention is to do something about it. For the longest time there wasn't a plan in the province of Manitoba to address—*[interjection]*

So, as I mentioned before, the MLA for Thompson, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) is the lead minister on a particular file dealing with the City of Winnipeg on all kinds of agreements, and this particular one is one that we're working with the City of Winnipeg and the federal government as well.

So, when the MLA has an opportunity to ask the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs with regard to waste water and many other projects and monies that we've allocated to the City of Winnipeg for bicycle paths, for highway projects, these are something that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is best to answer as opposed to I. But having said that, we have a number of agreements that we work with the federal government on and even though they are inside the Perimeter Highway with regard to McGillivray, for example, or Inkster, these are provincial highways that we work with the city on and try to co-ordinate our activities with. We do not necessarily directly fund the City of Winnipeg from my budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. So, am I correct—and I wouldn't want to now put words into the minister's mouth—but am I correct to say that no money is coming from your government department towards the upgrade of Winnipeg's waste-water treatment facilities?

Mr. Lemieux: That's not totally accurate, but, as I mentioned, there's a lot of discussion still happening with regard to, No. 1, the Building Canada Fund and the dollars allocated and the amounts of dollars that are going to be moved from the federal government to the provincial government and also a number of different projects that we're working with the City of Winnipeg on. For example the inland port project. The inland port project is one that we work with the City of Winnipeg on or will be working with the City of Winnipeg to ensure that this project is a viable project.

So, in some circumstances, we work closely with the City of Winnipeg; others, it's Intergovernmental Affairs or other departments that have agreements and work with the City of Winnipeg.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess, and again, I'm really not trying to be confrontational here with the minister at all. Okay, so if it's not totally accurate that no money is coming from your government department, then how much money is coming from your government department?

Mr. Lemieux: As I mentioned to the MLA for Tuxedo?—yes—that she, certainly, is welcome to pose the questions to the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs who deals with the City of Winnipeg. But, as of today, certainly, there are a number of different projects, as I mentioned, that we are working with the City of Winnipeg, but there are no specific dollars defined in our budget for the City of Winnipeg in the budget as we stand today.

Mrs. Stefanson: So I guess the Minister of Finance has announced that the government is going to fund this project, but to date, has not internally come up with where he's going to get the money from. If we don't have it within these Estimates books in terms of how much money they're putting towards this project this year, I mean I would question whether or not—again, it's maybe not the minister's fault if he hasn't been—you know, I think it's incumbent upon him to be able to set aside those dollars within his own government department, but maybe that's not the way things work within his government. I'm not sure.

It does concern me that the Minister of Finance would make an announcement that the minister is now saying that it's not totally accurate that some of this money within his government department may go towards the waste-water treatment facilities of the City of Winnipeg, but he can't say how much or what have you. I mean, I just, it's sort of a simple question. I'm just trying to figure out where the funds are coming from. We're very much in favour of upgrading these facilities. You know, I just want to know where the money is coming from to be able to do this because even the amount that has been announced does not represent one-third of the overall figure of the \$1.8 billion.

You know, if none of it is coming from his government department, I mean, I think he should just say so and be done with it. But it does raise concerns to me that the Minister of Finance would make such an announcement without sort of first consulting with the individual government departments from where the money will come from. I would assume that some of the money, given that it is the Department of Infrastructure, that some of the money would come from your department. But you know, I guess at this point, you can't tell me how much, or where, is going to go towards this project. To me that is of concern and, yes, I will go and pose these questions to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, but the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is not in charge of the Department of

Infrastructure and Transportation. That's why I'm here asking you the questions within your government department: How much is going to the City of Winnipeg within your government department that will be allocated towards the waste-water treatment facility? I can only ask you that because you are the minister responsible for this government department. I cannot ask him that. He can give me an overall, what they're maybe looking to do towards the overall picture here, but he cannot tell me how much is specifically going to come within your government department. That is within your purview.

* (16:20)

So that's why I'm here asking these questions, and I will be asking them of all the different ministers who could potentially be contributing to this project to see how much in reality this government is really putting towards the waste-water treatment facility upgrades.

So, again, I'll just ask the minister, and I'll leave it at this. I mean, is there money from your government department going towards the waste-water treatment facility in the city of Winnipeg within this budget, that has been announced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)?

Mr. Lemieux: There will be monies in place to address this. We don't make commitments without having the dollars to do so. We also have the Water Services Board or branch, that is within my department, that allocates monies to waste-water treatment and to water treatment projects.

If the MLA for Tuxedo does ask the Minister of Finance, I'm sure he'll be able to expand on specific dollars, but there are a number of negotiations taking place right now. There are partners needed to be brought in to get their commitments with regard to these projects, and we anticipate that's going to happen, hopefully, in the very near future.

There are many waste-water or water treatment programs that take place within my department, and those have been talked about through the last few days in my particular budget.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the minister's time to deal with some of these important issues, and I have a couple of quick questions in regard to some perusal of the comments from some of my colleagues from the last few days, from last week, that were here when I wasn't able to attend.

One of them particularly is to do with Highway 340 in the Wawanesa area, between Wawanesa and Shilo, presently a gravel road with some base. I wanted to just bring it to the minister's attention that not only is there a greater amount of persons moving back and forth between Shilo and Wawanesa, there are also 40 school kids, approximately two busloads every day, that go back and forth from Shilo down to Wawanesa to school in Wawanesa, the kids from Shilo, over 340. I know that the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) has asked these questions and done a good job of it, I just wanted to let the minister know that I, as well, have talked to the mayor of the community of Wawanesa, who's still concerned that they'd like to see more being done.

Obviously, a full paving and an upgrade of that road would be a huge plus because there is a growing amount of traffic going into the city of Brandon, as persons locate in Wawanesa and travel into Brandon, but can the minister just tell me what his thoughts are? Does it move up the priority pole any, I guess, if we can look at these school kids? I wasn't aware that there were as many personally; there are about 40 I'm told, moving back and forth every day in school buses up and down that road, at certain times of the year, in the fall, competing with trucks from the potato industry that work in that area, and, of course, the dust from this area is exceptional. It's about 7.2 kilometres, I understand, in that area that need to be upgraded. Can he just give me an update on that?

Mr. Lemieux: Just to conclude, I guess, a comment with regard to the previous MLA for Tuxedo with regard to water issues. As I mentioned to her before, Manitoba is definitely committed to implementing the recommendations of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship report. We've already provided funding equal to more than half of the city of Winnipeg's west end plant, and that's important, but, consistent with CEC recommendations, we're committed today to providing one-third provincial funding for the city's three waste-water plants. I think that's on the record, and I know these initiatives will have a major impact on reducing both nutrient and phosphorus levels overall. I know the federal government has not agreed to providing its one-third share. We've talked about it.

There have been many, many discussions going on with the Building Canada Fund, for example. I know the feds are trying to work out an agreement with us as to where those dollars are going to take place. We're talking about large sums of money to make up lost time, quite frankly, with regard to waste

water in the province, and we've taken a number of different initiatives. So we're working through that, and I know that I'm working co-operatively with my colleagues the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton), also the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and having negotiations through the federal government and also with the City of Winnipeg to put this plan together.

Anyway, just to conclude my comments with regard to that particular initiative, I'm wanting to say that, with regard to Wawanesa, we've talked with the MLA for Minnedosa. She raised this issue with regard to 340. We're talking about the bridge at Wawanesa, talking to the rural municipality as to taking over the heritage bridge and what would come of that if they did. So the department out of Brandon is negotiating, at least as I understand it, talking to the community, trying to determine where we go with regard to this particular project and what's the long-term vision for this stretch of road with regard to bituminous product on this particular stretch of road. No decisions have been made as yet. There have been no decisions made on what do we do with this particular road and how much work is necessary to put into it, but I know that those discussions are happening at the regional level, as I understand it.

Mr. Maguire: I had no questions until the minister answered the one from my colleague that's been asking the questions on water. I may come back to that in a minute.

I just wanted to say that the heritage bridge, I believe, would be on 344 coming into Wawanesa from the south from the west side. Is that correct? Or is it on 340?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Lemieux: Yes.

Mr. Maguire: That's what I thought. The heritage bridge on the south side is not on the road that I was in question of, 340, and I would appreciate just an update from the minister as to other discussions that he's had either with the base in Shilo, with the City of Brandon, with the mayor of Wawanesa. I know he's had good conversations with them in the past in regard to some of the projects that have gone on there, certainly around the whole issue of fixing the bridge on No. 2 highway last year. I appreciate the work that was done there.

But this is just an issue of safety for the children on that gravel road, the 340 going north to Shilo, and

can he indicate to me any work that will be done there in the near future?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, currently, the answer is no. But, as I mentioned, that doesn't mean that there will not be any work done on it. We've talked to the mayor, for example, and the community, and we've also had discussions with others, but there are 19,000 kilometres of highway in the province of Manitoba. We do have a substantial budget to invest into these roadways, and we're going to have to determine over a certain period of time, even though the majority of the roads are allocated or have been out in a five-year plan, four years left now. There still is some room to take a look at other projects. But right now, currently, there is no intention to RTAC or to pave this particular stretch of road.

* (16:30)

Mr. Maguire: In regard to the subagreements that the minister's referred to before the Building Canada project is signed between the province and the federal government, I take from his answer that he just gave to the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) in regard to waste-water treatment plants, that that's one of these subagreements that he'd like to see signed before they sign on to the Building Canada Fund.

Mr. Lemieux: Not necessarily, no.

Mr. Maguire: I was just wondering if the minister had given me a reply there or not. I just ask for clarification of his reply.

Mr. Lemieux: Not necessarily.

Mr. Maguire: I know that there is a number of infrastructure projects, perhaps I noted in the Member for Brandon West's (Mr. Borotsik) question in Estimates. I appreciate the work that he's done in asking the questions around the 1st Street bridge or 1st Street paving, 18th Street bridges, bypass, some of those areas that are being worked on. I had a bit of a dispute over when and how 18th Street bridge will be finished, now that it's partway done and come to a stall. Can he give me an example of some of the subagreements that obviously are known to he and the federal government around areas that need to be included, and are they right down to projects in communities on arenas and some of those things as he indicated in his previous answer?

Mr. Lemieux: First of all, under the Building Canada Fund there is a framework agreement that the federal government wants people to sign off on.

Then, after that, there is a secretariat that the federal government and the provincial government work together, and also municipalities have a role to play in that.

There are no subagreements as such to parcel off this amount of money from the feds. We should take one step back and say, first of all, you have to agree on the Building Canada Fund. What kind of dollars are we talking about? That's what's in dispute right now: what kind of dollars is in that fund? Right now, as I mentioned before, there are negotiations, not necessarily negotiations but meetings taking place as to clarifying how much money is in that fund.

We're awaiting the federal government's response, obviously, to that because they're saying that half or a good portion of the money should come out of the Building Canada Fund and applied to the floodway. Our contention is that that was never the case. It was always supposed to be a separate fund of money. What is laid out in their criteria, the federal government's criteria, is, without getting into a lot of detail, is waste-water programs, water, water treatment, infrastructure, transportation infrastructure. That could be bridges, roads.

So there are a number of different criteria. The feds are saying, sign the framework agreement; that means you're buying in to our criteria on how the money should be spent. Well, we're still in many ways at step one because we have to determine how much is in that pot of money or how much is in that fund that we're going to be able to work with because we do have to split it. We have to work with the feds and the municipalities on many projects.

As I understand it, very similar to the MRIF fund that is now complete. There are still a number of applications in there, but the MRIF fund is complete now. As I understand it, there isn't any money left in the MRIF package, the previous infrastructure package that was there. There are no subagreements as of yet. None have been signed. There just aren't any. We have to determine what kind of moneys were talking about and agree upon with the federal government. I know the MLA for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) threw out the \$75 million figure and that may be out there someplace. I'm not sure if that's for Highway 75 or if that's just for Emerson as the gateway or the corridor. I'm not sure where that is, but, as I mentioned, that has never been mentioned to me by any federal minister that that specific amount of money be used for the port of Emerson.

Mr. Maguire: I know there are a number of infrastructure projects that I would like to ask the minister questions on quickly. As we move into the supplementary information that has been supplied here, I see, as the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) pointed out, \$172 million for the floodway expansion in this year, \$213 million last year. I know that the indication in the sub-notes here are that the project is coming to a completion, so there's fewer dollars being spent this year.

Can the minister indicate what the major spending allotments will be? Is this mainly just earth movement this year, re-grooming banks, and when will this project be finished?

Mr. Lemieux: The floodway is a huge success, a huge success for many reasons, not only the employment that the floodway itself has provided to many Manitobans, for example, the Aboriginal people that are working on the floodway, the activity that's happened there. We are one-in-300-years' flood protection right now for the city of Winnipeg, and, of course, that protection increases, quite frankly, by every day that goes by.

We'll, certainly, have an update as to where we're at with regard to the particular channel and where we're at specifically with regard to years of protection.

This is a \$665-million project. Right now it's on time, on budget. We have employed over a thousand people on the job; 250 pieces of heavy equipment; 50 different companies involved in this project. We are told that the spinoffs on this project over five years is about \$2.5 billion, maybe closer to \$3-billion worth of spinoffs.

We have completed PTH 59 south bridge, for example, Trans-Canada No. 1 bridge; relocation of the city of Winnipeg aqueduct. What's ongoing right now and is still taking place is channel excavation. There are a couple of bridges that we're also doing, railway bridges, that is; replacement of CPR Keewatin railway bridge; inlet control structure improvements; outlet control structure enhancements or expansion; west dike improvements.

There are a lot of things that we still have to do, but the deadline that we had with regard to completion is still on schedule. Construction on the project is progressing on schedule with, certainly I would say, a good 65 percent, 70 percent of the channel excavated so far.

So we are making a lot of progress on this particular project. When completed, Winnipeg will have a one-in-700-year flood protection. As a Manitoban from rural Manitoba, we understand and know that the capital city of Winnipeg, if it were inundated with a flood of that kind of magnitude, would cause about \$12-billion to \$14-billion worth of damage, at least that's what I've been advised. We just can't have that happen.

To date, we started off, I believe, with a one-in-90-year flood protection. Now we're a one-in-300-year flood protection and that, of course, is improving every month that we work on the channel.

Mr. Maguire: The number that the minister has used in regard to another '97 flood, I believe he said, \$12-billion to \$14-billion damage that would be there, if it was to occur again.

*(16:40)

Mr. Lemieux: I understand that Manitoba's recorded history of the largest flood is the one of 1826, and we are at the one-in-300-year protection. We're at that now. My understanding is that, if Winnipeg were inundated with a huge flood, there would be a \$12-billion, at the very minimum, a \$12-billion cost. The feds pick up 90 percent of that, and the Province is responsible for 10, as I understand it. I've always been advised that that \$12-billion figure is there with regard to damage to the city of Winnipeg, should a huge flood overtake the city. I understand, 1997, we were literally just inches away from that floodway being over-passed or Winnipeg being flooded, and the government of the day did the best they could at the time to try to fight this flood. I know communities in my own constituency, like St. Adolphe, were under a great deal of stress, as well as Grande Pointe, which was inundated. Many homes suffered flooding there, so we now have a dike surrounding Grande Pointe. Highway 59, the twinning of it acts as the eastern side of the dike, and there's a huge dike that goes around that particular community.

I understand that the flood protection there, I may be corrected, but I understand it's two-feet plus '97. The damage, I've always been told, is the—a major flood could cause \$12 billion in damages to the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Maguire: I don't dispute those numbers with that level of a flood. The numbers I looked at, I think, if another '97 one came along, that, you know, 6 billion was the number that I'd heard.

Can the minister give me a listing at some point of the 50 companies that he's done—that have done work on the floodway at this point?

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for the question. There are, as I mentioned, approximately 50 companies, as I understand it, that have been working on this project, doing various jobs, as I mentioned, First Nations companies, Aboriginal companies included. I will certainly endeavour to give a list of companies—whatever's on the public record, I'm certainly willing to share.

Mr. Maguire: That's all I'm asking the minister, is that if I could get a listing of those companies. Perhaps the work that they've done. I would assume they would all be on the public record; I don't know what wouldn't be. So, if he can provide me with that, that would be great.

On time, on budget, can the minister just tell me what on time is and exactly when, projection-wise, from the initial contract, when the floodway is projected to be finished?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Canada and Manitoba have committed to the full 665 to the floodway project. Currently, as I mentioned, the project is on time and on budget. I was just looking to see if I could find some of those companies that I listed. But, to the best of my understanding, is that there are over a thousand people and over 200 pieces of equipment, heavy equipment, that have been used in over 50 companies, including construction, engineering and suppliers. They continue to work on this particular project.

So, as I mentioned before, indeed, we are on time and on budget, and Canada and Manitoba have agreed and committed to the full 665 to the floodway project.

Mr. Maguire: I didn't know my question was that difficult. I appreciate the minister for the depth that he was looking into—my question was, when are you going to finish it? When will the floodway be finished, and, I know, on time?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, 2009, as I understand it. I've been advised 2009 is the completion date for the floodway. It's going to be on budget and on time.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate that. He will then endeavour to provide me with a listing of those some 50 companies and their workings. But I don't need it right now. We'll have some time tomorrow, too,

perhaps, or he can provide that to me at his earliest opportunity, if he could. That would be great.

I want to say, just in relation to on budget, then what the minister is saying is, then, that they were able to bring this infrastructure project back on track in regard to having been 135 million over to start with, with the six bridges that they cancelled. to be able to bring it back into that venue, and over the last two years, then, there's been no change in the budgeting?

