



First Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

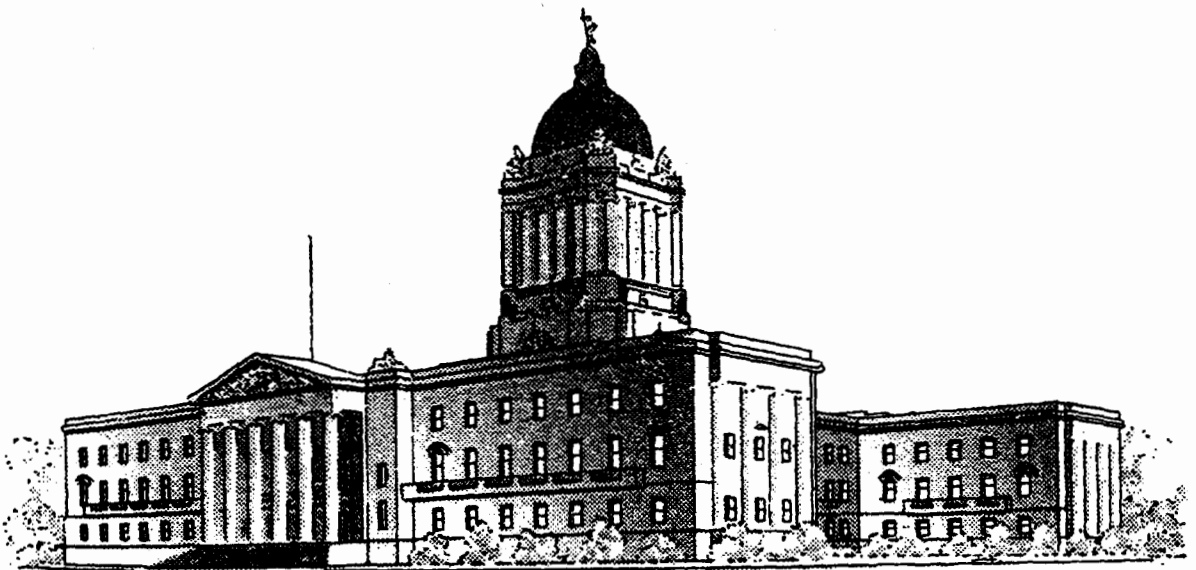
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(Hansard)

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Speaker*



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MANTOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Members, Constituencies and Political Affiliation

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Constituency</u> | <u>Party</u> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
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| CERILLI, Marianne | Radisson | N.D.P. |
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| KOWALSKI, Gary | The Maples | Lib. |
| LAMOUREUX, Kevin | Inkster | Lib. |
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 29, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
(continued)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Supply—Capital Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): The Committee of Supply will come to order.

We have before us for our consideration the resolution respecting the Capital Supply bill. I would remind members that as the 240 hours allowed for consideration of Supply and Ways and Means resolutions has expired pursuant to Rule 64.1(1), this resolution is not debatable. The resolution for Capital Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100 million for Capital Supply for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1996.

Concurrence Motion

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Mr. Chairperson, I move that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1996, which have been adopted at this session by the three sections of Committee of Supply sitting separately and by the full committee.

Motion presented.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): We have a number of questions for the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pallister) particularly relating to the evacuation. The Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Driedger) may be able to deal with some of them, but we have a number of questions.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): I have a question or two for the Minister of Government Services. I was reviewing the local paper in Portage and, to my

disbelief, saw some pretty unwarranted statements, I believe unwarranted by many of the members of the Portage constituency. I am wondering if the minister supports the concept for trade by some of his constituents that the evacuees were in Portage on a paid vacation courtesy of the taxpayers.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Minister of Government Services): You are referring to comments in the Portage la Prairie paper about the evacuees made by citizens of the area of Portage la Prairie and whether I support the fact that evacuees were on a paid vacation. I would think not. I would think anyone who was forced from their home due to a natural disaster would not be of the view that that was a vacation. I certainly do not hold that view.

As far as the paid aspect is concerned, we have systems in place to offset the costs that are incurred by people who are forced from their homes due to evacuations so there might be some truth to the statement there was some pay involved, but the pay, I would think, would be pretty much warranted given the circumstances.

Certainly, the people of Gods Lake Narrows would hardly consider this sojourn out of their home community to Portage la Prairie as a vacation, I would hope or think. The reality is that natural disasters have occurred in the past, are occurring presently and will occur in the future that will cause, unfortunately, many Manitobans to have to flee their own homes and locate in circumstances and in an environment that is not nearly as comfortable or as preferable to them as would be the case if they were allowed to stay in their homes.

I hope that clarifies my views for the member.

Mr. Struthers: It does partially clarify the government's position.

I want to go on record, too, as saying how disgusting I think it is for people to take advantage of people who have been evacuated from their households. The kind of conditions that they leave in places that are burnt certainly do not lend themselves to vacations.

I want the Minister of Government Services to indicate to me, as well, in the Leaf Rapids evacuation, I want him to assure the House that people will not be re-evacuated from any more of our communities, as was what happened with the evacuees from Leaf Rapids to Lynn Lake and then back to Leaf Rapids again.

I want to know why evacuees are evacuated from one hot spot in the North to another hot spot in the North.

Mr. Pallister: I will give no such assurance to the member. The reality is that the decisions made in terms of evacuation are very, very difficult decisions. The fact is that we are dealing with a set of circumstances that is volatile to the maximum. To suggest that in hindsight, as the member has the comfort of doing in this House, that other people faced with those difficult circumstances made mistakes is highly inappropriate, highly suspect.

I am surprised that he would even make that insinuation, frankly, because those people in those communities are faced with circumstances—whether it be government employees of my department or of Natural Resources, whether it be people working with Child and Family Services, whether it would be the community leaders of the northern communities affected, all of them are working as best they can, together, to make decisions around the relocation of people for their safety and for their well-being.

It is very easy for any of us to sit here and to second-guess, as a consequence of those decisions being made, that those decisions were wrong, just as it is easy in life to criticize people who make decisions after the fact. The member ought not to do that.

I think that, frankly, when one considers the circumstances, as difficult as they are, and tries to fully understand and appreciate what is going on in northern Manitoba today, I would hope that the member would be very supportive of the efforts of all people working together to try and accommodate those who have been relocated, to try to accommodate and defeat this fire situation that is being faced very courageously by the people of our province, rather than to lend credence to those who would be critical of the people who are

faced with making these difficult decisions in our communities.

Mr. Struthers: I am not being critical of the people who are at the front lines. I am being critical of this minister. It is not insinuation on my part that is the problem. The problem is the lack of common sense used in evacuating people from one hot spot to the next. You cannot write off as hindsight moving people from Leaf Rapids in a fire situation to Lynn Lake where there is another fire situation.

Why was all this going on when in another scenario Government Services had moved people from Gods Narrows where there was a fire problem to Portage la Prairie where there was no fire problem? That was a good decision. Why was it not made on the other side with Leaf Rapids people?

* (1010)

Mr. Pallister: I think that the member's comments, unfortunate as they are, are understandable because they reveal a lack of understanding of the process that goes into determining how relocations occur, how locations are determined, who makes the decision, and it is an excuse, I think. Ignorance is a legitimate excuse, and the member can use that excuse.

Mr. Struthers: I am not into making up excuses for what this government has done in this case. What I want is an answer to the question that I posed. Why is it that people in Gods Narrows can be evacuated to a safe place to stay, and the people in Leaf Rapids were not evacuated to a safe place? They were actually evacuated to place that is surrounded by fire, i.e., Lynn Lake.

Mr. Pallister: The member would be wise to consult the history which he is attempting to revise. He would be wise to consult the dates that fires occurred and to recognize that Gods Lake Narrows was evacuated not to Thompson, which had expressed a feeling that it could not accommodate more evacuees at the time that Gods Lake Narrows was evacuated.

He is suggesting that there is something somehow wrong with evacuating people from one community to

another when there is room, and that was done. There was room in Thompson at the time we originally evacuated Leaf Rapids people there. That is why Gods Lake Narrows people were not evacuated to Thompson, if he is suggesting Thompson should have been the site. I am not sure which alternative site he was suggesting. He could perhaps go on record, or he could perhaps consult with those—he is welcome to—who make the decisions as to the location of evacuees, where they choose to go.

I can tell him that Portage la Prairie was not the preferred site in the disaster preparedness plan that Gods Lake Narrows had prepared. Thompson was, but there was not room in Thompson. Our departments worked very, very aggressively and I think fairly successfully with most rural Manitoba communities to set up disaster preparedness plans. The member could avail himself of some of the background knowledge on that. I would be happy to provide him with more information on that if he would like.

Each of these communities has plans in place—most of them do now—which outline where in fact evacuees will be locating, so it gives a sense of certainty and a little bit of security to those folks to know where they will be heading in the event a disaster strikes. So, when these situations occur, as they unfortunately are occurring now and have in the past and, I guess, will in the future, these types of plans and this type of strategy being in place gives a sense of structure and a little bit of confidence to an otherwise very volatile situation that can create a great amount of stress within obviously the communities, not only the communities that are evacuated but also the communities that host those evacuees.

Mr. Struthers: Again, Mr. Chairman, I did not receive a direct answer to the direct question that I asked. I wanted to know why people were moved from Leaf Rapids to Lynn Lake. I know that people were moved from Gods Narrows to Portage. I do not need to be reminded of that. I think that moving them from Gods Narrows to Portage to a safe position was a correct decision. Instead of moving evacuees from Leaf Rapids to another hot spot, there are many towns all throughout Manitoba who would be pleased to take in evacuees when they are in a time of trouble. I am

sure if the Government Services minister would have checked out more alternatives, they could have found some place else to put people from Leaf Rapids instead of putting them into yet another dangerous situation provoking again another evacuation.

Mr. Pallister: I find it unfortunate, but I welcome the opportunity to defend a team decision. I find it unfortunate the member would put a question of this nature. I find it unfortunate that he would be as unsympathetic to those forced with making this difficult decision and these difficult decisions. I find that unfortunate.

I tell the member that when he attacks me or this government for decisions made around evacuations, he is at the same time attacking the process and the individuals involved in that process. He is attacking the mayor—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: A point of order, Mr. Chairperson. We are in Concurrence. We are asking questions, and the statements of this minister, the arrogant statements of this minister who every time he is asked a question is trying to say that it is an attack on the people involved in the process—the only person who is being questioned in terms of the decisions is this minister, and there is no reason for the arrogant approach of this minister at virtually everything that has been happening in terms of dealing with forest fires, including the very straightforward questions from our critic.

I would appreciate it, Mr. Chairperson, if you would ask that the minister follow the general principle that we follow in Concurrence. When we ask questions, what we ask for is responses, not the kind of arrogant statements from that member.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Thompson does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: I can only hope that the abundance of hot air I have just heard from the member for Thompson is not present in the North today.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. At this time, I would ask the honourable members in the Chamber to please choose their words very carefully. It will help in the debate, and it will help in keeping the decorum in the Chamber.

Mr. Pallister: I accept the responsibility for responding to the attacks of the member. I do accept that responsibility. I do understand the process. I wish the member did. I do understand the difficulties of the decision-making process in this difficult circumstance, and I support those who are given that onerous responsibility and will continue to support them and will continue to work with them.

When the member attacks this government for decisions made around evacuation, he attacks a process which involves community leadership, government departments, evacuees and host communities in a co-operative manner. He attacks a process that is not perfect. I do not stand here and tell the member that this is a process which will result in perfect decision making, but I do not know of a process that does.

The member needs to understand and be supportive of those communities that are faced with making this difficult decision and they will be having to make these decisions, it appears, on an ongoing basis through this summer and that is going to be difficult for them. They need to know that not only I as minister or the members on this side of the House support them in that responsibility, but also I think they would appreciate knowing that members opposite do and that the representatives of those constituencies do and they will stand behind them, right or wrong, in 20-20 hindsight. Right or wrong, they will stand behind their people who have to make these decisions and support them in the fact that they have made them, because they will have to make those decisions in future and they will need the support of the member opposite and all of us in this House.