Mr. Lemieux: We weren't over anything, Madam Chairperson. The reason some of those bridges were not included in the plan was because they had, as I understand it, through the federal government and others, that there were no hydraulic issues related to those bridges. In other words, by the bridges that had been left—for example, let's use Highway 15 and Dugald Road. That particular bridge has no impact on a huge flood in Manitoba. That's the reason why there were a number of bridges put forward by the federal government that said, I don't know if it was their engineers or who spoke to them, but the point is that because there were no hydraulic impacts as a result of those bridges, there was no need to replace them.

As I stated, that 665 budget is one that we're prepared to stay with. Indeed, we are going to be on budget and on time on this particular project.

Mr. Maguire: But the initial contract—I just asked the minister, maybe he can correct it—did indicate that those bridges would be changed. You know, maybe it was an engineering decision afterwards, obviously, to go ahead; they found that there was no need to replace them. I don't have a problem with that, but they were part of the initial design of the original floodway project.

* (16:50)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, there were a lot of things looked at, and the bridges were one that people did look at. Whether they looked at the railway bridges and looked at the other bridges, that was a determination from the Floodway Authority looking at the particular projects. As I mentioned before, when people do hone down a particular project into what is necessary to complete a one-in-700-year flood protection, people look at the hydraulic impacts of bridges and so on. So, as I mentioned before, without trying not to repeat myself, is that when it was determined that these bridges would not impact on the security, in a negative way—if they're

not going to impact negatively on the city of Winnipeg, then it wasn't necessary to replace them. That was the determination that was made by the Floodway Authority, the federal government, I understand, and I mean the engineers and staffing that work for them.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate to me what has been done with the girders that were already formed and built to be used on those bridges when the decision was made not to go ahead with it? Maybe you can just inform me on what they've done with the girders that they had tendered for and had built and where they're being stored.

Mr. Lemieux: I'm sorry. I was just talking to my deputy minister. Sorry, my critic just asked—repeat the question. Sorry. I just caught the end of it.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister just inform me, then, when the decision was made not to replace those bridges, there were girders that were tendered for and built for those structures—can he just tell me what has been done with them and where they're being stored?

Mr. Lemieux: The girders that were produced were just the girders that were needed. I don't want the MLA to leave the impression, or I wouldn't want to leave the impression, that there are a number of girders being stored some place and so on. That's not the case. We just used the girders that were necessary that we needed.

Mr. Maguire: I just wanted to touch base on another area, and that is the Perimeter Highway around the city of Winnipeg, if I could move to that. I think that the circumstances are that there is a good deal of work that could be done in that area. I know that there are safety issues around the Perimeter in regard to overpasses and this is part of the vision of the Gateway Council. I'd like to spend some time with the minister on that as well and appreciate the fact that he did give a reply to the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) on that area. But there are two overpasses, particularly on the area. One would be Highway 59, Lagimodiere and the Perimeter Highway. I mean, this is a confusing area. It's created a lot of accidents. Some of that area needs to be upgraded.

I've had many people refer it to me as the confusion corner of the Perimeter Highway, and I appreciate their succinctness when they mentioned that to me. Hopefully, there aren't that many accidents at Osborne and Pembina, but would the minister be able to give me an update of where

improvements could be made and how they're being budgeted for in that particular area?

Of course, also, there was an accident with fatalities out on McGillivray and the Perimeter Highway, pardon me, in the Oak Bluff area back last summer as well. They're both major areas, both major arteries, that one, in particular, going out to both No. 2 and No. 3 highways. I wonder if the minister can just give me an indication of what other plans he may have, particularly for those two areas, No. 1 priority being the north Perimeter area there and the overpass at Oak Bluff and as well the rest of upgrades for Perimeter Highway.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, a couple of projects, just, with regard to the northeast Perimeter, a huge investment on behalf of our government with regard to the northeast Perimeter. But Highway 59, there's \$3 million, approximately three million, and, also, No. 9 and the Perimeter, \$2 million to take a look at that particular overpass. Last year, I think we spent close to \$7 million with regard to the northeast Perimeter. So a lot of monies have been going into the northeast Perimeter. It's going to be complete. Looking forward, of course, the interchange at 59 and Lagimodiere and the northeast Perimeter, that is a year's—or a year—it's not this particular summer. That's going to take place at a different time, but that construction's not going to be happening this summer.

Mr. Maguire: In relationship to the increase in speed limit to 110 in Manitoba that's proposed by the traffic board, or that they're looking at, recommended to the minister, can he give me an indication of what would be needed to be done? I appreciate the fact that he's not moving ahead on the Perimeter Highway with that. At least, that's what I've heard, at least from the recommendations there.

What work would need to be done to satisfy the minister and his department in regard to the safety of the Perimeter before he would want to move to 110? Then, just a filling-in as well of the circumstances between the Saskatchewan border and Winnipeg, because, of course, east of Winnipeg, the speed limit is not being recommended to be increased until further work is done there, which I would concur with. I have no problem with it going up, as probably the minister knows, but need to make sure that there are safety issues taken care of, and how soon they would move in regard to providing paved shoulders on No. 1 Highway where it doesn't have it. I appreciate the fact that the area—the new parts out

where I am on the western side—does have paved shoulders.

Can he just make comments in regard to those kinds of improvements and what his plans are with moving forward with that increased speed limit?

An Honourable Member: Let's call it 5 o'clock.

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

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

As has been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I had brought in a delegation of people to meet with you, Minister, back on February 26, and life wouldn't be complete if I didn't ask you about the Treherne Dam. I remember very well that day telling you that I was hoping I could make it snow by saying there was very little moisture out there. We're in a drought situation right now in southern Manitoba, and this is serious. It's going—and, again, I hope I can say that and we get lots of rain so we're not there, but has anything transpired from your department in regard to the Treherne Dam?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Chairperson, there was a study on the Boyne River watershed—but the Treherne Dam that the member referred to—and it was anticipated that that study would be done by March 31, however it is in a draft form, because some issues have been raised by the technical committee. So there is still work to be done. Of course, when that's done, the next study required is the geotechnical investigation of the dam site. There's also supposed to be a community open house, and I don't believe that that open house has been held yet either.

It is in the works in a draft form, but it has not been received by the government yet, by ministers.

* (14:50)

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Minister, I believe the open house now is set for May 15 in Carman. That's my latest that I heard from Pat Sparling.

There have been some delays in getting these studies in to you. I'm just wondering if there's any way that the department can, or has, or will help the Treherne Dam committee in any way to move this forward.

Again, just, given the drought conditions that we could possibly be facing right now, it just makes this item that much more critical to happen. So, if there's any way the department could move this project ahead, it would certainly be appreciated.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, we have two staff that are working with the proponents to—and our goal is to move with them to move this plan along, but we're still working on it. It's important that we get the study, and that that study is presented, so then decisions can be made from there.

The member asks if we're supporting the group. Yes, we've got staff working with them and will continue to have staff working with them.

Mr. Pedersen: I am in regular contact with Pat Sparling. So we really need to move this project ahead. This is becoming more critical as we move on.

Just on a different matter, I talked to your deputy minister today. I'm not even sure if I can pronounce it correctly, his phytosanitary certificates. I just want to—so it's on the record, I had a call from a cattle feedlot last night. They've been hauling wet mash out of the ethanol plant in Walhalla. They've been doing this for the past two years. Yesterday, he got stuck at the border for some number of hours because he didn't have a phytosanitary—is it phyto or photo?—

An Honourable Member: Phytosanitary.

Mr. Pedersen: —phytosanitary certificate from the plant, but your deputy minister indicated that he would get back to me on that. I just wanted to put it on record that; again, this is just CFIA creating more rules. Anything that you can do in your department

to try and move this forward would certainly be appreciated.

Ms. Wowchuk: I thank the member for bringing that matter to our attention. I know that this is a very important product for livestock producers. I guess, when a new product comes on to the market, CFIA doesn't know about it, and they have to be concerned that, if it's an animal feed that's coming across, that it meets certain standards. Because it's a new product, those standards probably have to be developed, but, since you've raised the issue, my staff is looking into it. Once we have more information, we can provide that for you.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, this is in regard to MASC Stocker Loans.

An Honourable Member: Can we go to MASC?

An Honourable Member: Yes, sure. Let's do that.

Mr. Chairperson: You still have the floor.

Mr. Pedersen: The MASC Stocker Loans program, and from personal experience, I've been involved in the feeder co-ops for—since their inception, actually. I was involved in the second feeder co-op that started in Manitoba. We always had very strict credit requirements for any members. Certainly, anybody could join, but, if you were going to get money out of us, you certainly had to adhere to the credit stipulations.

The MASC Stocker Loans program as of December 31, '07, was \$21 million in arrears.

First of all, what is—while that's 2007, I guess that's close enough for right now—any plans to how you're going to recoup this money?

*(15:00)

Ms. Wowchuk: I'd like to introduce my staff that's joining me at the table: Mr. Neil Hamilton, who is the president and CEO of MASC; Charlene Kibbins, who is senior vice-president of planning and lending programs; and Jim Lewis, who is vice-president of finance and administration.

With regard to the question that the member raised with regard to the Stocker Loans, that number reflects, sort of, a moment in time, and that number reflects what the situation was at the end of January—the number at the end of December. At that time that number was a little bit high because there were people who had made a commitment to sell their stockers and were anticipating paying back by that time, but maybe had to carry the animals a little bit

longer. If you look at the end of the fiscal year, the amount in arrears is about 1 or 2 percent—what the write-offs would be is about 1 or 2 percent. So the write-offs aren't that high, and the number, that particular number, is high at that time because of when people were selling their animals.

Mr. Pedersen: So, when I look at this, and for 2002-03, arrears, the dollar value on Stocker Loans was \$19.5 million, the arrears on the Stocker Loans were 11 percent, and \$2-million worth in arrears for the current fiscal year, has that money been collected? Are those cattle still out there? In 2002-2003, there was \$19.5 million in value of Stocker Loans on a fiscal year base. So, in other words, in '02-03 you lent out \$19.5 million. You have 11 percent in arrears, which translates into \$2 million, a little over \$2.1 million in arrears. Has that money since been collected? My experience in the Feeder Co-op, boy, if you didn't collect that money right away, those cattle are gone. So do you have the cattle? Do you have assets for that loan in control?

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member's talking about 2002-03, the animals that were financed there are long gone. They've been sold. So the amount in arrears that he talked about is \$2.1 million. That would be collected already, but what I said was there could be write-offs of between 1 percent and 2 percent on those sales. The amount that you are reflecting here as being in arrears, those cattle are sold, that money has been paid back.

If it shows that it's in arrears, that means that they may have taken a little bit more time. They may have called up and said, you know, my cattle just haven't finished right. I need another month, or something could have happened with the business. So that, in arrears, does not mean that they don't pay it back. It means that they have asked for a little bit more time, but it is paid back. That's the requirement of the program.

Mr. Pedersen: So we have \$21-million worth of a little more time, here, dating back to '02-03? Like, you're showing loans. You're telling me that this money—if this money's actually been collected from '02-03, then why is it showing up as a total of \$21 million now? My guess is that those cattle are long gone and the loan is in arrears, and you're telling me how many percent have been written off, but, in fact, this still—if it's written off, does it show up—okay, the question is: If the loan has been written off does it still show up as arrears?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, Mr. Chairman, it doesn't show up as arrears. If it was written off it shows up as a write-off, but the number that the member is referring to is the size of the portfolio. It is not the amount that is in arrears.

Mr. Pedersen: So how do you propose to collect the \$2.1 million leading back to '02-03 when you don't have security on them, because the cattle were the security? Correct? The cattle become the security and if the cattle are gone, do you still have security?

Ms. Wowchuk: I wonder if the member would share with us which document he's referring to. That would be helpful to talk about. It might help my staff to clarify.

I'll hand this document back to the member in a minute, but if I look at the first row, the first row is the amount of the loans. The one at the last row is the amount of arrears in that particular year, but those arrears don't continue to carry over and over with; they're dealt with in that year. Once the cattle are sold payment is made, but there could be an arrear for a short period of time, might be a few months or a month, whatever is needed. When the cattle are sold—2003 is done with, if there is a certain amount of write-off, and we said there could be 1 percent to 2 percent, it's written off each year. It is not rolling over and over, so there is no total amount of arrears that has piled up under the Stocker Loan Program. It's dealt with year by year.

Mr. Pedersen: So what you're telling me then is that we're at 1 percent to 2 percent of \$21 million has been written off. To me it looks like \$21 million is in arrears as of December 31, but you're telling me this is just the total of arrears. So what is the actual number in arrears as of December 31, '07?

Ms. Wowchuk: As of January 31, 2008, the total amount of arrears in the program is \$3,665,000, but, again, those are arrears that people have delayed in making their payment but will still make payments. When the cattle are sold, there will be a recovery.

* (15:10)

Mr. Pedersen: So what's the value of the cattle as of January 31, '08, as collateral against these loans, using current values I would hope?

Ms. Wowchuk: The total amount of the stocker loans, as of January 31, 2008, is \$16,596,000. In arrears there is about 3.7 million, and those loans are secured by cattle that are worth far more than that amount.

Mr. Pedersen: Can you give me a breakdown of how many cattle are securing these \$16-million worth of loans, and the other part, if I understood correctly, the 3.7 in arrears was part of the \$16 million? Correct? Okay. So what is the value—you must have a book value on there of the cattle that are as inventory?

Ms. Wowchuk: We'd have to go back through records. We don't have that number here, as to how many cattle are secured. And, again, that number changes because some are sold off and some are being held for a longer period of time, but we do not have the number of animals that are secured. We know that we have 355 loans. We don't have a number, but there are 355 loans.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I'm certainly interpreting this differently than what I am hearing from you, too, but I know that, at least I presume that the only security on these loans is cattle. I think that's what I'm hearing. I think those cattle are supposed to be ear tagged, and I know in quite a few cases they haven't been. I'm just wondering how you recover if those cattle go down the road. I know that a couple of the areas that they weren't tagged. Once those cattle went on a truck and had been sold, where's your security? It's gone.

You say you let some of it go into arrears and it's paid at a later date. Where's the security? How do you collect it?

Ms. Wowchuk: The animals are the security. If the individual sells the animals they are required to pay back the loan. What I was saying was that sometimes they ask for a little bit more time to pay off the loan if they want to feed the animals a little bit longer, but, if the animals are sold, then they have to pay off the loan. They are the only security that we have. They are required to be ear tagged. They are inspected and sometimes they are inspected more than once depending on the situation, but those animals are the security and when those animals are sold, the loan must be paid back.

Now, the member says what happens if somebody sells the cattle and doesn't pay off the loan. That's fraud, and then if somebody doesn't pay off the loan but sells the cattle, steps are taken to rectify that situation.

Mr. Briese: There's a co-op feeder club program too, which, it appears to me, seems to be in—the government seems to be in competition almost with that co-op's feeder program, and I did send a letter to

the minister sometime ago on that issue. They, it appears to me, are also required by quite a few of the rules that are in there—they're under a lot stricter criteria than the government is on their stocker loans. I've seen the rules that they operate under. It appears that they're going to disappear because they can't meet the restrictions that are placed on them, and plus the government is in competition with them. I'd just like your view on that whole program.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is implying that the Stocker Loan Program is in competition with the co-op feeder program; in fact, they're serving two different groups of people. There are 10 associations operating effectively, but there are some people that don't want to belong to associations, so we've put another program together to help them. The member also said that he's afraid that livestock associations are going to die; I can tell you that in 2006-07 there was \$18,733,000 worth of activity. In '07-08, there was \$22,630-\$22,000,000; million and thousand are really hard numbers for me, you have to add more zeroes on and sometimes in the book, they don't put the zeroes down—depends if it's a bill or a cheque. Anyway, for the '07-08, it was \$22,630,000, so that's an increase of \$4,000,000 in activity. So the associations are not going down and they are meeting a different need. I would just say on the other question, the performance of the programs are very good. There is not a great loss, but they are serving two different markets and sometimes there is that need, that's why we put the two programs in.

Mr. Briese: One of those co-ops has went down, and I can't remember which one it is, but I know there is one that's gone. I just wanted to put that on the record.

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, I believe Vita did go down over 10 years ago, yes, but that's way back.

* (15:20)

Mr. Pedersen: I want to change—I don't know what it's called exactly. Was it the ruminant enhancement program, the 3 percent payout to cattle producers, if that's the right name? It started out as 3 percent. Now, apparently, it's 2 percent, and if there's more, if there's money available. What's the status of that program? It's being administered by MASC. It's through the AgriStability 60-40 financing. Correct me if I'm wrong on that, but whatever it is, what is the status? Are the cheques going to be rolling anytime soon?

Ms. Wowchuk: We put in \$14.5 million into the program. This is not a federal-provincial split program; it's a provincial program. We put a max of 3 percent of eligible net sales. As with some of these other programs, we pay out the first 2 percent, and then, if all of that money is expended and all the needs are met, then we can make a second payment, but we can't go over the amount, over the 14.5. So we have to start the payments, look at how much we're going to have to pay out and then make a final payment. So that's what we do.

Cheques have started to flow this week from the program, and a million dollars has already flowed from the program. So the money is getting into the producers' hands, and it is a provincial program. Farmers should have some of them today, I hope.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Good afternoon, Madam Minister.

Ms. Wowchuk: Good afternoon, Member for Russell.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Minister, we were talking this morning about some of the issues in rural development, or the Rural Initiatives division of your department, and you were going to table, for our information, the feasibility projects that have been worked on in your department over the course of last year. I was wondering whether you had them.

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member could ask another question, I'd ask my assistant to go back downstairs to my desk because I think I left it there, but I do have a copy of it. If you could ask another question in the meantime that will—

Mr. Derkach: That isn't a problem. We can carry on with some other issues because, in the broad areas that are funded by VLTs, I did want to ask the minister, this quality of life that 3 percent of the VLTs funds are going to, can she explain to me what the 3 percent quality-of-life initiatives are that are being funded by VLT funds?

Ms. Wowchuk: There are four items in that line. There is the advanced aging seniors directorate. There is rural policing, beach safety services and a program for mobility disadvantaged.

Mr. Derkach: This is obviously a new area that is being funded through VLT funds, that are supposed for economic development in rural Manitoba. I don't understand how advanced aging, rural policing and beach patrols have anything to do with rural economic development in Manitoba.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, these activities that I've outlined here enhance the quality of life in rural Manitoba. If you have an enhanced quality of life, if you have services there for people, that does lead to more opportunities for people to be in the rural area. This is part of a package about maintaining social quality of life and then being able to enhance the opportunity for economic development. It's all part of a package.

Mr. Derkach: This is all a part of confusing the public and trying to hide things from the public. Because advanced aging, we have a department that is responsible for seniors and is responsible for healthy living, and if you live in the urban centres, what the minister is then telling me, that these are the departments that are responsible for those programs but, in rural Manitoba, all of a sudden the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives is responsible for that area. That's baloney.

And then when you talk about rural policing, isn't that a Justice issue? Isn't that supposed to be covered through Justice? When you talk about beach patrols, isn't that part, again, of policing and Justice in the province of Manitoba? Mobility disadvantaged, isn't that covered under Healthy Living and Seniors Directorate?

I mean, why are we even talking about those issues in this department when they have nothing to do with this department? They have nothing to do with economic development. This is just another way to scam the rural VLT money and to direct it into subsidizing what should be done by other departments.

I'd like to know how much money, in total, is going to each of these areas under the quality of life issues. How much money is going to advanced aging, rural policing, beach patrol and mobility disadvantage?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member knows full well that there is a crossover between departments. There are services that are provided by other departments that are important to the quality of life for people in rural Manitoba. This has everything to do with providing services to rural people.

On the mobility disadvantaged, it's \$125,000. On beach safety services, it's—I'm sorry, I'm looking at last year's. This year on the mobility, 125. For beach safety it is 236. For rural policing it's \$2 million. For advanced aging, that was a program that was there

last year, setting up the publication, there is no cost to that one this year.

* (15:30)

Mr. Derkach: So the minister now has to transfer money from the VLT program to Justice for \$2 million for rural policing. Is that right?

Ms. Wowchuk: There is \$2 million from the REDI, Rural Economic Development Initiative, going to policing in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, that's absurd. Here we are, the Department of Justice is now robbing VLT money that is supposed to be going for Rural Economic Development Initiatives, and it's putting that into rural policing.

Now the minister stands up and makes a grand announcement in the House that the government, from general revenues, is putting this kind of money into policing in Manitoba and then scams the money off VLT money that is supposed to be going to rural economic development in rural Manitoba.

It's the same with beach patrol. Those are initiatives that were funded, either from industry, trade or from tourism, from other departments or Justice. Now we're funding them from Rural Economic Development Initiatives.

The mobility disadvantage—we have a department that is responsible for mobility disadvantage, and we are again tapping into VLT funds for rural Manitoba to pay for these programs. It has nothing to do with the economic development side of rural Manitoba whatsoever, and now we are finding that Manitobans who should rightfully have these monies afforded to them for real economic development issues are now having that money taken away from them.

I want to ask the minister: What are the criteria that apply in order to be able to identify how much money will go to rural policing and where? Where's that rural policing being done, in which communities? The beach patrol, where is it being done, in which community? The mobility disadvantage, who's getting that money? Is it the mobility disadvantage program in Manitoba, or is this going to specific programs outside of the city? I'd like the minister to answer those questions.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, I guess we have a difference of opinion between the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) and me, because I think that beach safety services and policing in rural Manitoba

are very important. They do make a difference to the quality of life in rural Manitoba.

I hear the members opposite many times talk about services for policing services. I hope they're not just talking about policing services in Winnipeg, because I'm talking about policing services in rural Manitoba. It's important to have those kinds of services, but you need to have the stability and security in communities for people to come there and live, for people to make their investments in rural Manitoba. It's all part of a package.

The member may not agree with it, and I would say that I think that these kinds of investments are very important. That's why we will continue to have strategic initiatives that are important and that will make a difference. We will continue to make those kinds of investments.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, it's not a matter of opinion. This is just, again, the backdoor way of the NDP government taking monies which rightfully belong to the Economic Development portfolio in rural Manitoba and scamming that money off to shore up what rightfully belongs in the budgets of Justice, what rightfully belongs in budgets of other departments, and Treasury Board making the decisions that rural development has to pay for these because there is, in fact, a share of responsibility in rural Manitoba for policing.

I'm wondering whether Justice takes money out of VLT revenues in Winnipeg to pay for the policing in Winnipeg, whether, in fact, there are mobility-disadvantaged people in Winnipeg that tap into VLT money to shore up the grants that go to VLTs in Winnipeg as well.

Where is the responsibility of government when it comes to taking money out of general revenue for things like policing, beach patrol, mobility disadvantage? That's what taxpayers pay their money for in terms of general revenues, and that's where that money should be coming from to shore up those kinds of responsibilities.

This has nothing to do with the mandate of the department. It has nothing to do with the mandate of rural initiatives. This is just an add-on, one that is hidden under the guise of quality of life issues. This is just simply a lark.

Mr. Chairperson, I want to go on and ask the minister to identify, if she would, the 18 percent for non-recurring expenditures, and then also to identify

for me the 10 percent and where it goes in terms of capital.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: I'd love to be able to say there are loges up at the front and come have a chat if you want. There aren't.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, thank you for calling that interesting discussion to order.

With regard to capital programs: '08 there is budgeted for sewer and water, 2.984 million; for conservation districts, 9.25; for mobility disadvantaged, 30-

An Honourable Member: I'm sorry. Conservation districts was what?

Ms. Wowchuk: Nine-two-five, 925.

Mobility disadvantaged, 30. Then we have capital grants of 2,017,500; and for Hometown Manitoba, \$500,000.

An Honourable Member: Hometown is how much?

Ms. Wowchuk: Five hundred.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, what the minister has just outlined again is that now rural economic development is putting money into water-and-sewer development. Are we talking about water-and-sewer development for specific economic development projects like the building of a plant somewhere and extending that water and sewer to them, or are we talking about general municipal water and sewer issues?

Ms. Wowchuk: All of these are in rural and they tend to focus on the type of projects that are economic development but sometimes there is something that is needed within a municipality to help with that economic activity. So it could be a bit of both, but it tends to be for helping establish, for example, a waste-water treatment that is needed for economic development.

* (15:40)

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister identify the communities that received the money of \$2.84 million, and the projects that received that money?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: The majority of the water and sewer has gone into the Neepawa project. That's where the majority of the water and sewer is.

An Honourable Member: How much?

Ms. Wowchuk: At the risk of making an error, I would say that I would provide the member with the exact number that went into the Neepawa project.

There was also money that was allocated and set aside for treatment of SRMs and some of the money in this line as well went into SRM treatment.

Mr. Derkach: I want to ask the minister, is this where the capital infrastructure dollars are coming from to match the federal money that is flowing into Neepawa?

I don't know where this SRM treatment facility is. That's an agriculture issue, not a rural development issue. Once again, we have the convenience of blending these things to the satisfaction of the department and the minister. This is baloney.

Ms. Wowchuk: I would say to my colleagues at the table I have great respect for the Russians and the Ukrainians and their schools, and I admire anyone that will take the opportunity to study in those, although that wasn't in the minister's question.

The member's question was about SRMs and funding SRMs is not important to rural economic development that we're funding. The SRMs is a very big challenge for processors in Manitoba. Yes, we are making some investments from the REDI fund because there are federal dollars and we have to top up some of those federal dollars in order that the people who are dealing with the SRM issue are able to do so and continue their operations.

I'm not quite sure where the member is going. One time he says, oh, that's agriculture, you shouldn't be doing rural economic development, you should just be doing agriculture. Then he says, well, that's agriculture. There's not a clear message.

Rural Manitoba is not just about farming. Rural Manitoba needs a variety of services. We need beach patrol safety where they aren't able to have enough lifeguards on hand at times. You need to have the issues of SRMs addressed. You need to have waste-water treatment issues addressed so that you

can have economic development in rural Manitoba, and that is what this fund is being used for, indeed for a variety of amount of programs that enhance the quality of life in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Derkach: Well, I didn't get an answer on that question either, Mr. Chairman. So I'll ask the minister if she can identify for me the 18 percent money that is going into non-recurring one-time expenditures.

Ms. Wowchuk: Because they are non-recurring, we don't have a list for this year. We allocate when events come up, but I could share with the member the list of what happened in '07-08. There was the Western Canada Summer Games '07 that money went into, the National Aboriginal Art Administrators and Funders gathering, Parkland Ethanol Co-op, Northern Diversification Centre, and the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission.

* (15:50)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, could she identify for us—she said that 20 percent of the money is used for infrastructure. I would assume that this is over and above what she talked about in terms of capital. Can the minister identify for me what infrastructure projects the 20 percent is going to?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, part of the infrastructure money is the money that I reported in capital under sewer and water; that would be part of it. There is also the debenture for Hanover and La Broquerie rural gas that started in 1999 and is still carrying on. There is the R.M. of Ritchot debenture that's included in that. Most of the money that is in infrastructure is dedicated to water and sewer and to SRMs.

Mr. Derkach: The minister outlined for me that capital and infrastructure were two separate categories: 20 percent for infrastructure, 10 percent for capital. Is she saying now that it should all have been under one category, and 30 percent of the VLT money goes into infrastructure and paying for debentures?

Ms. Wowchuk: That would be about right. I broke it out when I was going through it as two separate sections but, as we look at it, they overlap quite a bit in the numbers but that's about the right percentage.

Mr. Derkach: With the debentures, Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister, debentures are not new items, not new initiatives, not current initiatives.

They are paying old debt. Now, can the minister tell me what new initiatives are being undertaken in the area of capital or infrastructure, besides the SRMs in the Neepawa project?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the SRM program is a two-year program so it has to be budgeted for again this year. If you look at the various sewer and water projects that we're invested in, that comes very close to using up the money that is allocated here. You asked for new projects; the SRMs is a new project. The different water and sewer projects are new projects, the Neepawa one, and the other one is Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids has one this year.

I know the member doesn't think beyond No. 16 highway because that's where he lives, but there are people across the province that need water and sewer. Our government is very committed to cleaning up water and providing a good source of water so people have an opportunity, no matter where they live in this province. That will be the other project that's new. So the new ones are Neepawa, Grand Rapids, continuing on the SRM projects. Those are the new programs that we have budgeted for this year.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, I have never, ever, ever heard of anything so out of this world when it comes to money that is supposed to be allocated for rural economic development projects. This has become a big slush fund of the government to utilize wherever it wishes. There are no parameters; there are no categories.

We're going from SRMs to funding sewer and water which should be the responsibility of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs or Water Stewardship. We are going to treatment of SRMs. I don't know how that fits in with rural economic development. I would like to know from the minister where this SRM treatment facility is located. It's a two-year commitment, and I'd like to know how much money is being committed to that on site, wherever it is in Manitoba.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, all meat processors are going to have to deal with SRMs, and there are a number of people who have submitted applications. The department is working at those. There is a need for a distribution right across the province because hauling SRMs from a great distance is not always efficient so we are working—this is very much industry driven. There are applications. The department is working with them. We've allocated \$1.5 million for this year to try to get this SRM issue

addressed, but it is a very challenging issue for some of the smaller processors and we are working with them.

The member talks about the programs here, and it is a whole suite of programs that are being offered, all the way from Hometown Manitoba to CED tax credit to strategic funding to feasibility studies. There is a variety of programs that are offered under this division to help people with their business plan, to help people address environmental issues in the meat processing industry, to help with economic development by doing water and sewer infrastructure. All of these things are in place to help develop business but also to improve the quality of life for people in Manitoba and to improve water supply. All of these are issues that are addressed under this department.

Mr. Derkach: Well, the minister didn't tell me how much money is going into the SRM or I maybe didn't catch it.

Ms. Wowchuk: I had indicated that there was 1.9 million for capital. The total budget is 2.4, so there is some half a million dollars that's there for soft costs to help establish and get the facilities running.

Mr. Derkach: The minister's saying there's \$1.9 million for capital. Can she identify what kind of capital, where it's going to be located, where the money is specifically being spent for SRMs? I don't understand it, if she could please clarify that for me.

*(16:00)

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes. The amount that's available provincially for capital is \$1.9 million. It's an application process. People are in the process of making applications. It could be an incinerator. It could be an upgrade to a hauling facility to move it. It could be developing a compost. People are looking at different options on how they can deal with SRMs, and we know that we have to have a system that meets the needs of people across the province so there could be various options, but, yes, people are looking at incinerators. People are looking at how they can use SRMs to capture heat from them, but they're also looking at what kind of infrastructure is needed to haul the product to another site, or what kind of upgrades have to be made to landfills in order to dispose of them there, and also composting. So there are a variety of things and different communities are looking at—some of it is driven by

communities and some of it is driven by individual processors who are making application.

Mr. Derkach: So this is just money set aside for hopeful projects dealing with SRMs. I don't know how that equates to rural economic development but if she could identify for me the criteria that would be established for the expenditure of this capital money. Is this money that's got to be matched with federal funds? Is it money that's got to be matched with municipal funds? Is it money that's got to be matched with individual proponent funds? What percentage is the government going to be funding of these initiatives in terms of capital?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, the member opposite can't figure out how this relates to rural economic development; I tell you, if we have all those slaughter facilities shut down in rural Manitoba because they can't deal with their SRMs, then we do have a problem. So this is about keeping slaughter facilities open, small ones and larger ones, helping them deal with a very important issue that has been put on them.

Now, the member asked about the cost-sharing. If it's things like feasibility studies and business plans, it can be up to—those are soft costs, 90 percent. If it's municipal waste treatment, it could be 90 percent. If it's a private one, its share would be 75 percent. If it's research and development, 100 percent of the costs could be covered and those costs are split 60-40 with the federal government.

Mr. Derkach: The minister still didn't answer the question in terms of the criteria for capital. I mean those are the soft-cost expenditures but in terms of capital, what is the approach in funding, whether it's incineration facility or whatever it is? What is the criteria for funding a capital project in dealing with SRMs? Is it 60-40? What are the criteria and what are the splits? The criteria are important.

Ms. Wowchuk: If it's a municipal site, they can get funding up to 90 percent, that's split 60-40, federal-provincial. If it's a private site, they can get funding up to 75 percent, and that's split 60-40, federal-provincial. If it's research, they can get up to 100 percent up to \$200,000?

An Honourable Member: Research?

Ms. Wowchuk: Research and development can be—

An Honourable Member: That's not capital.

Mr. Chairperson: The minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: But it's part of the package. The capital is on the municipal and the private one. I'm just saying to the member that there is another portion that can be used and that's for research. That could be also funded from this pot of money, and it would also be 60-40. But, if he's talking about capital for a municipality, it's 90 percent funding, for the private sector, it's 75 percent funding.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister identify for me any projects that are in the hopper, so to speak, with regard to SRMs right now?

Ms. Wowchuk: There have been several who have applied, but I can share with the member the ones that have been approved. The town of Dauphin has been approved for engineering analysis of the municipal waste-disposal site. The town of The Pas, Kelsey, and the meat processor have been approved for a feasibility study. Both of these are feasibility studies in engineering analysis of an incinerator. The R.M. and town of Minitonas, and Valley Meats and Benito Meats have been approved to carry out a feasibility study and business plan for a municipally owned incinerator. There has also been research money that has gone into the Orverter at Elie. A pilot project on an Orverter, which is a burner.

An Honourable Member: I didn't get the project, I'm sorry.

Ms. Wowchuk: It's an Orverter. It's burning at a very high temperature that can destroy the SRMs, so that's the research—

An Honourable Member: Where's that?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's near Elie. It's near Fortier.

So those are the projects. There are several others that have been applied for, but at this point their applications have not been completed. There are different places that are looking at how they could handle SRMs throughout the province.

Mr. Derkach: The town of Dauphin, she said has been approved for feasibility study, yet they don't have a slaughter facility near Dauphin.

An Honourable Member: Yes, they do.

Mr. Derkach: Do they? Right in Dauphin?

Ms. Wowchuk: Dauphin meats is what it's called.

Mr. Derkach: So, Mr. Chair, through you to the minister: These are for small abattoirs that are in operation today, providing them with the feasibility studies to deal with SRMs?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right, Mr. Chairman. The further you get away from the city where Rothesay is dealing with SRMs, the more difficult it is with transportation costs. So these people are looking at how they can deal with SRMs and continue their businesses. We are providing funding so they can do their feasibility study to decide whether this is a viable business for them.

Mr. Derkach: I have one more question as it relates to the VLT funds and that has to do with conservation districts. Can the minister tell me whether conservation districts are funded totally from the VLT money or is there money going into conservation districts from the Department of Conservation or the Department of Water Stewardship?