Mr. Struthers: For the last 15 minutes, Mr. Chairman, I have been receiving a lot of advice from the Minister

of Government Services. Maybe I should reciprocate with a little advice of my own. First of all, there is a difference between an attack and a question. I am not attacking anyone. I am simply asking questions in a democratic House as an elected representative, and all I am getting back from the Government Services minister is defensive rhetoric.

What I want to know, he had mentioned a plan that has been put in place. I want to know when the government minister sat down and put together a plan to deal with fires in 1995.

Mr. Pallister: Emergency Measures Organization has been working with communities across this province in developing disaster preparedness plans. They have run numerous sessions, seminars, training sessions working with community people, some elected, some nonelected people, to do their utmost to have a plan put into place. In fact, this particular part of our government has been working to develop strategies.

For example, this spring they have released a booklet for people with special needs on how to develop their own home emergency plan, home emergency preparedness plan. They recognize, as should all of us, that accidents can and do happen but that if we do advance preparation we can perhaps minimize the consequences of those accidents or of those disasters. By anticipating those events, we can effectively minimize the human suffering and human cost as well as the property and material costs that will occur as a result.

* (1020)

Our department has been working very, very co-operatively with people across this province in the development of these emergency preparedness plans and in developing home preparedness plans and community preparedness plans, as well. Some have said, and there has been some resistance, I suppose, by some communities saying, well, we will never need this, but the fact of the matter is that these accidents and events do happen.

We only need look to recent years at the situation in St. Lazare or in Oakville, where derailments caused major, major problems in those communities, of course

—evacuations and so on occurred there, as well—to know how important it is to do our very best to be prepared.

The member asked, when did we develop a plan for the 1995 fires? The reality is, well, we have been working on that over a long period of time and not just for the 1995 year or that specific event, because you do not know until you are up into the specific accident or the specific event that you have a problem. You can predict, with some certainty, fire situations, and we have been doing that, of course, as the member is fully aware, for some time. But to have plans in place and a strategy in place beforehand is really the key, not responding to the single set of circumstances or the single incident but rather having a broadly developed plan or strategy in place. That is the work that the department has been doing with communities across Manitoba for some time.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chair, it seems to me that in six years since the fires of 1989, none of the lessons that should have been learned back then have been learned for this coming fire season. My understanding is that an inquiry was called into the way the 1989 fires were handled. There are several recommendations from that package.

In the plans that the minister talks about leading up to where we are at today, I wonder if anywhere in those plans there is a section that says that you should be taking people from one area of danger and putting them into another. I am still not understanding why this government put people back into a dangerous situation when they were pulled out of an already bad situation.

I also want to know if in these plans, for example, would Manitoba Hydro have some kind of input into the making of a plan to help out people in the northern parts of our province who end up being evacuated? Specifically I am thinking in this case of Pukatawagan where people were phoned, put on alert ready to move out because they would not have hydro—this is Manitoba Hydro doing this—and then within 10 minutes phoning back and saying it is all off.

It does not sound real co-ordinated to me. It does not sound like there is much of a plan there. I wish the minister would elaborate a little bit on the plan.

Mr. Pallister: The member is not only wrong but dead wrong on the lessons-learned comment he made that lessons were not learned from '89. Certainly that is not the case at all. Those who have been involved in both sets of circumstances, and I have spoken to several of them, have told me that the situation we face here, albeit certainly as difficult as '89, is being met with much more success, with a much greater sense of cooperative understanding. That is evidenced. If the member would care to talk to community officials certainly who have been involved in both sets of circumstances, I think he would find his comments not only unwarranted but basically just wrong.

The people that I spoke with—and this is, of course, just anecdotal—but from Gods Lake Narrows when we toured through Portage la Prairie, and the member was there, told me that the circumstances were much preferable to their previous evacuation. They had a sense of knowing how things worked. They had a sense of knowing how conditions would be and how they would be received and what the process and the procedure was. This kind of awareness goes a long way to reducing the stress that individuals feel, I am told.

Fortunately for myself I have never had to be evacuated, but I have tremendous sympathy for those that have been put into this circumstance. I can tell the member that from talking to the evacuees themselves they tell me that it is a far better situation, from their standpoint at least, than was the case in '89. I think the member's comments are largely unwarranted.

As far as the specific question about Manitoba Hydro, I cannot tell the member to what degree Manitoba Hydro has been involved in the decision making. I will undertake to get that information for him. I do not know, so I will do my best to get that information to the member in terms of Manitoba Hydro's specific involvement—I think that is what he is asking—in the preparedness plans and in the ongoing consultation. I know that Manitoba Hydro is involved, but in terms of the preparation plan, that I do not know.

I met with members of Manitoba Hydro staff in Thompson last week to ascertain their perspectives and to get some sense of how the fires were going to impact

on their installations. Certainly I know that they are involved in the community and had met with the community of Thompson and I know have met and had discussions with the communities of Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake as well. I know there is an interrelationship there.

The member asked about Manitoba Hydro's input into the emergency preparedness plan, I believe. That I will undertake to get for the member.

Mr. Struthers: The only thing that was dead wrong was the insinuation that we have not done our homework on this side and we have not talked to people who are on the front line and people in the departments involved in this firefighting effort and the evacuation effort. Never assume that we have not done our homework because we do our homework over here. We have talked to people, and what they have told us is that things today are not co-ordinated even as well as they were in 1989. They tell us there is a lack of fire equipment in the North. They tell us that they cannot send people in to fight the fires because of no equipment. These are the facts that have come to our attention. I would appreciate the minister answering the questions straightforward and not passing them off as some kind of criticism of the volunteers who are working.

What I want to ask is: Did the minister and the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Praznik) meet with any of the Leaf Rapids evacuees or a delegation of Leaf Rapids delegates on their trip to the North that they took a week ago?

Mr. Pallister: No, we did not have the opportunity to meet with the evacuees from Leaf Rapids. However, that is something I hope to do in the not-too-distant future, to get their perspectives as well.

The member talks about homework. It has unfortunately been my experience, and it may well have been the member's—I would believe it has been his experience that sometimes one can do homework and still fail miserably, and that is what the member is doing in terms of addressing this point in an effective manner. The fact is that anyone can sit in the stands and watch people in the arena or on the playing field

and be critical of them. That is what the member is doing. He is being critical of the decision-making process which involves community leaders and elected people at the community level as well as volunteers.

I would ask the member again to understand that process is one that is inclusive. When he criticizes or attempts to score political points in this House by making invalid criticisms of this government or of me personally, he fails miserably to address the true facts.

Anyone can criticize; it takes no skill. It takes no skill whatsoever, and the member is doing it. It is unfortunate, because there are I am sure always going to be people sitting on the sidelines being critical of the people who have to make the decisions. The reality is, there are no statues of critics. The member needs to understand that if he would be supportive he could contribute. He could play a role. He could assist these communities in a very, very difficult task. He could be a supportive factor in this decision-making process. He could be encouraging. He could be a positive person if he chose to be. I know he could, and I invite him to do that. I encourage him to do that.

* (1030)

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chair, I want to point out to the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pallister) that when the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) and I went to Portage to see what was happening with the evacuees, we did not take a single camera with us to score cheap political points. We stayed there from approximately seven o'clock till three in the morning, talking with people. We did not fly in and fly out quickly.

When it comes to scoring cheap political points, however, I do take with some seriousness the comments of the Minister of Government Services because I think he knows what he is talking about in that case.

I also take a little bit of exception to the comment about the homework and failing miserably. We have talked to people from Leaf Rapids. We have talked to people in the area. You, Mr. Minister, did not even meet with people from Leaf Rapids, so do not give me

the nonsense about the homework not being done. You cannot pass if you do not do your homework in the first place.

The next question I have is a question I have been asking for a couple of weeks now. I have not gotten a straight answer yet about whether or not your government has hired an aboriginal co-ordinator to help with the evacuation plans and then to eventually help in the disbursement of compensation and assessment of damages of this fire. Is there or is there not an aboriginal co-ordinator working in your department to help in this matter?

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Chairman, this government has in fact taken an aggressive approach to affirmative action hirings, and the member might like to do a little more homework on that front.

As far as racially based hiring on the basis of the group served, no, I have not made any aggressive actions in that direction, nor will I encourage that to happen.

Mr. Struthers: The minister did not answer the question. Is there or is there not an aboriginal co-ordinator being used in the assessment and evacuation of the people who are suffering from the northern fires?

Mr. Pallister: The people that are evacuated, the people who are affected by disasters in this province want to be treated fairly. They want to be handled capably by professional people. I cannot believe that their first priority would be that those people be of the same race, creed or colour as they. When the member makes that suggestion, the member—you know, we have flood claims in the Assiniboine Basin. This is no different than a representative from that area standing in this House and saying: What is the Minister of Government Services doing to get a nonaboriginal person who will more effectively deliver service to those people in the Assiniboine River Basin where there are not primarily aboriginal people? No kidding, it is an absolutely ridiculous insinuation for the member to make. The member should recognize that.

Mr. Struthers: To the credit of the government of the time, it is my understanding that in 1989 there was a

position of aboriginal co-ordinator which was utilized to help in the assessment of the damages of the fires of 1989.

I am going to ask again, is there or is there not somebody hired in 1995 to serve as an aboriginal co-ordinator in the assessment and compensation claims of the fires of 1995? I am insinuating nothing, asking a simple question, hoping finally for a simple answer.

Mr. Pallister: The simple question the member asked is rooted in the most basic, fundamental affront to human fairness and equality that there is. The member should understand and these members should understand that. What the evacuees are concerned with and what I am concerned with is their fair treatment. I am concerned that anyone who is a victim of disaster is treated fairly, capably and equitably. That is what I am concerned with. That is what those victims are concerned with. We are not concerned with cookie-cutter approaches to delivering services in this department or this government.

Mr. Struthers: Earlier on in our discussion this morning, the minister had stated that the performance of the government in this fire evacuation undertaking was just as good, if not better, and they had learned their lessons from 1989. Now we are finding out that is not the case. Why is it not that what was good enough in 1989 is not good enough now? Why do you not have an aboriginal co-ordinator hired to help you out with the assessment of these fires?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his suggestion. The reality is somewhat different from his perception and that may be due to a desire to see the reality be somewhat different, and I can understand that. The fact of the matter is that this particular set of circumstances is somewhat the same and also may present somewhat different opportunities for service than the '89 disasters did. We hope, because we strive for continuous improvement, to do a better job in dealing with this set of circumstances than was done in '89. That would be our objective.

But we in this House alone cannot fulfill that objective. We have to have the full support, cooperation and involvement of the communities where

these disasters are occurring, and so that is what we are aspiring to do. That is what we are trying to do, work in co-operation with those people, be supportive of their responsibilities and encouraging of their involvement. That is what I will continue to do as minister.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chair, the minister has talked a lot this morning about co-operation and how I can become a much more positive person. When the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) and I returned from Portage la Prairie with some very legitimate concerns on behalf of the evacuees that were housed in the arena, it was not that we were met with co-operation from him, what we were met with was accusations of political grandstanding. I want to suggest to the minister that that does not encourage anybody on this side to be the least bit co-operative. So let us get that straight right now. If the minister wants co-operation from us, then I would expect some straight answers from this minister.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Chair, the member had a valid point. The day that he and the member for Rupertsland raised the question in the House I was wrong to have reprimanded them. I apologized in this House and I apologized to them personally. Now a gentleman, I believe, would accept that apology, and we would move on and we would work towards better relationships. A gentleman, however, would not do what the member has just done and continue to harken back to an event for which he has received a apology, so the member does not conduct himself as a gentleman in this House when he does that. I do encourage the member—

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Chairperson, the member should know, if he does not by now, that all members are honourable members, and it is very clear from his remarks that he is once again engaging in unparliamentary comments made towards the member for Dauphin. I would ask that he withdraw those comments once again.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Thompson does not have a point of order, but I would advise the honourable minister to please choose his

words very carefully again. We are getting very close to unparliamentary.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: I suggest to the member that if he would follow my advice on that particular matter, it would probably go a long way to encouraging better relationships between us. Certainly I want to encourage that, and I sincerely hope that the member continues to be genuine and sincere in his comments around the circumstances that are faced by many Manitobans today.