Ms. Wowchuk: I can tell the member how much money is provided for conservation districts through this department, and he would have to obtain that other information from the other two departments.

Mr. Derkach: I guess my question is to the minister: Are conservation districts totally funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Initiatives?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, they are not.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister inform me as to how the money from her department flows to conservation districts? Is it done on the basis of projects? Is it done on the basis of grants to conservation districts for general operating purposes? Or is it project specific?

* (16:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: It's a transfer through Water Stewardship, and then Water Stewardship takes the application from the conservation districts for their projects.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me, because I didn't get that number, how much money from VLT revenues is transferred to Water Stewardship for conservation districts?

Ms. Wowchuk: For 2008-09, it is \$925,000.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me what the total budget for conservation districts is?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, we don't have the total number for conservation districts here.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister indicate to me the historical increases with regard to the transfers to Water Stewardship for conservation districts? Has it

been constant? Has it been increasing? Can she give me some idea over the course of the last two or three years?

Ms. Wowchuk: Last year, it was 425. That was a constant number, very close to that number for a few years back. This year we got an increase in revenues and it has gone up to 925.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, I'd like to focus some questions on the failed Ranchers Choice project in Dauphin. This is a little characteristic of how this government has been running its affairs, but I want to know a couple of things. The first one is: How much money was invested by individuals and/or private corporations into the failed Ranchers Choice project?

Ms. Wowchuk: Could he clarify it? Was it, how much was put in by individuals and how much was put in by—

Mr. Derkach: Corporations.

Ms. Wowchuk: —corporations, yes.

Mr. Chairperson, of the producer investments, \$1.6 million in investment capital was returned to the producer. What wasn't returned to the producer was their \$100 membership fee. But returned was \$1.6 million. There were no large private companies investing in this.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me how much total money was lost by the government in this failed investment?

Ms. Wowchuk: I just have to say a couple of words about the co-op. I want to recognize the producers that had the vision to build this facility. I want to recognize my staff who worked very hard with them to try to bring this project to fruition. We had hoped that we would have slaughter capacity in this province. Unfortunately, the producers did not get the kind of support that they needed to bring this to reality. The province took an equity position and the province lost about \$4.7 million on this.

Mr. Derkach: Well, I'm not blaming either the investors or the people who worked on this project because, I think, everybody did put a sincere effort into this. I, for one, would have loved to have seen this come to fruition. As I indicated to the minister, family members of mine did invest in it. I didn't, because I didn't feel that was appropriate. But I think that where I'm going with this is two things. There is some equipment that is still out there that may have some residual value in it, I guess, and I would like to

know how much that equipment cost, who actually owns the equipment and what is happening to it right now.

* (16:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: Tomorrow there is a meeting of the creditors. As you know, the Ranchers Choice has filed for bankruptcy, filed those papers. Creditors are meeting. We have secured positions on the equipment. The Province and MASC are the ones that have the secured positions. So I anticipate that once the meeting is done, tomorrow, and that is complete, that we will have possession of the equipment, but the procedures have to take place first.

The value of the equipment, when it was purchased, was 1.1 U.S., but 1.5 Canadian. The equipment is in storage, and it's my hope that it can be put to good use, but there is a procedure that has to be followed first.

Mr. Derkach: I missed it when the minister identified who the creditors are. Who are the creditors in the bankruptcy?

Ms. Wowchuk: There are some trade creditors that are there as well, but the province has a secured position. So they will have to deal with all of those issues at their meeting.

Mr. Derkach: The trade creditors are unsecured creditors?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, that's my understanding.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister identify how much money is outstanding or owing to unsecured creditors?

Ms. Wowchuk: We do not have that number now.

Mr. Derkach: Since the minister or the department was a partner in this project, according to the minister, should she not have a list of the unsecured creditors? Are those not available to us?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, each of those creditors will file a proof of claim tomorrow. Once they do that, then the amounts will become public.

Mr. Derkach: I have only one more question with regard to Ranchers Choice. It has to do with the extension of the tax credit to people who invest in projects like that. I had asked this question in the House once, and the minister had indicated to me that a co-op grocery store in southern Manitoba

which had investors in it were eligible for a tax credit, a 30 percent tax credit.

Can the minister tell me why that same privilege wasn't extended to the investors at the Ranchers Choice investment?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the limit for a CED tax credit is \$500,000. That was far too small for these kinds of investments and, if they would have taken it, only some of the people would have benefited from it. The project was just too large to qualify for a CED credit.

Mr. Derkach: I want to know how this squares with government policy because, if you were an investor in Crocus, you could get a 30 percent tax credit. Then that money was invested in other projects across the province. If you were an investor in a grocery store, the minister's telling me that there's a \$500,000 cap; over and above that, you couldn't get a tax credit.

Was there any consideration to extending tax credit opportunities for investors if they had invested up to \$500,000 in total in the project?

Ms. Wowchuk: The limit for a project is \$500,000 under this tax credit and a limit for an individual is \$30,000. So this is a new program that we have brought in. It's been running for a few years now, and they're the limits that are added. Perhaps there will be consideration given to raising it, but at this time this is the level of this program. It's targeted at smaller communities, and it really is an innovative tax incentive that encourages Manitobans to invest in opportunities in their communities and target where it is considered most desirable.

So there are projects that are in it. This project did not meet the criteria because it was much larger than the tax credit program.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me how many projects qualified for the 30 percent tax credit under her government's new program?

Ms. Wowchuk: There are eight projects that have qualified for the tax credit.

Mr. Derkach: Can she identify them for me, please?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, there is the Clearwater Development, which is a restaurant; Bifrost Bio-Blends of Arborg, a biodiesel plant; the Intermountain Forage of Dauphin, which is a hay compacting plant; the Bowsman Community Store;

Pilot Mound Hotel; Crocus Plains co-op; Langruth Restaurant; Pipestone development, which is also—

An Honourable Member: Slower.

Ms. Wowchuk: Oh, I'm sorry. Where would you like for me to repeat—sorry about that, my friend.

Pilot Mound was a hotel. Crocus Plains co-op; Langruth Restaurant; Pipestone development, a restaurant; and Kudu Foods in Winnipeg, a food manufacturer.

An Honourable Member: Who?

Ms. Wowchuk: Kudu Foods. K-u-d-u Foods, a food manufacturer.

An Honourable Member: In Winnipeg?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right.

Mr. Derkach: The Kudu Foods, is that a rural Manitoba project that has moved into the city?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, but that one would be funded under UDI. It's listed under this, but the funds for that project would come under the city portion of VLTs, which is UDI.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister outline the criteria for the tax credit projects? I see they're retail, they're restaurants, they're hotels. Is there a set of criteria that describes what kinds of projects would qualify for this type of tax credit program?

Ms. Wowchuk: These are community development projects. They have to have the endorsement of the community to have the tax credit. Once they've got the endorsement of the community they can be as broad as the community wants.

* (16:30)

So it's a community development, and if they have the endorsement of the community—and I will use one, an example, that's in my constituency, and that's the Bowsman Community Store. There was a store that was closing down. They weren't going to have a business, the community. They got the endorsement of their council. They got approval, and then the community raised the money in order to keep the store open, very similar to, I'm sure, the Pilot Mound Hotel. People wanted to maintain that; in fact, they've raised \$500,000 in the community to make sure that they maintain the hotel.

So it has to be community driven, endorsed by council, and then they can proceed with it.

Mr. Derkach: I have no trouble with it, Madam Minister, I think that's a good program, and I congratulate the department and the minister for bringing this forward. The only areas that I would like to see this expanded into are larger projects, of course, which would cover things like the—whether it's the hay compress plant in Dauphin, or the timothy, or the what do you call it, hemp project. This especially is a vehicle that we should be using to try to encourage more expansion in the small abattoirs and value-added processors in the province.

So I'm not being critical at all in asking these questions. I'm asking the questions just to get information as to how it was spent, because I do have problems in the other areas that we talked about, but I don't have a problem with this and when I asked the minister how much money has been set aside for the tax-credit program in the province for this coming year.

Ms. Wowchuk: The amount we have set aside for this is \$150,000. It's the same amount that we had last year and I would agree with the member, it's a discussion that we have to have. This program is working for small business. How do we work on it and the other area that we have to look at is when—oh, I'm sorry, I've been corrected. The amount is \$300,000 available for tax credit. That's what's available. My mistake when I said 150 but remember, that's just the tax credit part of it—a lot more money—that's only 30 percent. So that would allow for \$2 million, \$2 million of investment in a year. So, that's what there is. I agree with the member that there is room for more and the other area that there's room for more to look at is other capital. When people are trying to get started in new businesses, capital is an issue. This is one way to help that.

I appreciate the member's comments and we will continue to look at how we can enhance the program. I would ask him to encourage my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) when he gets a chance to talk to him and tell him what a good program this is, so we can get more money into this pot.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Minister, I think this is something that I am fully supportive of, but \$300,000 is a very tiny thing. When you look at the province as a whole, I would hope that that would be taken up very quickly. But why wouldn't we be including programs under this category, such as the minister talked about, the SRM projects that are

being developed out in rural Manitoba? If they are individual investment types of projects, I would hope that those would qualify as well.

I would ask the minister whether or not, under this program, projects in value-added, which I don't see any of here, would be included, except for this Kudu Foods. I'm wondering whether the minister has had any contact with people who are in the you-brew industry who want to expand the you-brew industry into Manitoba. We don't have one here yet. You-brew is very prevalent in Saskatchewan, in Alberta, and there are a couple of investors in Manitoba who want to get started on you-brew, but they haven't been able to access any funding from any of the departments. I'm wondering whether this is something that the minister would be open to considering for our province which we don't have any of.

Ms. Wowchuk: They would have to have an investment structure because it can't be just one person that comes in. So they would have to be prepared to have that investment structure and, of course, it could be looked at. If the member wants to talk later about whom these individuals are who are looking to start these businesses, I'd be happy to talk to them.

The member asked about \$300,000; this is the amount that was set aside for the program. It hasn't been fully used yet, but it's growing, it's growing in momentum. As it grows, we will have to reconsider the amounts that are here.

With regard to food processing, the value-added is the Kudu Foods. There's also the Arborg biofuels; those are value-added, as is the Intermountain Forage Limited—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, I would let my colleague ask another question.

Mr. Derkach: The minister said that it is municipalities that have to give approval at the local level. Is this the municipality or the CDC that gets involved in economic development projects? I'm just wondering who has sort of the final word from the community? Is it the development corporation or is it, in fact, the municipality?

Ms. Wowchuk: It could be either one. I said municipality but, if the cases were there, there are

CDCs. It could be the CDC that endorses the project, or the RDC. It could be any of those that could get the process started.

Mr. Derkach: I'd like to turn my attention to tourism for a minute, if I might. I know we have a department of tourism that largely deals with tourism issues, whether it's signage or whether it's initiatives. I would like to know from the minister, she said that in the department there is a tourism specialist.

Can the minister identify for us who the tourism specialist is, what kind of programming that tourism specialist has under his or her control, and what types of projects they're either restricted to working with, or what their mandate includes under this department?

*(16:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, when I talked about tourism, I was talking about agri-tourism. Manitoba and our department are active members of the Canadian agri-tourism national group. We have two business development specialists that work on agri-tourism. We actually have three people who are trained in the area of agri-tourism, and they work with the industry on an agri-tourism strategy. That strategy is very close to being released, but they also work with the farm market association and the agri-tourism association.

They work with the regional cuisine network which is a new and innovative idea of bringing people out to rural communities, being able to learn about the rural culture, learn something about the landscape, but also be able to test some of the local cuisine. It works very well with some of the people that are in, sort of, the bed and breakfast, people who are interested in serving meals to people.

So it is very much a focus on promoting rural Manitoba, educating people on the agriculture industry, and bringing them out to working to get more people to understand the business. The people that we have are distributed throughout the province.

Mr. Derkach: The minister did not identify the individuals that are involved in the agri-tourism industry.

Ms. Wowchuk: Dan Roche is in the south Interlake, Susan Nicoll is in the north Interlake, and Karen Walker is in Russell. Those are the people that are working with us on the agri-tourism strategy.

Mr. Derkach: Why is the minister's department—it's supposed to be rural economic development—

confined to agri-tourism only when there are so many other tourism opportunities outside of agriculture which can be developed, are being developed and should be supported whether they're initiatives, whether it's in guiding, whether it's in the area of providing bed and breakfasts, accommodation? Why is it that tourism initiatives like this don't qualify because they're not agri-tourism related?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member may have misunderstood me, but, certainly, bed and breakfast would qualify. I said that we try to work together to promote tourism, agri-tourism, promote bed and breakfast, get people out to learn about the local cuisine, local cultures, and the member says agriculture. There's a lot of people that want to learn about agriculture, but there are a lot of people that want to learn about the rural communities. So it's building on all of that.

Certainly, this is one part of tourism, but there is a crossover between the Department of Tourism and what these people are doing. I would say to the member that once we have the strategy ready to release, I would share it with him. In that strategy, you will see that it goes far beyond just touring a farm. It is the whole rural areas. It's not just touring the farm, it's agri-tourism, but there is a lot more to rural communities and that is what these people are working on.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Minister, can you identify for me what the difference is between tourism and agri-tourism? I mean, why aren't we trying to broaden the base of the tourism opportunity in this province beyond agri-tourism, because the whole hospitality industry is out there in rural Manitoba? I come from an area that has a fairly significant number of tourism hospitality initiatives that should be working with rural development to enhance and to provide opportunity and potential, and expand on the potential that is available here. But if we restrict it to agri-tourism, it has a very negative connotation in terms of being open to all kinds of tourism opportunities that exist in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson, 80 percent of tourism in Manitoba is rural. Yes, we have a tourism department that is supposed to be involved, but most of their money is spent right here in Winnipeg. We need to have that, sort of, other, I guess, focus on tourism outside of the city, and that I can't help but think should be provided by rural development. I don't care whether it's in northern rural Manitoba or

rural Manitoba. But just to confine it to agri-tourism and to call that strategy, that is very narrow-minded, in my mind, narrow-focussed. I shouldn't say narrow-minded, it's narrow-focussed.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, I am sure that, if we were promoting tourism in rural Manitoba and didn't mention agriculture, the member opposite would take offence to that. Agri-tourism is a term; it does not mean promoting tourism just on the farm. We also work with Road to 2010 and Destination Manitoba.

I'm going to say to the member, since he comes from an area that is important for tourists, the Russell area, part of the promotion, part of the strategy is: How do you get more people to come to Russell, to Asessippi, not only in winter but get them to come in the summertime?

I think the member may think that this is a little funny but this is a pretty serious issue in rural Manitoba. People are working very hard to attract more people to come out to the rural areas. The member thinks that because it's call agri-, there's something wrong with it. I take offence to his comments as well because my staff has worked very hard on this and to promote rural Manitoba.

If you're coming out to Russell, Dauphin, Clear Lake or to the Blue Lakes, look at how you can take in some of those others. How can you also enjoy some of the cuisine and some of the families that are prepared to share their culture? There are tours that are being developed; in fact, one starts in Dauphin. The fall suppers are part of the rural cuisine. Some people are prepared to share their culture, whether it's the Ukrainian culture or some of the history that went into developing those areas.

I talk about the Parklands. The same kind of thing can happen in the Interlake where you have the Icelandic population; it can happen in southern Manitoba where there's a tremendous history with the Mennonite community. There are opportunities for Hutterite colonies in this as well.

We want to put together a strategy where we build on what tourism is doing but also promote the other parts of it and create economic opportunity for producers. I say to the member, the strategy will be ready. I will share it with him when it's prepared. I'm very proud of the people in this department who are taking the lead to develop this and representing Manitoba very well at the Canadian Agritourism group as well.

Mr. Derkach: I don't have anything against agri-tourism. I think it's okay, but it's a very narrow-focussed approach to tourism in general in Manitoba. I don't know how you equate culture, whether it's German, Ukrainian, Mennonite, whatever, with agri-tourism. I don't know how those two fit. It may be tourism in general, but how you bring it into agri-tourism is just a little bit of a stretch.

We have wonderful Folklorama in the city of Winnipeg that brings together all cultures from all walks of life and we don't call it agri-tourism. It's a cultural event which is separate from agri-tourism all together.

There's nothing wrong with agri-tourism. I'm just asking the minister why rural development wouldn't be taking the broader view of tourism and working with the Tourism department that largely concentrates its efforts on Winnipeg and make sure that tourism in general, the hospitality industry in Manitoba, is promoted as a tourism and hospitality industry, and agri-tourism is just then a part of that.

To just say that we have a strategy for agri-tourism and ignore the broader tourism issues, the broader tourism potential that exists in rural Manitoba, is wrong.

I'm just indicating to the minister that she would serve the people of this province much better if she looked at the broader issues that relate to tourism and the opportunities and the potential that exist out there, whether it's in the areas not just of hospitality but in terms of eco-tourism, in terms of people being able to go out there and participate in the various sporting events that occur in rural Manitoba at the lakes, at our beaches and in other venues throughout Manitoba.

*(16:50)

Agri-tourism doesn't mean rural fairs. It might be included in that, but in today's celebrations, whether it's the Corn and Apple Festival, or whether it's other events, whether it's the Beef and Barley Festival, there is an element of agriculture in there, but there's so much more to that tourism event that pertains to general tourism. I think the department and the minister would do well to be inclusive of the broader tourism industry, rather than just focus the whole area of tourism in the department to agri-tourism. I think it's wrong. I think it's narrow-focussed, and I think it misses out the

opportunities that exist in Manitoba that go far beyond agriculture.

Ms. Wowchuk: Again, I'll say to the member that this is a very broad group. It's titled agri-tourism, but it goes far beyond agriculture. The member takes offence, but I can say to the member that there are regional tourism networks, and we provide support to these networks. The goal really is to get more people to visit rural Manitoba. Whether it is to a fair or whether it's to the lake, we really want them to see the whole package, and what else is there out there that people might be able to tap in on their way to the lake, as they're visiting—how do we promote it, and that's the intent.

So I can say to the member, he may not like the term, but it goes far beyond agriculture. To me, agri-tourism, if you look at agri-tourism, it is a term that addresses rural tourism and I would say let's wait for the strategy to come out. But I take it, the member's advice, and we will consider that. Thank you.

Mr. Derkach: Just one last question: Can the minister tell me how much—what the budget of the tourism initiative is?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's \$325,000, plus our staff time.

Mr. Derkach: Is that the total budget for the total province for tourism in this department, Madam Minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member knows that there is a Tourism department. The budget that I indicated here is the budget in our department, and this budget plus the staff that we have allocated to the agri.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairperson, through you to the minister, I'd just like to spend a minute or two asking a question about the whole area of technology. We haven't discussed any of this in the minister's Estimates.

There is tremendous opportunity in rural Manitoba to utilize broadband technology to bring services to rural communities. There was an emphasis on this back in the '90s. We did broadband networks to several communities and it is something that is still in great demand and still in great shortage in rural communities—to bring them into the current era, if you like, of communication and which is an industry in itself, but in terms of having the information at a fingertip to be able to assist you in your business or in your enterprise.

As the minister knows, that kind of technology is not available, and I'm wondering whether there is anybody in her department that has dedicated to working with communities to ensure that these types of services are brought into rural communities to assist with economic development opportunities.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the responsibility of broadband falls mainly under the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, but I would just say that this is a very important issue. We work with them, and we do get involved with communities that are looking to enhance their broadband services. As an example, there is a project that we worked on called the Central Plains Broadband, and it was the R.M. of Lakeview. The R.M. of Lakeview initiated the start-up of a high-speed Internet service in 10 municipalities that are currently lacking service, and our staff assisted in co-operating with Central Plains Inc., Heartland Community Futures Development Corporation, and rural councils.

So we worked together to help this move along. The Canada-Manitoba Rural Infrastructure program provided \$1.4 million as a grant to this project and the private industry committed another million dollars. So there is work where my department gets involved in, but it mainly falls under STEM.

Mr. Derkach: Does the minister have any staff that are dedicated who have training and experience in high-speed or broadband technology who work in this area and is there a specific budget for this area?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, that's STEM's area of responsibility, but our staff in the GO offices would work with the individuals who are putting this proposal together.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, through you to the minister and her department, I will conclude my questions and remarks on the Estimates of the Rural Initiatives side of the department. I want to thank the minister and her staff for providing the answers that they have. We may disagree in terms of the approach on many of the initiatives that are being undertaken in the department. I specifically dislike the way in which money flows as if it were a slush fund to projects that have nothing to do with specific rural development initiatives.

I would encourage the minister—and I know that she comes from rural Manitoba—and her staff to somehow influence the Cabinet table to ensure that the money that is supposed to flow to rural development, economic initiatives, is enhanced so

that rural Manitoba communities can continue to not only sustain themselves, but to grow. There is indeed lots of evidence out there of communities picking up the cudgel, so to speak, and pursuing opportunities. There are individuals who are investing in enterprises, hoping that these will create jobs and create opportunity for them. I think there's so much to do out in rural Manitoba. I haven't seen a plan from the minister or her department in terms of the strengths that rural Manitoba has in different communities, the strengths that we are working on in general in rural Manitoba, the direction that we are taking in terms of enhancing the opportunities in rural Manitoba, whether it's in small industry or large industry.

When we look at the biofuels, the ethanol, we look at the potential of resources in this province. There's so much that can be done and should be done in rural economic development, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives should be at the centre, should be the focal point in terms of people being able to access those resources.

I've advocated for a rural development centre, a one-stop shop that should be out there in rural Manitoba, whether it's Brandon or Neepawa or wherever it might be, but a place where rural Manitobans can go to get their information. Although the GO centres are a step in that direction, I think we need the other level which has to be in other communities. So I thank the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH

*(14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Daryl Reid): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates for the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Yes, Mr. Acting Chair, thank you. I am absolutely delighted to be here today to talk with my colleague across the way about educational matters here in the province of Manitoba. I must say April has been rather an extraordinary month for me with respect to the celebrations that we've enjoyed in Education Week

recognizing the achievements of Gordon Crook and Susan Gustafson, who are recognized as two of Canada's outstanding principals. I had an opportunity to have lunch with them and talk about the success that they enjoyed being recognized through the Learning Partnership as winners of this very prestigious award.

Of course, another luncheon with the Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence where four Manitoba teachers were honoured for their achievements as exemplary educators here in the province, as well as many other celebrations, whether it was MAST's celebration of the citizenship awards for the students from all six districts in the province and their contributions to making their communities a better place, or Manitoba Association for Multicultural Education's celebration of Educator of the Year, where they appropriately recognized students as the educators of the year for the work that they have done to promote peace education and to promote a multicultural fabric of our society in their own schools and in their own communities.

Manitoba, Education, Citizenship and Youth has recognized an increase in graduation rates from 1999 to 2007, from 73 percent to 82 percent. Our government has also invested \$238 million into the K-12 public school system over the past nine years, a 31 percent increase since 1999, while the rate of economic growth had been 23.1 percent.

We have also followed through on our commitment to provide Manitobans with property tax relief by eliminating the residential education support levy and increasing the property tax credit, an increase of over 110 percent. As a result of the tax incentive grant this year, 20 school divisions chose not to raise taxes, and those that did had the tax increases offset significantly by the property tax credit increase of \$75. In fact, only three school divisions out of 36 will see any increase in property taxes. What that amounts to in one school division, on a \$125,000 home, it's one dollar. In another school division, on a \$125,000 assessed home, it's two dollars. There's only one anomaly, and we will certainly be talking to that school division about why that was the case, that their taxes went up by \$43.

We have increased, or pardon me, reduced taxes on the average \$125,000 home by over 16 percent since we've been in office. We also invested \$483 million into schools capital, more than double what was provided in the final eight years of the previous government. Our commitment to build,

replace and renovate schools across the province has provided funding for 11 new schools, 12 replacement schools, 49 additional renovation projects. Once the 100-plus projects are completed this year, in the next capital year, that will have meant over 1,050 projects will have been completed through infrastructure improvements throughout the province of Manitoba.

Of course, it continues to be a very popular policy that school year would start after the Labour Day long weekend. We know that summer is short—it feels like it will be particularly short this year—so I know we'll all enjoy that extra Labour Day weekend with our families without having the start of the school year until after that time.

There have been a number of different issues that we've addressed, including funding increases to special needs by 49.2 percent since 1999 and, of course, that is a significant increase compared to 4.7 percent of the previous administration.

Manitoba teachers have seen our government respond to their pension requests. I know that I had been a teacher advocate that was quite concerned about the unfunded pension liability, and through the good work of my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), we have secured \$1.5 billion to the TRAF fund, 75 percent of the government's pension liability because the main account had been an issue of primary concern for the teachers of Manitoba. The stability of that account is no longer in question because of that significant increase—or, pardon me, contribution—to address that particular liability.

These are a few of the many things that we've been able to accomplish in the province of Manitoba for our education stakeholders.

We continue to work hard to ensure that our schools are safe communities. I was pleased to introduce the legislation that would deal with the issue of cyber-bullying, as unfortunately technology does not come with rules, so we have to be responsive to the technology and the fact that there are predators who will find a way to use that technology in a very inappropriate manner. We know that students are victims of cyber-bullying, of text-message bullying, of bullying on social networks, and we know that that's not acceptable nor tolerable in our schools. As such, we will be working with our partners to ensure that regulations are in place to deal with the technology that which, as I said, came without rules.

I was very pleased to attend the Safe Schools forum where we also recognized the three top video award winners from students who had generated videos that sent a very strong anti-bullying message. Over 2,400 students voted on the 10 videos that were short-listed after a submission of 160 different videos, and the students picked three very powerful messages that had been scripted, performed and filmed by students. A review-and-rate program allowed students to have very meaningful dialogue and learning moments with their teachers about the impacts of bullying in the classroom environment.

So, although we have certainly done a number of very innovative things and we continue to find ways to improve the system, whether it's through the bricks and mortar or whether it's from the magic that takes place every single day inside our classrooms, from the 15,000 dedicated teachers that we have working for us in the province of Manitoba, on behalf of the 185,000 students that attend our schools each and every day, we continue to work with our partners to ensure that our schools are safe, caring, learning environments and, more importantly, inclusive learning environments where all students have an opportunity to learn and all students are full participants in the education program in Manitoba.

With those few comments, I look forward to the discussion with my colleague. I know that he truly has the best interests of students at heart as a former trustee, and we've had many discussions around the education system and what it means to the economy and to the social well-being of our people here in Manitoba. I'm very much looking forward to the discussion with my critic, the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

With those few remarks, Mr. Acting Chairperson, I thank you for that opportunity.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): We thank the minister for the opening statement.

Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Acting Chairperson, I do appreciate the opportunity to be here in Estimates again. This time round, of course, having been in this position as Education advocate for the Progressive Conservative caucus, I have had an opportunity to get myself immersed in a lot of the issues that are facing us currently.

Over the last year, months, I had the opportunity to spend time in our schools, which is something I

thoroughly enjoy. I spent quite a bit of time with I Love to Read Month and covered a lot of schools. It's surprising how exhausting that can be, because the students expect you to be 100 percent on, all the time. I had a just terrific book that I was reading to students. It had to do with an election of a class president. We thought that was really fitting. I made the students act it out with me as I read it, and we had a great time. It didn't matter if this was a grade 8 class or a kindergarten class; they all understood what it was all about. I really enjoyed the book; it was a series of different stories.

What I found very interesting was, I went into the Hutterite colonies of which I read at three of them. They loved the story because they elect the farm boss in the same fashion, maybe not quite as a large of a franchise when it comes to elections, but they still do have elections. They just loved this story, just ate it up.

It gives us, as legislators, a really good opportunity to get into the classroom and just really experience the atmosphere again, because it's easy to get lost in the Legislature with issues that come up in legislation and all the kinds of things that happen here in this building. You forget that it really is about that student in the classroom and their interaction with their teacher in an environment. I'd have to say that every classroom I was in, the experience was just great.

I've also had the opportunity to spend time with a lot of the teachers. I've been at various events. There was a fundraiser for a family, the Schmidt family out of Springfield, whose house burnt down. The teachers in Oakbank put on a beautiful fundraiser, and I had a chance to speak to a lot of the teachers. They did just an amazing job.

I've also had the opportunity to speak, although briefly, numerous times to Ms. Isaak, the president of Manitoba Teachers' Society. I still want her to know the offer is open, that I will buy her a grande vanilla latte, half-sweet, 171 degree, percent milk latte with quality, not extra, foam. We keep trying to get our schedules together. It's been difficult but, in the meantime, I do have her cell number. I appreciate the fact that we get to speak whenever there seems to be an issue coming up. I appreciate her willingness to get back to me, if she's busy with something else.

Also, I have had the opportunity to spend a considerable amount of time with the retired teachers, the RTAM, and work with them on their

attempt to convince the government to do the right thing and fund a meaningful COLA.

We know that the minister, still relatively young—I would have to say he's young and probably doesn't even think—it's probably the furthest from his mind that, at some point in time, he too will be a retired teacher. We know that it won't be too long from now when he'll be a retired politician but, right now, we're talking about education. We know that the time will come when he'll be a retired teacher and then he too will be looking for a full COLA.

I know when we ask these questions and we talk about these issues, the minister looks at me and there are two different ministers. On one half of the face is the minister having to toe the departmental line and, on the other half of his face, his face is begging me, please, please keep fighting for my COLA. I know he's conflicted because, on the one hand really, it is a conflict of interest because I'm actually fighting for his pension.

* (15:00)

Let's just be very clear at this committee that I will not benefit from a full COLA for teachers—*[interjection]*—the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) is asking me if I could, at the same time, be fighting for a fairer pension for MLAs, and I have to tell him that, once I have won a fair pension for retired teachers, I will then move on to the next one.

Again, it's just one of those ironies in life that I'm actually fighting for a fair COLA for the minister. It's just one of those ironies of life. I want the minister to know that, whenever I ask him a question about getting a fair COLA like we had up until 1999, which his government then axed, I'm actually thinking of him. I'm actually thinking, you know, here's a young man who has put aside his career, puts in a lot of hours, time away from his family, and when he, after the next election, goes back to teaching, because he will then be a retired politician, the retired politician pension is not enough. He will have to go back to being a teacher. We feel that he must then, one day, retire from education with a full COLA. So, actually, I am looking out for the minister's future.

I mean, it's not just that I'm looking out for the minister and his COLA, but I am looking into the future for when the day comes when he retires as a teacher that he is well taken care of. In fact, I meet him and his wife periodically at functions, and I can just read in the minister's wife's eyes this thank you,

Ron, for fighting for my husband's pension, because she too has a vested interest in him having a good pension. Though she can't let those words cross her lips, I know she's whispering to me, thank you, thank you, with her eyes, that you are fighting for a fair COLA for all teachers.

I don't differentiate, Mr. Acting Chair. I don't. I don't differentiate at all between a retired teacher in East St. Paul or Springfield and a retired teacher who isn't quite retired yet and is the Minister of Education. I don't discriminate, actually. I don't. I don't believe in it. I fight as strongly for the minister's pension as I do for all of those teachers who are currently retired.

I felt that I actually had to get that off my chest and onto the record, that they're not later on, someone throwing it in my face, you know, that it was a conflict of interest. The only thing you were thinking about was the minister, the Member for Gimli's (Mr. Bjornson) pension.

Just so we know, it's declared—

An Honourable Member: I'm a teacher, too, Ron.

Mr. Schuler: You know what? I have just been correctly criticized by the Member for Brandon East, and I owe this committee an apology. It's not just the Member for Gimli. It's also the Member for Brandon East and the Member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), and all the other teachers on the government side of the House who look at me, and I can see, as I'm speaking on this, that the honourable Member for Brandon East, I can see he is, with glee, looking at how at least one individual is fighting for his pension, for his fair COLA. I know that, again, he was one of those who was so terribly conflicted.

I want the committee to know I've had the opportunity to meet with parents and schools at sports events, and I've had the opportunity to listen to them. School trustees and MASS, which was a great event, and the consultation has been great. I'm looking forward to getting into the Estimates process.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): We thank the critic for the official opposition for the opening comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of

line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance. Will the staff please enter.

Mr. Bjornson: I'm very pleased to be joined today by Deputy Minister Gerald Farthing, who's also the chairperson of the Public Schools Finance Board; Director Steve Power from Schools Finance; and Claude Fortier from Schools Finance Branch.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): I thank the honourable minister for introducing his staff.

Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): If it's fine with the minister, we would like to go in a global fashion to begin with.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): It's been proposed that these Estimates proceed in a global fashion. It's agreed? *[Agreed]* Thank you.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Schuler: I seemed to be a little rushed at the end of my opening statements because I got myself all caught up about the hard work that this member has been doing for the ministers and the former minister, the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) and others on the government benches fighting for a fair COLA for when the day comes when they retire.

But I do want to start off by thanking the department, including the Deputy Minister, Gerald Farthing, who I have, from time to time, made a few comments about and referenced in this House about the kind of relationship and history he and I have. In fact, I saw him the other day in one of the hallways and we had a little talk. He kind of said to me, he said, you know, Ron, if you keep going on with all these compliments, it's becoming a little bit career limiting. Could you please throw in a bad word once in a while about me. The minister's starting to look over his shoulder at the fact that all that you do is say nice things.

I actually told Gerald Farthing that, because if the House doesn't remember I actually worked for Gerald Farthing as a student and, no, that doesn't mean he's old; it just means he was a very young boss, is what that means. He was my boss at Crown

Investments, and I really hadn't had a lot of good superiors or bosses at that time. Gerald Farthing, you were really one of the most—

An Honourable Member: It was still pretty slim pickings, Ron.

Mr. Schuler: Really? One of the most amazing employers I'd had and, as I went through my career, I would come upon situations as a junior manager and later on as a more senior manager, I would come upon an issue, a problem, and, actually, I would always think: What would Gerald Farthing do? I think that speaks very highly.

I think the minister is lucky—and I don't think luck has anything to do with it—but the minister is lucky to have the kind of staff that he has—Gerald Farthing and the others at the table and those advising him. Now, I'm not too sure if the minister is taking the advice, and therein, I guess, always lies the difficulty we have with the minister. We don't take issue with the department or the staff. I'd like to also thank, not just within the deputy minister's office, but throughout the department, we would like to thank all of them for their hard work, and it goes through the entire Education system.

I do have some questions that I want to ask to start off with. I was wondering if the minister could let this House know who his political staff are, including their name, position and the FTE.

Mr. Bjornson: First of all, I would like to echo, as my colleague said, how privileged I am to work with the team of staff that I have in Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. As a teacher happens to be minister, I consider myself to be part of an incredible team of very dedicated professional individuals, and they work tirelessly on behalf of the students of Manitoba and the teachers and parents of Manitoba.