*(1040)

It certainly is my first concern and this government's first concern that we do everything in our power to help alleviate the stress that is associated with this evacuation situation in the North. The stress, the incredible pressure that is brought to bear on people whose lives are thrown into turmoil by events beyond their control, whether it be in the case of fire or flood or other events, it is a difficult circumstance faced by many Manitobans today, and it needs the full, complete support of all members of this House in co-operation with others in this province to effectively deal with it.

With that in mind I can tell the member—he may be aware—that as far as the evacuation from Leaf to Lynn, recognizing the difficulties faced by those people, we are including a stress-debriefing team to work with the people of Leaf, to work with them to help them work through the definite stressful situation that they face.

These teams are something that is one example of the kinds of improvements that we have made over '89 to try to deal not just with the actual material and property aspects of the fires in the North, but also to deal with the psychological aspects which are sometimes the greatest areas of human suffering. That has been done. Those groups, I am told, are working very proactively with the people, and their presence there is very, very well received and appreciated by the evacuees.

These groups are also working with other evacuees as well, but the member made reference to the people from Leaf, and this is why I refer to them specifically.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): I want to say to begin with, Mr. Chairperson, I find virtually the entire 40 minutes we have been sitting here with this minister and his comments to be most unfortunate, because this minister has repeatedly made comments which to my mind are unbelievably arrogant and also not reflective of what has happened in terms of the last number of days and particularly the fact that when we ask questions, not for political reasons but representing our constituents, myself being a resident of Thompson, being someone that represents a northern constituency, other members who are concerned about that, this minister has no business lecturing us in the arrogant way in which he has this morning, no business.

He does a complete disservice to what our goal is, and that is to make sure that if events occur that are handled properly, that that is continued and, if things are done that need to be changed, that they need to be changed. I find it also absolutely unacceptable that this minister, who last Thursday, with the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Praznik) went to Thompson, flew up to Thompson, made sure the media was well briefed in advance, and when they were up there—and this is the same minister who talked about being from the sidelines—they did not meet with anyone from Leaf Rapids.

The people from Leaf Rapids were attempting to arrange a meeting. In fact, if they had met with the staff that were co-ordinating at the rec centre, they could have told them all the concerns that have been expressed by the people from Leaf Rapids. They had a petition. They were very, very concerned about the fact that at that time they were likely to be relocated to The Pas. They were concerned about the fact they were not eligible for the \$5-a-day payment. They had other concerns as well. But the three ministers who were there did not meet with the people from Leaf Rapids, and it is nice for the minister to say after the fact he is going to meet with the people from Leaf Rapids. The fact is, at that point in time, they wanted to meet with the government, and they did not.

Mr. Chairperson, for the minister, because this minister keeps talking about this in the sense of a sports analogy here, this is not a sports game. This is not a question of spectators and participants. I went up and

personally visited—by the way, no camera in tow—with the people who were evacuated. I talked to the staff who were dealing on the front line with some of the concerns that are being dealt with, and many of the questions that were asked by the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) were the questions that they wanted asked.

I know the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen), who represents Leaf Rapids, would be asking a whole series of questions again in terms of the concerns of the people from Leaf Rapids. These are the questions they wanted to ask on the Thursday, and this minister and the First Minister and the Minister of Northern Affairs chartered a plane to go to Thompson and did not meet with those people directly.

I would appreciate if the minister could put on the record whether he was aware of their request for a meeting or whether he even attempted to find out if there were any concerns from the people from Leaf Rapids because, given the fact that they were very clear with their concerns and their grievances, I find it amazing that the Premier, the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pallister) and the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Praznik) coincidentally did not meet with those people. I think it is a very important question, because the questions we are asking again are the questions people are asking themselves.

I do not know if the minister is aware of how difficult a situation it was for many of the front-line people. I talked to the staff who were dealing on a front-line basis with evacuees, and there were situations where assaults nearly arose, Mr. Chairperson. There were a lot of heated words back and forth, and they are in a difficult position. They do not make the decisions, but they are in the position of implementing them.

What I find unfortunate, Mr. Chairperson, is—I can tell you from my own personal experience. I went down there, as I said, I went down with no cameras in tow. I did not issue any press releases. I went in there. I wanted to see what was happening, and, you know, there is a lot of volunteer effort that goes in, but the volunteers were the ones who were telling me about some of the concerns the evacuees had. Put yourself in the situation of the people from Leaf Rapids or South

Indian Lake who were in Thompson, evacuated. Take Leaf Rapids, they have been evacuated three times in nine months. They were evacuated, returned home. Then they had to be evacuated again.

There were people from Leaf Rapids who, when they were leaving Leaf Rapids initially, ended up with a fireball crossing the highway as they were driving out. I know the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) I am sure will be raising some of these concerns afterwards, but there were people—there was one person, a taxi driver, who opened the vents on his vehicle and the fireball entered his vehicle, burned his clothing. I think it is a miracle that there was nobody killed in that evacuation.

When we ask questions it is because questions have to be asked. It is because people are asking questions, not MLAs on this side, the people of Leaf Rapids; and, if the minister would have met on Thursday with the people from Leaf Rapids, he would have heard the questions directly and he would have, I am sure, got a rather different perspective than he obviously got with this flight up to Thompson.

I want to ask the minister, who has been very good on lecturing people about standing on the sidelines, why he did not meet with the people from Leaf Rapids when he was in Thompson and why he did not meet with the co-ordinating staff at the rec centre in Thompson when he was in Thompson last Thursday.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Chairman, the member makes the statement that he raises these points not for political reasons. It has been my impression, over the last some three years of having the good fortune to represent my constituency in this House, that the member exists for no other reason but that. I tell the member that he does need to understand an adage that my grandmother taught me, which is, when you observe flaws in other people, most commonly you are observing your own.