With respect to political staff, Carolina Stecher is my special assistant. I suspect the member wants to know the constituency staff as well. I have an executive assistant Jeannine Kebernik, and I have two constituency assistants sharing the full-time position, one, two days a week, one two and a half days a week. Their names are Sable Chamberlain and Krista Porteous.

* (15:10)

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and I was wondering if we could get a specific list of the staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office. It's usually something we ask for on a yearly basis.

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, we'll gladly provide that to the member.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell us the number of staff currently employed within the department?

Mr. Bjornson: There are currently 450 in the department. There are also 100 STEP students who are employed in the department as well; they're not usually included in that figure.

Mr. Schuler: The 450, obviously that's throughout the whole department. I take it that includes the minister's deputy minister and all the departmental staff as well.

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: Where are these housed? Which buildings—obviously, there's the building on Portage Avenue, but which buildings are these people housed in?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Acting Chairperson, we do have two office buildings on Portage Avenue that house Education, Citizenship and Youth staff; they are located at 800 and 1181 Portage. We also have staff on Ness Avenue, a facility on Dublin. Of course, the text bureau is located in Souris; the distance education department is in Winkler. The student records and teacher certification unit is in Russell; we have two positions in Rivers, Manitoba. We also have Aboriginal Education Directorate at Murdo Scribe Centre on Selkirk Avenue.

Mr. Schuler: Where is the bulk of the departmental staff? Would that be at 800 Portage?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, most of the staff is housed at 1181 Portage Avenue.

Mr. Schuler: The minister also has a few other departments. I was wondering if he could spend a bit of time—on the one hand, it's Education and then he's got Citizenship and Youth. I take it the 450 include the Citizenship and Youth component of his department.

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, MB4Youth is primarily responsible for the youth initiatives, and that would include several programs that support employment opportunities, transitioning and a number of different initiatives. MB4Youth is also responsible for the citizenship component of the agenda primarily, but they do work in collaboration with other parts of the department, including curriculum and instruction around the citizenship component.

Citizenship in itself has been adopted as a core concept for the department and is reflected in a number of different initiatives, including the curriculum changes that have been made to the social studies curriculum as well as a number of different initiatives that have supported the citizenship agenda. That would include citizenship grants; that would include the Youth Making a Difference initiative; that would include citizenship forums with teachers.

Getting back to MB4Youth, they offer over 25 programs and services for youth and students from across the province, and many would be delivered direct to resources, to groups allowing students to engage at the community level as well. An example of this would be the Green Team, which is supported through MB4Youth and a \$2.5-million budget to allow organizations to develop employment opportunities that directly meet the needs of their communities.

So those are just some of the examples. MB4Youth is a very, very busy department—that part of the department, as are all parts of the department—but theirs is certainly one that's focussed on opportunities for young people in community capacity.

Mr. Schuler: Does the minister have a breakdown—for instance, there's the Shared Services, Bureau of the French Division, School Programs Division, MB4Youth Division. Does he have a breakdown of approximately what percentage of the 450 employees are in each division?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, if the member were to refer to page 12, you see a breakdown of the FTEs by department, by branches within the department: if you look at the Admin and Finance total of 44 FTEs; School Programs, 263.39 FTEs; Bureau de l'éducation français, 61 FTEs; Support to Schools, 59.5 FTEs; and MB4Youth, 122.73 full-time equivalents—on page 12.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I want to be very clear in that. So Administration and Finance would include the minister, the deputy ministers and all the boards?

Mr. Bjornson: For clarification, if the member could ask me what boards he's referring to specifically. This, for example, wouldn't include the Public Schools Finance Board.

Mr. Schuler: Okay, I'll go the other way around. Obviously, MB4Youth is very clearly on the flowchart. School Programs Division, is that just

then called School Programs? That would be the 263 full-time positions?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Schuler: Then there's the Bureau de l'éducation français, that would be, obviously, the same match. It's the Shared Services, is that the Administration and Finance? I'm trying to understand where that FTE equivalent would go on a flowchart.

Mr. Bjornson: I see what the member is referring to with respect to the flowchart and the Shared Services. A lot of the groups identified, for example, the Aboriginal Education Directorate also shares services with Advanced Education and Literacy. The Systems and Technology Services, I would suspect, is engaged with STEM. Sustainable Development Initiative is also engaged with STEM and Conservation to some extent. So the Shared Services are exactly that. They are different groups that work not only for my department, but also for other departments. Your question is: Where do they fit in with respect to the number of FTEs? They are actually budgeted in my department. So, where you see references to the Aboriginal Education Directorate or Financial Services, that's broken down in the categories that you would see on page 12, I believe.

* (15:20)

Mr. Schuler: So, in MB4Youth Division, there are about 122 staff? School Programs Division, 263; français Division, 61; and then Shared Services and the minister's office, I guess, would be the additional 44?

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: Since the minister's come to office, has there been a substantial change in any of these departments insofar as staffing is concerned? Or is it fairly static?

Mr. Bjornson: In the five years now that I've been in this position, there has been some reorganization per se, but, in terms of the numbers of staff, the number of FTEs has been relatively constant.

Mr. Schuler: Is the minister noticing, or is there a projection that there will be a lot of retirees taking place over the next near future?

Mr. Bjornson: Of course, good planning would require to know and anticipate what your needs might be. We do have a number that have declared. I don't have that information right now, but we do

have a number that have declared their intent to retire. But it's certainly not something that would not be manageable in terms of the staff that would replace them.

Mr. Schuler: I've noticed that within the department are 100 STEP students. Perhaps, for the committee, the minister can explain who these individuals are.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, certainly, with a hundred students it would be difficult to make that determination and identify all 100 obviously, but this is something that's been ongoing where the department would identify students and hire them for term positions primarily. On occasion, some STEP students, I understand, do go on to seek term and full-time employment within the department. Of course, when we go through this process, when people do express their intent to retire, then, of course, the positions are posted and advertised and a process is undertaken for their replacement. Certainly, if the STEP students are qualified to do so, they would go through that process as well if they were interested in applying for a position.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I don't think we're looking for a breakdown of each hundred students. I don't think we can fit that in to the 30, 40 hours that we have for Estimates in Education. What I'm just wondering, these hundred students, I take it these are predominantly university students?

Mr. Bjornson: My understanding is that the students are eligible to apply for the STEP program right out of high school as well, but I would suspect that a good number of them are university- or college-trained as well.

Mr. Schuler: The minister mentioned that 100 of them are currently working in the department. Is it that they work part-time? It's a six month contract? Just to get a handle on what kind of employment these students have. Is it they work part-time during the winter and then work full-time in the summer? How do they get their employment?

Mr. Bjornson: Sorry, I should make it clear that we have 100 STEP positions that are hired within our department for other departments as well. They're not all hired and working in our department. But STEP is administered through MB4Youth.

Mr. Schuler: So the hundred students, the funding comes out of the Department of Education, and they work throughout government. Is that correct?

Mr. Bjornson: We house the full-time equivalents and the other departments have to have it within their budgets to pay the salaries of the STEP students.

Mr. Schuler: So it's the Department of Education that has the FTE, but other departments, depending on their need, they pay the Department of Education for that student. How is that accounted for?

Mr. Bjornson: The departments pay the students' salaries directly.

Mr. Schuler: However, their FTE does not show up in their department. It shows up in the Department of Education.

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: In the last year, have there been a lot of retirees, in the last fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: I don't have that exact figure available. We could get that for the minister, if he would like to have that number, or for the member.

Mr. Schuler: I would appreciate that. I guess what I'm asking for is how many new individuals have been hired in the last year?

Mr. Bjornson: We'll certainly get that information for the member. I should also mentioned at this time that the Public Schools Finance Board Executive Director, Rick Dedi, has joined us at the table as well.

Mr. Schuler: We want to welcome him as well to the Manitoba Legislature. Great to see him here, and we'll make sure we go easy on him with all our questions. I'd like to ask the minister, have there been positions that have been reclassified over the last year?

Mr. Bjornson: I'm not aware of any at this time, but we'll certainly check and see if there are any reclassifications that have taken place.

Mr. Schuler: The hiring that's done and certainly those that have been done in the '07-08 year, this year that's just ended, were all the positions hired through a competition process or was it by appointment?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe they were all through competition.

Mr. Schuler: When an individual has worked here in the Legislature for an MLA—I know that it is federally and I'm not too sure how it works provincially; I know federally it used to be if you worked two years for an MP, you then could get into

the public service. Is there that kind of a rule provincially or that just doesn't apply?

Mr. Bjornson: There's no rule of that kind that I'm aware of, no.

* (15:30)

Mr. Schuler: If there's somebody that works in the minister's office, and, again, this is not now constituency staff; this would be working for the minister, whether it's his EA or SA. Is there any time frame that they work and then they can get into the public service?

Mr. Bjornson: No, there are no guidelines like that at all. No.

Mr. Schuler: In the five years that the minister has been in this portfolio, could he tell us how many staff that have worked for MLAs or for ministers, how many of those are now working in the Department of Education?

Mr. Bjornson: I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Schuler: Again, just in the same line, what is the vacancy rate right now within the department?

Mr. Bjornson: We believe it is around 4 percent, but we can certainly check and get a more definitive number for you, if the member should choose.

Mr. Schuler: With that 4 percent, is that standard for the department?

Mr. Bjornson: My understanding is that 4 percent might be a bit lower than usual, but not out of the realm of what we might consider standard.

Mr. Schuler: The reason for these vacancies would be?

Mr. Bjornson: It would be a number of variables that might contribute to that, whether it's a career choice change, jobs within other departments for government, jobs in the private sector, retirement; all of those variables would contribute to that vacancy rate.

Mr. Schuler: The money, then, that has been put aside for those positions—obviously, they've been budgeted for—what happens to that money?

Mr. Bjornson: We do budget in anticipation of vacancy rates and on occasion, if that budgeting is not accurate, then there's cause for the money to lapse on occasion. Sometimes that money that would be available is used for other purposes within the department, for other educational purposes,

obviously, but it's usually something that is budgeted for in terms of the vacancies that we can expect on an annual basis.

Mr. Schuler: Back to the amount of people working for the department, the minister mentioned about 450, and, when we kind of added up the numbers from page 12, I came up with 490, and, within the addition on page 12, it's actually 550.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I'll remind the member that the difference would be the number of STEP students that are included in that calculation.

Mr. Schuler: So where would the bulk of those 100 be? Would that be in MB4Youth?

Mr. Bjornson: All the positions are banked in MB4Youth. Depending on how many STEP students other departments want to hire would determine how many STEP students are actually working in the various departments.

Mr. Schuler: Well, that certainly explains it. Again, it is a little odd in that they're not really full-time and I don't think I got from the minister, they work during the school years, or are they summer students? Anyway, that's where I got a little messed up with the numbers. I didn't realize the 100 were added in, so I'm glad the minister clarified that. Again, if the minister could just explain to us, these 100 STEP students, are they full-time contract? Are they sometimes contract? Are they summer students or all of the above?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Acting Chair, some of the students do work throughout the year. Some of them are on terms and a good number of them are actually summer employees.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for that. Within the department in the last year have there been any contracts awarded directly? And, I guess, what I'm going to ask here is: Is there a dollar value cutoff to the contracts? For instance, \$25,000 and under doesn't need Treasury Board approval. How does the contracting process work within the department?

Mr. Bjornson: I thought this question sounded familiar; I believe the member asked it last year. We do try to tender everything where possible in the event that there are sole suppliers for the goods or services that we are requesting through the tender process. If there's only one provider of that particular service or product, whatever the case might be, then we are sure to document why it is the case that that particular individual would have been awarded the

contract in the absence of a tender process if there's only one other, or one provider for that particular service or product, but we do try to tender everything.

Mr. Schuler: Was there any polling done out of the Department of Education?

Mr. Bjornson: No, there was not.

* (15:40)

Mr. Schuler: So, just to be very clear, no monies were paid for polling, and there was no polling done by the Department of Education.

Mr. Bjornson: No, there was not.

Mr. Schuler: The minister, I know, has cause for travelling on occasion. Could he tell this House where he travelled in the last fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: Within the country of Canada, I've had the opportunity to travel to Newfoundland and Toronto; those were both for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada meetings. Beyond our borders, I went to Cartagena, Colombia last November, representing the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, for a week's summit on early childhood education, which was funded through the federal government as part of our Council of Ministers of Education international education when we are requested to represent the country. As far as out-of-province or out-of-country travel, that's it. That's all I recall.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister. I'm probably one of those individuals who gets quite agitated when I read— it usually happens about federally—that there seems to be a belief that our politicians should stay at home, not educate themselves on what's going on in the world and, basically, want to keep our politicians stupid so that they don't see how other countries work or what goes on in other places.

When I see these and, usually, it's off the wire, they don't even credit it to one reporter because you can't call up him and her, and say, how stupid can you get to somehow indicate that politicians should never learn, ever, and shouldn't leave their jurisdiction and just become parochial.

I'm not one of those who feels that travel is a bad thing, and I don't ask for those reasons. It's probably the one area where I would suggest, I'm quite surprised the minister doesn't do more travel. I just wanted to know where in the budget is that listed.

Usually, where does that get listed under the minister's travel?

Mr. Bjornson: That would be reported under Executive Support.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell us who he travelled with to Newfoundland?

Mr. Bjornson: My special assistant, Carolina Stecher, and Deputy Farthing had been to Newfoundland, and Keith Lowe from the department as well. Of course, as it's the Council of Ministers, Minister McGifford and one of her staff went as well.

Mr. Schuler: To Toronto, who travelled with the minister?

Mr. Bjornson: Toronto, I believe, it was the same cast. It would have been the same group that would have attended in Toronto as well.

Mr. Schuler: And Colombia, who travelled with the minister to Colombia?

Mr. Bjornson: There was nobody from Manitoba that travelled with me. Emery Dosdall was the Deputy Minister of Education in British Columbia, and he represented the Council of Ministers as the deputy minister. There were also a couple of other individuals that attended. Raymond Théberge who is, of course, the executive director of the Council of Ministers, and the young woman from a federal department; I'm sorry, her name escapes me, at this time.

I was very thankful that Raymond Théberge and Emery Dosdall were there. I'm quite convinced I'd still be at the airport in Bogotá if they weren't, but it was a very important delegation on a very important topic for early childhood education.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I'm surprised at how little the minister has travelled, and I'm sure wherever he did travel, I'm sure he represented our province well.

My next question is: What kind of travel plans does the minister have for the coming year?

Mr. Bjornson: The biannual meetings for the Council of Ministers of Education. I believe the next one is in Fredericton in September–September, October, I'm not sure of the date yet. Then we have the annual meeting in Toronto, usually in February. I celebrated my last three birthdays with my friends in the CMEC.

As far as international travel, I know that the CMEC does circulate requests quite frequently when international conferences do arise and the opportunity presents itself. Quite frankly, the trip to Cartagena, I believe I was the third on the list and was advised with very short notice that I would be going. I also understand that—[interjection] I didn't romance the stone, but I did see where they filmed it. In fact, I believe the courtyard at the hotel I was staying in was part of that motion picture. I've been advised I will be getting an invitation for international travel. I won't speak to that until such time that I do receive that invitation.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I think it's important for ministers to travel and represent Manitoba, and I ask only for matter of the record and feel that it's important; it's healthy for elected officials and ministers to travel and find out what's happening in other jurisdictions. It brings good ideas back and maybe find out that some of the stuff that's being done here should be improved on. I don't think Bill 28 was one of those, but we'll agree to disagree. I don't think he probably learnt about Bill 28 in Cartagena, Toronto or Newfoundland, but we'll leave it at that.

I take it that all the departmental travel came out of each department's budget.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, and , as mentioned, it's part of the Executive Support budget line.

Mr. Schuler: I take it the minister does travel around the province as well.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, indeed, I've had an opportunity to go to Churchill and open up the new school in Churchill, which was a wonderful celebration for the community. I mentioned in question period today that I spent a couple of days in Park West School Division. Where was I—oh boy, I was in Russell and a couple of other communities in the area, and I put, on average, between 48,000 and 52,000 kilometres a year on my ministerial vehicle. Of course, a good number of that is commuting back and forth to Gimli, but also travelling to visit many schools throughout the province of Manitoba.

So I do travel extensively in the province and have had occasion to fly to many of the more remote communities in efforts to meet with the community, to meet with parents, teachers, students and, of course, the administration, whether it's boards or school administrators or community officials who

have issues of concern for their communities and their schools.

Mr. Schuler: Has the department paid for any travel by the Premier (Mr. Doer)?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I do know that a blanket request has been made and that my expenses would be reported in that response as well.

Mr. Schuler: Has any delegation led by the Premier been paid for by the department?

* (15:50)

Mr. Bjornson: No.

Mr. Schuler: Anybody from the Department of Education that travelled with the Premier—has there been, let me rephrase that. Has there been anybody from the Department of Education who has travelled with the Premier on any delegation?

Mr. Bjornson: No.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I guess the Premier has no need for anybody from the Department of Education.

The minister over the last year has had cause to make some departmental announcements with the Seven Oaks School Division. We've gone through that well enough, and I know how painful that is for the minister. In fact, I remember there used to be a saying, Lord, save us from our friends. I'm sure, at times, the minister was mumbling that to himself.

Since then, there has been this new Public Schools Finance Board set up. Can the minister sort of explain for the committee how that's working? The changes have been for the better?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, since the changes have been made, we've been hearing very positive feedback in terms of the responsiveness of the Public Schools Finance Board and their ability to respond more quickly to school divisions and streamlining the services. The delivery of the PSFB mandate has resulted in a very favourable response from the stakeholders. We've heard very good things from the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, from MASBO, from MASS, as well, on the delivery of the services through the PSFB.