The experience of travelling to meet with these folks who had been evacuated to Portage and to Thompson—and the member has had the experience in the past, I am sure, of meeting with these people—was done not for any other purpose but to encourage them and to hopefully give them some understanding of the support

and the sympathy that is felt by all members of this House. It was done on behalf of all members.

The fact is that in our process here we are given what are called "pairs." I am led to believe that I was given a "pair" to a certain point in time. I believe the members opposite would know what that point in time was.

* (1050)

The sad fact of the matter is that the member lectures and reprimands me and others on this side of the House for not spending a long enough time in Thompson in order to meet with everyone there. The fact of the matter is that, while the member lectures us and lectures me personally, he fully understands that his political party had staged a vote to be held in this House, had arranged for that vote to be held to attempt to take political advantage out of the fact that members were away from this House trying to work with these evacuees and express support for them.

This same member who lectures me and lectures us on political behaviour exhibited the most uncaring, callous political behaviour that I have seen since I came to this House. The member should be ashamed of himself for making the accusation when he and his political colleagues made every attempt to try to derive political benefit from the absence of members of this government working with his own constituents.

That uncaring and callous attitude is one that his members need to fully understand. His constituents must fully understand, and I want it on the record that that member could care less about the presence of any kind of caring, counselling government member in his own community.

The member on the other side of the House will have the opportunity to ask a subsequent question. For example, when the member talks about political motivations, last week the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) raised a concern in this House about moisture levels, and I believe, if one were to consult Hansard, one would talk about people sleeping in pools of water; I believe that was the phrase the member for Dauphin used. In Portage la Prairie, he referred to the

Gods Lake Narrows evacuees sleeping in pools of water.

I spoke to the members who had been there, and then, upon advisement from them with respect to their suggestions and comments, I took the personal initiative to travel back to my home town, which is easy to do because I live there, granted, but to travel back without the TV cameras the member alludes to, and go to the Portage arena and talk to the evacuees and ask them about the circumstances that they were faced with the prior night.

Those evacuees told me that the conditions were not as described by the member. They told me that there was moisture on the floor and that I had noted the day prior, but they told me that they were offered the opportunity to move to a dry location and that they chose not to because they liked where they were in the arena facilities. That is what they told me, so I have to ask.

Although I support the existence of the member's political party as a necessary means of comparing our quality of government to what they offer as an alternative, I do not want the member to lecture me on political motivations when in this instance I find it sad, I find the statements made in this House by the members opposite in stark contrast to the reality that I encounter in my community when I travel there and speak to the evacuees themselves. I wonder how self-serving the member might be in his comments.

Mr. Ashton: It is indicative that the minister did not answer the question, has refused to answer questions related to why he did not meet with the people from Leaf Rapids or deal with many of the concerns. And quite frankly, Mr. Chairperson, I find his attitude towards members of this House to be absolutely unbelievable.

The member should know that we live in a democratic system. The Conservative Party—and I will use the words of Sterling Lyon that I have heard used in this House—may be the temporary government. All governments are temporary governments. We do not need any lectures from this member about the role of members of the Legislature in this House. This

member has nothing to offer in terms of a lecture on the democratic process.

I find every time the minister is asked a question—he was asked a straightforward question, why he did not meet with the people from Leaf Rapids, and he did not answer it. [interjection] Well, he says sit down and he will answer it. He has been asked the question by the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers). He has been asked the question by myself, and I think it is very similar to what he did the other day in this House when he was asked the question by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) in terms of the many people in Leaf Rapids who do not have insurance, many of whom have difficulty getting insurance.

For the information of the member, many insurance companies will not insure trailers, particularly in northern communities, and the minister in this House said, well, we have the EMO procedures, we had the EMO procedures, and anyone outside of the House and the media said no, if they did not have insurance coverage and they had not attempted to get insurance coverage, they are not going to be covered.

You know, in these circumstances, what we are asking for is some compassionate treatment of the people from Leaf Rapids and other northern communities. That is one issue.

The second issue, to the minister again, because he was asked about this in the House, about the \$5-a-day amount. This is one of the grievances the people in Leaf Rapids had that they wanted expressed to this minister directly. Because many of the people in Leaf Rapids were not on a fixed income, they were told they were not going to be eligible for this \$5 fee.

The people from Leaf Rapids, they have not worked now for close to a week and a half, apart from perhaps one or two shifts on the weekend. There are a lot of people—now a number of people have lost their homes. There are a lot of people who have been in real uncertain situations, and I mentioned what happened on the highway. That is real, and if the minister would talk to the people from Leaf Rapids, he will get that directly from the people from Leaf Rapids. I think the minister should recognize that if he would take the time

to meet with the people directly, he will find they will be saying the same things we are saying in this House, the fact that they have real concerns.

I would like to know, in this case—and I know the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) wants to raise a number of these questions too, because he has been raising this in the House—why the government will not show some compassion to the people from Leaf Rapids. There are people right now who do not have a cent in their pocket. They have been out of their community for a week and a half. They are not eligible for UI, Mr. Chairperson. They are effectively unemployed right now, because they cannot get back into Leaf Rapids to work in the mine.

They are not eligible for the \$5 a day, all that they had been requesting. Many of the people from Leaf Rapids have stayed with friends. Many people in Thompson have relatives in Leaf Rapids. People are staying at campgrounds. There are people in Winnipeg. They get no assistance by the way, Mr. Chairperson, if they are out of scope from the community they are supposed to be in.

They are actually doing what they can to help in their own way, but you know, there was a great deal of frustration, and the minister, if he would have gone to the arena on Thursday, if he had gone to the arena where the people were from Leaf Rapids, he would have found a petition on the wall. If he had gone to meet with the staff in the rec centre, there was a petition raising many of these issues, so once again for the minister, when we speak, we speak for the people who have asked us to speak.

By the way, I do not represent Leaf Rapids, I do not represent South Indian Lake as an MLA, but as a northerner I am concerned. When my community of Thompson goes to the tremendous efforts it did to host people, I can tell you what I got in terms of concerns were a lot of the people who were on the front lines as they were saying, let us show some compassion, some flexibility here, the people in Leaf Rapids have some real concerns.

The minister, if he had gone there Thursday, would have known one of the concerns of the people from

Leaf Rapids is they were going to be moved to The Pas, given gas money and sent to The Pas, the community that had been evacuated twice in nine months, going to be sent to The Pas. I understand the planning rationales and the rest of it. We can get into all that, but the fact is these are people who are worried about their homes, some of whom had gone through harrowing experiences where their own personal safety was very much at stake.

I would like to ask the minister to please respond on the record to some of those things. If he does not want to get into why they did not—by the way, the minister's comments in terms of the vote. The minister should know the vote took place well after the minister was paired, which we did, we paired. The vote was held well after the pair; he knows that is the case. In fact the vote that he was talking about was only on the question of putting the question, and he knows full well the way the political process works, so that I find to be typical of the kind of comments we are getting from the member.

I have given some of the questions that people wanted to ask him directly. For whatever reason he did not meet with them, but can he please respond on those questions? I will just summarize them in case the minister gets distracted by the kind of political rhetoric we are seeing him throw back across the way every time we ask questions, but it is in terms of the \$5 a day, concerns about the insurance and concerns about what happened when people were being evacuated. There were a number of vehicles lucky to survive because of the fireball that took place.

Those are real concerns for real people, Mr. Chairperson. We want some answers, and I think the minister should recognize, when we ask the questions in this particular House, when the people in Leaf Rapids ask the questions, we are not living in a police state.

People in Leaf Rapids have the right to ask those questions and receive answers as we do as members of the Legislature. That is all we are asking from the Minister of Government Services.

*(1100)

Mr. Pallister: Thank you to the member for the series of questions, Mr. Chairman, and I will attempt to answer each of those in the order that he asked them.

First of all, the member said that he is concerned as a northerner, and I accept that statement. I am concerned as a Manitoban, and I think that the opportunities that I have to work with Manitobans who are victims of disastrous consequences is something that excites me as much as any challenge I have had in my life. I look forward to trying to do my utmost to work with those people and with all Manitobans who may in future be victims of disastrous consequence to help alleviate their concerns and fears, to help work with them in their hour of need, if you will. I welcome that opportunity and I am excited by the challenges that opportunity presents.

The member asks why we were not able to meet with the people of Leaf Rapids. We left late. We got to Portage late. We spent too long, perhaps in retrospect, visiting with the people from Gods Lake Narrows and Portage and were late leaving there. We arrived late in Thompson, and we had to leave early from Thompson to get back. It turned out because of the circumstances created by a vote being made necessary by actions of the members opposite that it was fortunate that we left when we did, I guess, because that pairing procedure, as it is, had expired, the privilege had expired to not expect members opposite to refrain from voting because of the absence of government members.

To answer the member in a straightforward way, which is exactly what I am trying to do, the time that we had was not sufficient to meet with everybody in Thompson as much as it might have been preferable to do that, and it was preferable I think. All of us would like to have done that. It just was not possible to do it and get back to Winnipeg to reassume House responsibilities that we do have. The member knows the process in this House far better than I and perhaps far better than most and need not play naive as to the process that exists here.

The member does know it full well, and does know that actions of his political party were planned actions, not unplanned and not as a consequence of a lack of planning at all. This is what was an affront, I think, to

me when the member attempts to attack me and the Premier for not being attentive enough to our needs in Thompson with regard to the evacuees. The member should know and does know that through our attentiveness to those people we would have caused a loss of a vote in this House which does have consequences as well for the people of this province.

So I hope that addresses the issue of why we did not meet with the people of Leaf Rapids. Certainly all of us wanted to do that. All of us would like to have done that. That was certainly in our plans at the time that we left this city.

I hope I am addressing these in the order the member asked them. I will attempt to do that. As to the \$5-per-day issue that the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) raised—and I appreciate the member for Flin Flon's sincerity, when he raises questions in this House, very much—the \$5 per day, as I did attempt to explain to the member in answer in—

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: It has been rather difficult this morning. I realize the minister is rather sensitive, but he should not be getting into a question of sincerity of members or questions asked, and I would appreciate if you would ask the minister once again to come to order and at least follow the rules of the House in terms of those kinds of comments. I would ask once again for a ruling, asking the minister to stick to answering the questions without the kind of rhetoric and personal attacks we are seeing on anyone who dares to question this minister, Mr. Chairperson, because that is exactly what is going on here. Anybody—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable member for Thompson did not have a point of order, but again I would advise the honourable minister that we should be very careful that we do not impugn motives on any member in the Chamber and that we choose our words very carefully within the debate.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Government Services, to continue his response.

Mr. Pallister: I am sorry that the member took offence at my reference to his colleague from Flin Flon being sincere. If he took offence at that, I am sorry that he did. That was not, it was not my intention to imply that he was in any way insincere. That is not what I was saying. I was simply making an observation about his colleague—that is all, nothing more.

The reality is, on this \$5-per-day issue, that it is something that is not an entitlement, as I mentioned to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) when he asked the question the other day. It is not sort of designed to be along the sort of the J.S. Woodsworth line as a universal social program. It was not designed to be something that was given to everyone without need or without acknowledging the uniqueness of their circumstance. It is something that is to be made available to people, precisely the kinds of people that the member describes, and I certainly will look into the accusation that he makes that people are in need and do not have this \$5-a-day allowance because I take very personally, very strongly that suggestion. I do not want to see that circumstance that he describes exist in an area that is a responsibility of my portfolio, certainly.

The idea of this \$5-per-day allowance for adults and \$3 per day for adolescents is to provide for some resource, cash resource for immediate emergency expenses or common, ordinary, day-to-day expenses that are incurred by evacuees, such as to do laundry, such as to purchase toiletries, these types of items. And so the member may not fully understand that this is not a universal social program along the lines of those designed by his predecessors in the earlier years when socialist dogma was in its prime. Now that it is in its decline, the member perhaps should accept the fact that these types of programs are not in vogue, nor should they be in vogue, and there has never been the intention for that particular small stipend to be paid to everyone regardless of the circumstance or regardless of their individual need. The member must understand that. I hope he does.