Mr. Schuler: How often does the new PSFB meet?

Mr. Bjornson: The PSFB meets approximately every six weeks.

Mr. Schuler: Just for the committee, I know that the chair is Gerald Farthing. Can the minister again tell this committee who else is on that board?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, the member is correct that Deputy Farthing is the chair; we have the Deputy Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, that's Sandra Hardy; and the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, that's John Clarkson.

Mr. Schuler: So it's a committee of three.

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct.

Mr. Schuler: So how does the process work? Is it still the same, where the school board identifies their top priorities, and then that's submitted to the Public Schools Finance Board, and then the vetting starts?

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct. School boards submit their five-year capital plans, and they go through a process at the board level. That's how the process has worked in the past; that's how it continues to work now, only it's essentially eliminating the step by having the board with deputy ministers at the table.

Mr. Schuler: Once the board has met and made its recommendation, does it then go to the minister?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes. As per the act, I do see the recommendations, and, as per the act, make the ministerial awards and approvals.

Mr. Schuler: Once it goes to the minister, does it then go to Treasury Board for approval?

Mr. Bjornson: The Treasury Board will know what the major items will be, but the PSFB develops the plan in terms of the capital expenditures for the funding that is announced.

Mr. Schuler: So the PSFB makes the recommendation. Does this not get vetted through Cabinet? Does it not go to Treasury Board? Is there not a final vetting of the funding?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, under The Public Schools Finance Board Act, section 8(1), plans submitted to the minister subject to section 186 of the PSA, the board must submit the annual funding plan to the minister for approval in the form, and at the time, specified by the minister.

Mr. Schuler: So these decisions never go to Cabinet for discussion?

Mr. Bjornson: As minister, I make the awards. The extent to which it's discussed with Cabinet would be the extent to which I would see fit to bring it forward as information, but the PSFB develops a plan, makes

recommendations, and I approve the plan and, of course, the funding envelope has been determined. The amount of money has been determined through the usual process, but the projects themselves are determined by the PSFB and a process that looks at a number of priorities. Those priorities, of course, could be an issue of the structural integrity of a building; it could be a health issue. If we've had schools that have been committed to build and suddenly there's a health issue with respect to mould and mould being beyond the ability to reconcile, or remediate the mould so the building might have to be replaced. We've had a couple of situations where that's been the case.

Health and safety are the priorities. Enrolments in programming are also weighed in on the decisions that PSFB makes when they make the recommendations to myself.

Mr. Schuler: So the budget came down in which the capital funding announcement was made. When did Public Schools Finance Board meet after that announcement?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe they met a week after the budget was announced.

Mr. Schuler: And it was at that time that they decided which schools would be funded, which projects would be funded?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as the member can appreciate, when you're talking about a \$60-million budget, there's a considerable amount of time and energy that goes into the planning process, and when you have 36 different school divisions coming forward with their five-year capital plans, all of their priorities are taken into consideration and, again, those priorities are weighed against other issues such as health and safety, such as enrolments and such as programming needs of the community. When you weigh that in, a lot of the legwork per se has been done prior to that \$60-million announcement, and those are part of the recommendations that come straight from the Public Schools Finance Board when the budget is finalized in terms of the amount of money that will be available for capital expenditures.

* (16:00)

Mr. Schuler: Throughout this Estimates process, periodically there'll be other members that will be dropping by and wanting to ask a few questions, and I hope the committee indulges, the minister indulges us. I understand we have a member right now, and he has a few questions. So I'll pass it over to him.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): It's just a few questions that I would like to get on the record with the minister.

With the recent announcement in terms of the legislation for a moratorium on school closures, I trust that the minister had a sense of what the potential schools that could have been closed had the moratorium not been put in place.

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct, of course, this is a very public process—under the guidelines that were introduced in 1982 with respect to the consultation that would be required to take place with the community. Many of the schools that were up for review, per se, didn't necessarily mean that they would be closed, but they were up for review and a notice had been posted publicly by the school divisions that they were intending on reviewing those particular schools and the viability thereof.

There were 13 schools that I'm aware of that were being considered for review purposes, for the purpose of potential closure. So the intent now is to look at what are some other options that might make the school viable within the community despite the fact that enrolments have been declining. We've asked school boards to look at other options, to support their community school by engaging the community as part of the bill that was introduced on Monday.

Mr. Lamoureux: I just want to be clear on the point: Had the government not gotten involved on this issue, there would have been a possibility of, let's say, 13 schools that would have closed over the next few years, let's say three or four years. Fair assessment?

Mr. Bjornson: That is a distinct possibility. If you look at what's occurred in the last nine years alone with declining enrolment, we've seen 38 different schools closed in the past nine years, but we've also seen 10 new schools opened or funded as public schools, so you have a net loss of 28 schools in the province over the last nine years. It was quite possible that the schools that were posted for review purposes would have closed indeed.

Mr. Lamoureux: Given the importance of public debate or the issue of accountability, would the minister be prepared to share with me the 13 schools, whether it's right now or he can just provide me a list, would be fine.

Mr. Bjornson: As a matter of fact, I do have the list available to me. As I said, this is a very public

process in that school divisions are required to advertise their intent and provide a notice to the community that the school is being considered for review. If you want to look in rural Manitoba, Disbrowe School, in Frontier School Division, was up for consideration.

There are a couple schools that are currently potential for consolidation in Lakeshore School Division, in Ashern and Fisher Branch. Then you go to Park West where Kenton School was potentially going to be closed. If you look at Louis Riel School Division, four schools in Louis Riel School Division were listed: Archwood School, a K to 8 school; Dr. D. W. Penner School, K to 6; École Henri-Bergeron, a K to 6; Marion School, a K-to-8 school.

Pembina Trails had Chapman School up for review; River East Transcona, Sherwood School and Westview School; St. James-Assiniboia, Ness Middle School, which is a 6 to 8, and a school where a student taught back in the day; Hedges Middle School, which is a 6-to-8 school.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Acting Chairperson, I appreciate the information. I wanted to, and I don't know if the minister or the staff have a copy of the summary budget or access to it at the table there. What I'm going to do is just throw a couple of numbers and ask for some feedback on it. In it—and it would be on page 8, Education, Citizenship and Youth—it says government expenditure estimate of \$1,409,138,000. Then it has consolidated impacts of \$846,149,000. Am I to assume that that \$846,000 is just the monies that are being spent from the different school divisions and that that money is the money that's then raised from local levy?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Acting Chair, I believe the number to which the member is referring speaks to the special revenues at some school divisions. If you see that, it speaks to tuitions that school division is receiving tuition arrangements with First Nations communities, and it would also speak to the taxes that would be levied at the local level. I believe that is the case, but I'll certainly confirm that for the member if he would like.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Acting Chairperson, I would very much appreciate that. My understanding, then, because you would take the two of them together is that in order to provide K to 12, the cost is \$2,255,287,000. Believing that that is, in fact, the case, what would be the actual number of students today? And then the following question I'm going to

ask is the number of teachers that are in the classroom.

Mr. Bjornson: I can tell the honourable member that the total public schools enrolment is 181,446 if you include the independent funded schools, non-funded schools, total independent schools is 14,163. If you combine that figure you will get a number of 195,609. The home schooling accounts for 1,235 students. So you have a provincial total of students in the province of 196,844.

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the government have a sense in terms of those between the ages of let's say four and a half to 18 living in the province of Manitoba that are not in the educational system, in the public school system or private school system.

* (16:10)

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Acting Chair, we don't have that data available to us right now.

Mr. Lamoureux: I'm just going to talk strictly about the public school system where we have 181,000. When you say that number, is that the number that would have been in September of 2007 or October of 2007? Is that where that number would come from?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, Mr. Acting Chairperson, the book that I am referring from is the enrollment report for September 30, 2007.

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the department actually have—and I appreciate you might be getting it back; maybe you could just confirm it—does the Department of Education have any hard numbers as to the number of youth that are not attending public schools?

Mr. Bjornson: The data that I have would speak to the number of students who aren't in the public school system right now and are being home-schooled, which would be 1,235.

Mr. Lamoureux: I would like it if the minister could provide me from the department the number of youth, youth being defined as age four to 18, that are not attending the public school system. I would ask if he'd make that commitment to get me that number at some point.

Mr. Bjornson: Could I get some clarification, perhaps, from the member, if he is saying the number of students that don't attend the public school? Are you talking about non-funded independent schools? Are you talking about funded independent schools? Are you talking about home-schools as your term of

reference, or are you talking school-agers who have left the school system?

Mr. Lamoureux: It's those that have left the school system. I'm interested in knowing how many kids are not attending school, whether it's private, public, home schooling. If I could get that commitment from the minister, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Bjornson: That data would be difficult to ascertain for a number of reasons. There are different times of the year that students might choose to leave school. Are they choosing to leave school for employment opportunities? Are they moving from the province? Medical reasons? What are the variables that might contribute to a student leaving the school system?

I know from my teaching experience that there are a number of different issues that might tell a student that, yes, I want to learn, but now is not the time for me to learn. They pursue adult education opportunities; they pursue short-term employment in the interim. What we try to do, of course, as a department is to find as many opportunities as possible to engage our students and to keep them in the school system.

For the variety of reasons and others that I might have omitted, it's very difficult to ascertain the number of students who are school age who are currently not in the system. The data that I do have says, between the public, private and home schooling, that there are 196,844 who are. I can't get specific on the number that would be school age that are not.

Mr. Lamoureux: I do believe that it would be beneficial for debate, whether it's within the Chamber or within a Cabinet or a caucus, to have a sense of how many children are not. We are not looking for a precise 433 children on January 10 that were not in any educational school system. What I'm looking for would be, at the very least, there should be a best guesstimate. I think that's a very reasonable thing to be asking for. If you were to say to me, in the area that I represent, are there children that are not attending school that should be attending school, I would say, most definitely. How would I qualify it? I would have a very, very difficult time to do that. It doesn't mean that I kind of throw my hands in the air and I give up. I think there is some merit in terms of attempting to qualify.

As an example, if someone was to say to me to guesstimate out of a population of, let's see, of

maybe just over 20,000, you know, you might be talking of a couple dozen. I don't know, but I think that there would be some value. I spend, on a percentage basis, very little time on education in terms of all the other issues that I'm having to deal with, but at times I do focus on education, and I think that these types of things would be important, especially for the Minister of Education to have some sense of how many children have, in essence, fallen through the cracks, if I can put it that way. I suspect in certain areas that the minister will find that it's higher, and I will leave that issue unless he wants to add comment to it. I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, I'd appreciate the opportunity to comment. As someone who taught for 13 years, I certainly had been witness to a number of circumstances for young learners who were at risk—learners, young learners, who came from a variety of different circumstances that made school not exactly a priority for them. They had other issues that they had to contend with.

The member did say in his question that he thought it would be very difficult to ascertain those numbers, and indeed, it would be very difficult to ascertain, but, under the act, parents and guardians are required to have their children attend school through to age 16. It is incumbent on the parent to ensure that they do so as well as incumbent on the school to make every effort to keep that young learner in school.

Certainly, there are some challenges that we've been trying to address proactively. A case in point—we have done a lot to improve the English as an Additional Language, as language has been a barrier for many of the recent immigrants to Manitoba and it can be a tremendous barrier to academic success. Part of that, when you consider the number of students that come from refugee status situations coming to Manitoba, we also initiated the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant for war-affected children who might find themselves drawn from the school system because of their past experiences and their traumas and realities that they had to deal with in the push factors that sent them here as refugees. So we're trying to be proactive and intervene with students who are at risk of leaving the system.

Also, we know that the graduation rates for First Nations learners are not acceptable. We need to do a better job, and we continue to do so with partnerships with First Nations educational authorities, some professional development for

teachers. We have the Aboriginal Education Action Plan that has gone through three years of initiatives that have proven quite fruitful and support our decision making around the next steps to support First Nations learners that do not currently have the same success rate.

There are a number of variables that could contribute to students leaving, and I know, for example, in Alberta right now, when I last met at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, the Alberta ministers were quite concerned that the big dollar sign that's being waved around in terms of the labour requirements—and labour requirements that don't require a high school education—is going to create quite a deficit that you have a significant number of school-age children leaving at 16, drawn by incredibly high hourly wages and it's difficult. It's going to create difficulty, in the Alberta minister's words, with respect to the education level of the work force, and that is a challenge.

So there are a number of factors that might push a student from the school. What we're focussed on is efforts to pull the student into the education system and the value of an education and the value of an educated economy.

* (16:20)

So these are the things that we have been doing and, in some cases, to get the numbers that the member is speaking about would be very difficult, given the transient nature of some communities, as well, where they might leave school in one community. They might be moving on to another. There are a number of different variables that would contribute to how complex it is to get this information. Although it might seem simple on the surface, it is a very complex issue. I thank the member for the question.

Mr. Lamoureux: I realize that there is a difference between Manitoba and Alberta and the reasons why. I guess I still would be concerned, but maybe not as much if the sole reason why students were leaving the system was because of economic opportunities. For me, it's the other direction.

It's the sniffing, the crack, the crime, the ability, the low self-esteem; it's pregnancies; it's because they don't feel safe at school. Those are the ones that I'm more concerned about, and I think it behooves us to have a better understanding. That's just my point, just to have a better understanding of it.

I wanted to move on to the issue of student visas. Does the department have any sense in terms of how many foreign nationals would be in our elementary school system?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. Actually, we don't have that data here. It is through International Education, under the auspices of International Education through Competitiveness, Training and Trade, where I happened to be this morning at a board meeting to bring greetings on behalf of the Province. We were looking at the value of international education across Canada and how we, as a country, should be branding the excellent education system that we have here to promote more international educational opportunities. Had I known you were going to ask the question, I would have asked for that this morning in the office. Unfortunately, that's not the case. We can find that information for the member, though.

Mr. Lamoureux: I appreciate your comments, Mr. Minister. What I'm really interested in is which school divisions and what sort of numbers that a school division would have. If you have that, that would be very much appreciated.

The last issue is just dealing with teachers. Numbers of teachers that are practising today would be what, from K to 12?

Mr. Bjornson: I can tell the member it's approximately 13,000. I don't have the exact number in front of me today, but I can surely provide that for the member.

Mr. Lamoureux: One of the things that, I think, frustrates a lot of the classroom teachers is the sense of, while you hear about these large numbers of teachers, but how many of them are actually inside the classroom? I suspect the minister pointed to the fact that he used to be a teacher in the classroom and maybe at some point shared some of those very same frustrations.

When we say there are 13,000 or whatever the actual number is, would that be teachers that are registered as teachers in the province, and they would include those that wouldn't necessarily be in the classroom?

Mr. Bjornson: The measure has always been that the number of certified personnel working within the division would be included in that measure. That would include, of course, principals and vice-principals who would have teachers' certificates. There are some teacher librarians that would have

teachers' certificates, counsellors that would have teachers' certificates. They might not actually have the responsibility of teaching a class, but they are there providing supports and services for the students.

That is how the number of teachers is calculated in a division. I know some divisions that are quite large have a number of consultants who are working for the division. Their role is no longer to teach students in the classroom per se; they might have student contact, providing professional learning opportunities for their teachers and conducting classes on specific issues, but they are also factored into that measure of the number of teachers working in the division.

Overall, however, Manitoba does have a very favourable pupil-educator ratio. I don't believe the measure for pupil-educator ratio is as consistent throughout the country, though, to give us a fair picture, but I know that we do have a quite favourable pupil-educator ratio here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: I do think that there is value in terms of just looking at stats in this sort of an area: How many teachers are there in the classroom and actual classroom teaching students, how does that compare with other jurisdictions. I'll leave the minister to kind of toy with that thought and maybe next Estimates, or the official critic might ask more questions in regard to that.

Finally, and this will be my last question, in terms of the teaching profession: Does the minister believe that there is a shortfall of teachers, that we need to have more teachers going through our university system? In particular, do immigrant teachers have a role in assisting in a possible need for teaching?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question. I can share a personal anecdote with respect to how far we've come in terms of addressing teacher education certification opportunities here in Canada. When I was teaching high school in Gimli, I had a colleague of mine who had taught 14 years in college, but, under the regulations of the day, was not eligible to teach—with a Master's of Education—was not eligible to teach in Manitoba as a certified teacher.

Since that time, there's been a tremendous amount of work done through the Labour Minister and in partnership with the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, where there is a mobility now for

teachers who do receive certification in other provinces, who can come to Manitoba to teach and where some teachers have been recognized, had their credentials recognized from other jurisdictions—case in point, Newfoundland, was a tremendous source of teachers, particularly in northern Manitoba. When visiting Churchill, I was really astounded at the number of teachers in the school who are actually from Newfoundland, and the same could be said for other jurisdictions like Thompson.

So we've come a long way in addressing mobility and the recognition of credentials as far as the teaching profession is concerned here in Canada. With respect to international credentials, of course, that is something that I believe is still being worked on. Of course, you have to recognize some of the complexities that would be involved in that, but as far as anticipated shortages are concerned, I know that the faculties continue to graduate, I believe, around 600 teachers a year between—if I'm not mistaken—University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Brandon, and Collège St. Boniface. That has been able to meet the demands of the public school system over time and I suspect will continue to do so, but we'll also continue to adjust according to need.

Another thing about teacher education certification that I think is worthy of note is the fact that the Special Education Review Initiative did recommend that there be six hours of instruction, six credit hours that would be required for certification around appropriate educational programming. So I'm very proud of the fact that we have followed through with those recommendations and the faculties are gearing up towards including that as part of their credentials for teachers.

I just received a sheet that does tell me that we have currently 15,840 active teachers as of September 30, 2007, but I should clarify for the member that that includes band-operated, private, and public school teachers in the province of Manitoba. So 13,574 that are public school teachers right now in the province.

* (16:30)

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood) Keeping on the theme of teachers, I recall a few years ago there had been a survey done, I think, of teachers in Manitoba by the MTS that indicated quite a high percentage of violence against teachers.

Is that something that the minister's department tracks and, if so, are those numbers going up, down? Is there some resolution to that?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question. I know that MTS has conducted that survey a few times over the course of the last 20 years. I know that this year, class size usurped violence and aggression towards teachers as the No. 1 concern for teachers in the MTS survey. That said, we know that we still have to be diligent and monitor events that do, on occasion, occur in our Manitoba schools.

With respect to violent episodes in the schools, we had requested that school divisions report episodes to the department, because we wanted to monitor the impact of the initiatives that we've been introducing through the Safe Schools Charter, through Safe Schools Manitoba, through partnerships with various other organizations, RespectED through the Red Cross and a number of other initiatives that we've implemented through the Safe Schools initiative here in Manitoba.

To ask if the incidents have increased or not, we simply don't have the data that can support that. We did ask for the data because we do want to know, and we do want to know that we're able to resource and support the teachers in situations where they might find themselves in harm's way.

I know from my own experience, I never thought that, having been a bouncer at a local nightclub here in Winnipeg, would've been part of the job description when, I think it was in 1996, I first had to assist the police in putting handcuffs on a student; that was not a moment I will ever forget. It's not an easy thing to have to do as a teacher, when you're there to protect and work with these children. Certainly, there are occasions where there will be a violent act, and we have to make sure we provide the resources and supports for the students and the teachers to address these.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, I think it is a serious issue when we see teachers being put in harm's way and violence being part of that equation. I don't really recall much of that when I was going to school. It is disturbing to know that, if you become a teacher, that becomes part of your job description. Certainly, I would support any initiatives to track violence against teachers and to try to get to the genesis of what that is all about.

I could almost say the same in nursing too, where I can recall one night, in the middle of the

night, feeling bad for this patient who had been restrained. In my compassionate way, I decided I was going unrestrain him, only to then have a fist, the size of a pail, come at my head. I was smashed in the head, fell to the floor, saw stars, not quite blacked out, I don't think, crawled out of the room on my hands and knees with my white uniform on and sat in the hallway half-dazed. Another nursing colleague had hair pulled out, earrings ripped right out of her ears. You don't expect those kinds of things to be happening when you go into these kinds of professions, but they have become a part of those environments, sadly.

I guess this does lead me into—the minister was talking about tracking violence in schools. Can the minister just indicate: Are school divisions expected to keep track of violent incidences and file a report on those on an annual basis?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, we do request that school divisions provide a report on incidences of significance. Now, some of the incidences of significance have resulted in a lockdown in a school; for example, when there have been allegations of weapons, but those allegations of weapons haven't necessarily been in the school. They might have been in the neighbourhood, which would have necessitated the lockdown, so we make sure that we differentiate between those situations.

We do request that they report episodes to us that would be considered significant. Now, I guess part of that discussion is what exactly is significant, but most school divisions can make those determinations on what that might be if it involves assault or things of that nature, weapons offences.

So we've asked for the data because we want to know, as I said, that our initiatives are working, and we also want to know how we can improve the supports and resources. I can certainly empathize with the member in her experiences in nursing and on the ward when you don't expect these types of things to happen. I guess in my case, I was often called upon to intervene because I happen to be a fairly large guy, so I found myself more often than not in harm's way, if that was a case where teachers were at risk and I would be asked to intervene on their behalf. It was a difficult thing to do, but it was necessary to put yourself in harm's way to support children who are at risk and teachers who are at risk. That is unfortunate. It did happen in the schools. It does happen in the schools. I believe, though, that a lot of the initiatives that we brought forward,

including even the Triple P Positive Parenting initiative that will reduce—that has been statistically verified to reduce conduct disorder will allow for more attention and energy to be devoted to children who are higher risk and higher needs with respect to behavioural disorders and behavioural issues.

We do need to know, and we ask that we're told so that we can make better decisions and support our learners and our teachers.

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mrs. Driedger: I know in health care we have what is called critical incidents, and it's well-defined in terms—well, or it's getting there, hopefully—as what identifies incidences as critical incidents. You can almost look at something similar in a standard methodology throughout the province in schools where you could have, you know, what you call critical incidents so that—or different levels of incidences—and certainly then gather that information and track it to see if our schools are indeed, in today's society—and I imagine they are—becoming more violent. At least we would have maybe a somewhat objective ability, then, to track some of this and where it's happening so that you can adequately then truly follow up with resources into those areas.

But, if the minister's indicating that some of this is happening right now, can he indicate when that started to happen and if, in fact, these numbers are made public through his annual report?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. I appreciate the advice as far as standard reporting is concerned. We do, actually, have expectations that certain episodes will be reported. For example, if there's police intervention, if the police are called to the schools, if there are medical emergencies, if there's a brawl, things of that nature. We are quite specific in terms of what our expectations would be to report such incidents.

I do appreciate the advice on a standard report card, if you will. I'm not so sure I would agree with the member that schools are becoming increasingly violent. I think that there've been tremendous efforts to reduce violence in the schools. I think it's, perhaps, the nature of violence that is alarming in terms of the weapons and the nature of the fights that we do see in the schools, but I would suggest that schools are actually probably safer and less violent than my past experience would suggest as a student, as a coach, as a teacher, and certainly, as minister,

because there have been significant efforts made to address violent behaviours. But we do, regrettably, when you have almost 200,000 students combined in all the schools in the province of Manitoba, the number of interactions that will occur on any given day, it's regrettable, occasionally, the interactions will turn for the worse, and that does occasionally happen. We're not going to deny that it does. We just have to continue to find ways to support the teachers and the students to ensure that they feel safe in their schools and in their communities.

* (16:40)

But we haven't made the information public as it is a first year to assess the number of incidents. We'll certainly monitor the next years' reports and see if we see anything that is alarming or anything that needs to be addressed.

The requirement to report incidents to the department, we did send a notice out in February of '08, as well, reminding divisions that the department continues to require notification. So it has been consistent over the last two years. It's just that the data, we'll be seeing more, we can make some determinations on what needs to be done next.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister's comments are a good segue into the next question I have which is around police in schools program, which sounds like a very positive program out there that does provide the supports to teachers and to students. I know that the information that I have is that the North End School Resource Officer program began as a pilot in 2002, and it placed three Winnipeg Police Service members in 15 North End schools for a three-year period. It was cost-shared between the Province, the police and the school division. When that project ended in '05, the program was renewed for another three years with all three partners, eventually, agreeing to continue funding the program.

Then, in '07, three more officers were announced for the Winnipeg School Division, Gordon Bell High School, Hugh John MacDonald School and six downtown elementary schools would now be served. Then, after a lot of encouragement and pushing from concerned south-end parents, a South District School Resource Officer program was introduced, serving Churchill, Grant Park and Kelvin, and two junior highs in south central Winnipeg. Again, the Province made a commitment over three years, in this instance, from the Neighbourhoods Alive! program to provide funding for these three additional officers.

I'm sure the minister is aware that a request has come in from Pembina Trails School Division. It was passed at their budget. It was approved by the school division board of trustees, approved in their budget, as a three-year pilot. They are very hopeful that something could be put in place this fall. Behind this movement, in the Pembina Trails School Division, there was a very, very significant parent group that was behind the project from the outside, and has been driving that project from the start.

I know, right now, that there are a significant number of schools that are in strong support of this proposal, and wondered if the minister will be supportive of this project in Pembina Trails and commit the government to following through on their request, as he has committed with all of the other schools in Manitoba.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Bjornson: One of the things about our police officers in the school initiative compared to other jurisdictions, is that it's not funded by the City of Winnipeg Police Service. Many other jurisdictions, the police service funds the officers in the school program. So it is a bit of a challenge to address the demand as opposed to the budgetary considerations and the requests that we do have for this program.

I know there is a tremendous amount of value in having police officers in the school, not only for safety reasons, but also for the purpose of providing information to the students about what it is that police officers do. I know in Gimli there was a very good working relationship at our high school with the local RCMP detachment; once a week, a resource officer would come and attend to the school and sit in an office.

In fact, I saw a student of mine lately, who reminded me that I once sent him down to the police officer. He reminded me of how embarrassed he was when he was there to be advised of his right to remain silent. They were a very important part of the community in terms of helping students understand the role of a police officer and, certainly as a presence, it is a deterrent for activities that we don't want to see in our schools. I appreciate the advocacy of the parents and the community for the position, and it will be given due consideration.

As I said, though, it is not something that's funded through the Department of Education. It is also something that, unfortunately, is not funded by the City of Winnipeg Police Service. We do embrace

the police-in-schools initiative. We have been supported by them in the past, and I suspect we will continue to be supportive of it in the future. Any requests will be given due consideration.

Mrs. Driedger: Some clarification then, and I'll break this up, because my understanding was that the North End School Resource Officer program was funded through the Province to the tune of, I've got all the numbers here, but it was cost-shared between the Province, the Winnipeg Police Service and the Winnipeg School Division.

I understand then, when that project ended in '05, it was again renegotiated and those same three funding partners, including the police, did move ahead and agreed to fund that. So, in fact, it was the Province, the Police Service and the Winnipeg School Division.

Can the minister, just on this North End School Resource Officer program, could he indicate if that information I have is accurate or not?

Mr. Bjornson: I would have to check on that original agreement. I apologize to the member. I'm not aware if that is currently the case as far as a three-party agreement is concerned for the funding.

I suppose in my comments I had said that the program isn't funded fully by—I should say other programs are funded fully by the police service in their communities. I know that the lion's share of the funding has been borne by the Province in this initiative and through the Neighbourhoods Alive! and Intergovernmental Affairs. That department would be responsible for that funding, and the rest would be funded by the City of Winnipeg.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't know if my number is—and we've pulled this from the information we have—but, in fact, with that first one, that North End School Resource Officer program, the lion's share of that one did come from the Winnipeg Police Service, \$319,000; from the Province \$258,000; and Winnipeg School Division, \$124,000. That was the first go-around. When it was renegotiated, that may have changed. There were three partners that did go back in, when that was renegotiated.

I'd ask the minister then, in 2007, three more officers were announced for Winnipeg school divisions: Gordon Bell, Hugh John Macdonald, and then there were six downtown elementary schools. Who would have ended up funding those particular ones in '07?

Mr. Bjornson: As that doesn't fall under my purview or my budget, I would have to check with my colleagues in terms of what the funding arrangement had been. I certainly will follow up with respect to the North End officers and what the funding arrangement in the renewed contract has been. I will confer with my colleagues on that.

*(16:50)

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister would take that undertaking one step further then, and also I understand that there was a real push from concerned south-end parents. Then a south district school resource program was introduced serving Churchill, Grant Park and Kelvin high and two junior highs. The Province committed \$267,000 over three years from the Neighbourhoods Alive! program for this particular program. I guess I'll ask the minister then, I'm taking it from what he's saying that there's no education department funding into this last one, that it actually did come from Neighbourhoods Alive!

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct. It came from Neighbourhoods Alive! funding.

Mrs. Driedger: What I would ask the minister in regard to this, seeing that there have been a number of schools now that have had this program introduced into their schools, which they've all felt is pretty needed, and I think the request coming from, you know, Pembina Trails School Division is also based on incidences that have happened. It's also based on the fact that we've lost our community police services in our area.

I've been very, very involved with a very high-needs school in Charleswood that benefited tremendously from this community police officer program. It's a very high-needs school. This school and community were absolutely devastated when this community police officer was removed from that job because it wasn't replaced. I think there's a real void now in terms of what I think is a great concept and that's community policing. Having them in the schools, I guess, is sort of the next step or evolution of this, and I think it's a very proactive way to deal with a lot of problems.

I guess I would ask the minister in looking at this, because now it is definitely going to come down to a fairness issue, his government has supported it, whether it's been through Neighbourhoods Alive!, but they've supported all the requests that have come forward to this government. I would ask the minister, because it's now one of his school divisions, another

one coming forward with this, is he prepared to champion this request and treat the Pembina Trails School Division as fairly as all of the other ones were treated?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, thank you for the question. Certainly, you know, the member and I will agree that there's tremendous value in this initiative, not only from a safety perspective, but also, as I said, some of the benefits around educational opportunities with police officers in the schools and to talk about community policing and talk about community as well as be a role model for many of the young children in our schools. Certainly, when we receive requests, we collectively as government, whether it's my department or the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, that those requests are given due consideration. I know my colleague in the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs values his program as do I. So the request will be given due consideration.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm really glad that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) is here and is listening to this dialogue because I'm hoping now that there will be fairness played in this province and that the requests now will be met for this school division as has been with others.

I just want to end by just reading a paragraph from one of my schools in Charleswood related to the school resource officers. It's a quote from one of the co-chairs: As parents, we are all concerned about protecting our children from violence, predators, terrorism and drugs. We also wish to see our children learn respect for police officers and the rule of law. Unfortunately, there has been a trend away from the community policing model that has seen community policing offices closed and services centralized. The Pembina Trails School Division covers a wide geographical area which means the potential police coverage is stretched very thin. It is difficult for our school administrators to formulate effective school plans for security when it may take hours to have the police respond to a lock-down scenario involving, say, a stranger wanting into the school off the street.

I probably can't say it better than these parents in the community; all I would ask is for fair treatment of the Pembina Trails School Division, as was given to all of these other schools throughout Winnipeg that have asked for and received police officers in their schools.

I would just like to ask a question about education in women's shelters. I understand that

there has been a school teacher that has been—and I don't know the full extent of it and I guess that's going to be the question to the minister—how is it working that a teacher is able to go into Osborne House and teach children?

I think that's a great initiative. In talking to administrators from shelters, they have been giving us the reasons why kids aren't able to go to school and part of it is because they have no permanent address. Kids are actually denied their education because of that scenario. So to have a teacher in Osborne House seems like a pretty common-sense type of an approach.

Can the minister comment on that in any way?

Mr. Bjornson: We were very pleased that we were able to work in partnership with the Winnipeg School Division. The Winnipeg School Division is administrating the position, and we're providing the funding for it. We will see how this particular pilot works and assess that with the potential to expand the program.

Another part of the announcement for funding this year included having teachers in the—we don't call it juvenile hall anymore—the Youth Detention Centre as well, recognizing that they would need certified teachers to deliver programming as well. We've done that in partnership with the Justice Department; we're very excited about that as well, and so is Justice. My deputy advises me that so is Justice; they're quite excited about that initiative.

We do recognize that we have to take the delivery of services to the students and not all students, unfortunately, are able to attend school because there are different circumstances. So we're very thrilled with this opportunity to work in partnership with the Winnipeg School Division and very thrilled with the opportunity to work with the Justice Department to deliver educational opportunities for these children who are, unfortunately, so disadvantaged because of their circumstances, because of their reality. I thank the member for raising that.

Mrs. Driedger: I would indicate I'm very supportive of that initiative because, without an education, a lot of kids aren't going to stand a chance.

A final question, because I've been talking to some teachers who have indicated that English as an Additional Language is very challenging in the schools with more and more immigrant families

coming in. They're feeling they don't have the resources to adequately do this.

As part of the initiative to bring more immigrants into Manitoba, is there also a resulting commitment and dollars flowing to address English as an Additional Language within schools?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. Indeed, there are challenges with the ability to deliver English as an Additional Language when you consider that, in some schools, we have 65, 70 languages spoken.

* (17:00)

Having said that, a review of ESL, which we now call EAL, included 11 recommendations. We've been acting upon those 11 recommendations, including putting more resources at the front end and funding for four years, as opposed to three. So there has been a significant increase in support for EAL learners in our schools, including war-affected children in the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant, to get a better assessment of the languages that they do speak and their literacy levels that they bring with them, or the lack thereof, unfortunately, in some cases.

So it has been a significant commitment by the department working with the EAL teachers and trying to support those learners and the needs that they bring with them.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): 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).

CORRIGENDA

Vol. LX No. 32A – 10 a.m., Tuesday, April 29, 2008, page 1275, the first column, tenth paragraph should read:

Ms. Howard: I am honoured today to be able to bring this resolution before the House. Before I begin my remarks, I just want to welcome some guests who have joined us in the gallery, representatives of several organizations that work within the Jewish community and with all of us to help provide education and support. I think these organizations do the work that is likely our best hope of removing the scourge of anti-Semitism from our province and

from the world. So I just want to welcome them here with us today.

Vol. LX No. 32A – 10 a.m., Tuesday, April 29, 2008, page 1276, the first column, fourth paragraph should read:

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we are no strangers to anti-Semitic events in Manitoba, and I want to, at

this time, take the opportunity to table, for the House, a report from B'nai Brith Canada that talks about anti-Semitic events both nationally as well as in Manitoba. This report is quite alarming. In 2007, there were over 1,000 incidents of anti-Semitism reported nationally. That's the highest figure ever recorded since the B'nai Brith has been doing this audit, and in Manitoba, anti-Semitic incidents were up 64 percent in 2007, with a total of 41 cases.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

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