As far as the issue of insurance on trailers, the member misrepresents my statements in this House, and that is unfortunate. The comments that I made were in regard to the trailers in the communities that have burned, unfortunately, that if house insurance or

trailer insurance was available to those people and if they unfortunately made the decision to assume the risk when there was the opportunity for them to share the risk with others through an insurance approach, that was not something that the Disaster Assistance Board was in a position to cover. So if that situation exists, it is highly unfortunate, but it is not a question of not covering burned trailers. That is not the comment that I made, and the member should not misrepresent my statement.

The Disaster Assistance Board exists to cover uninsurable items that are lost, not to cover insurable items that were lost or damaged, and the member needs to understand the difference between those. Certainly, when people make the individual decision not to purchase insurance coverage, it should not be put on the backs of others to absorb that responsibility for that management decision that was made by that individual person. As unfortunate as the outcome may be for that person, they did have the choice; they were responsible for making the decision. They made the decision, and they knew that when they made the decision, they were responsible for bearing the consequences of that decision. So only where insurance was available to trailer owners and they chose not to take it would disaster assistance not be able to come into play in terms of offering compensation.

If, as the member attests, insurance was not available to these trailer owners, then that is an entirely different matter, and, of course, that is something that would follow the normal process as claims do in disastrous circumstance where the claims are forwarded by the individual or the municipality or government district that has seen these damages occur. Those claims are then forwarded, they are processed and evaluated and assessed by disaster assistance.

* (1110)

As the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) knows all too well, it is a process that is cumbersome but does work, and the Disaster Assistance staff do have a pretty good reputation. I note, from perusing some of our records—I did just recently have a chance to review the Swan River area in terms of the disaster assistance claims and note that there were hundreds of

claims received and satisfactorily dealt with from all reports. In fact, we have numerous letters from people saying they are very, very pleased with the way they were treated, the way that the staff dealt with them. [interjection]

Well, the member for Swan River says from her seat that there were problems there, and I would welcome to hear from her on what those problems were. Certainly, I think she recognizes there is no perfect system and that there are always going to be some problems with it, but our goal is to strive for continuous improvement and do that on a daily basis in terms of how we deal with people that are unfortunate victims of consequences of natural disasters. So I invite the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), if she does have some concerns, to express those to me. I would appreciate that very much.

I hoped that I have addressed the questions again that I believe that the member raised: the meeting with Leaf Rapids, the insurance issue, the daily allowance, and the fourth question he raised was on the fireball incident when the convoy was moving from Leaf Rapids to Thompson in the initial evacuation that occurred. I think, again, here is a very frightful incident. There is absolutely no question about it, truly frightening.

The member describes the fireball entering a vehicle, and I just hope that the person that that happened to is availing themselves of our stress-debriefing facilities, the people from Manitoba Health and so on because that would be an advantage. Someone would never forget it, I am sure. As far as the event itself happening, I think it, unfortunately, falls in line with many other accidents, with many other disasters in that it is not something that—if we could predict with accuracy every event, of course, we would not very likely have these disasters occur. We would be able to deal with them for the most part.

I question whether that anything that human beings could do could effectively have stopped us from having a flood this spring on the Assiniboine River or stopped us from having some fires. Certainly, as human beings, we are pathetically weak in the face of greater powers, but we do our best. I believe that is precisely what

people in those communities did in the process of making their decision to leave Leaf and to relocate at that time.

That was a difficult decision for them, I am sure. Certainly, all of us in this House are sympathetic to the circumstances, and I am sure none more so than the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) who resides in that area and whose community graciously is housing people when they need that comfort and they need that security.

The city of Thompson has been one that has come forward and graciously taken on the responsibility and the challenge, and at a difficult time, too, in terms of another event that the member is fully aware of, a major tourism event in their community that fell in the same time frame. As the city of Thompson was asked to take in additional evacuees, it was taking in and trying to accommodate and keep its normal life going, I guess.

So the member raises a single incident and refers to it. I can only say that we do not control these single incidents. We attempt to develop plans and strategies around avoiding the circumstances he describes with this fireball incident across the highway, but we are certainly not capable, nor do we pretend to be, of perfection. The member may think he is; he is not either.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I want to ask the minister, can the minister advise the House what time did he seek the pairs for the purposes of votes in this Legislature? What time did they ask to be paired, the three ministers—himself, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Driedger)? What specific time did they request in writing a pair on the day in question?

Mr. Pallister: I only know when I signed the form, in response to the Leader of the Opposition. I only know when I signed the request for a pair. I do not know when the member opposite or his political organization received the request. I believe that is what he is asking.

Mr. Doer: I will ask again. The minister planned a tour of evacuation centres and a tour of fire locations

on the day in question. What time did the government seek a pair from the opposition party? What time did they say they would be back and not need a pair?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for the question and, not being sure, I will invite him to put on the record what that time was.

Mr. Doer: As the minister responsible for evacuation and emergency services, as the minister involved in a tour with the Premier of the province with three other ministers, one would think after all the lectures the minister has made to the members of the opposition about good planning and competence and making proper arrangements that the minister would know the time.

I would like him to know that the time requested in writing—I have three letters in writing from the minister, from the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources, requesting a pair to four o'clock in the afternoon. Can the minister now confirm that?

Mr. Pallister: I can.

Mr. Doer: The minister has made a number of statements about having too little time to deal with the question put about the Leaf Rapids evacuees. The minister made three comments about a vote in this House planned by the opposition. Is the minister saying he is incompetent by asking for a four o'clock time in this House and not accommodating the time that was necessary?

Mr. Pallister: No, I am not suggesting that, but I guess what I am suggesting is that my responses were responses to questions put in an effort to attack the lack of compassion, the lack of understanding of myself and my colleagues. I attempted to respond to those questions by trying to explain honestly to the members opposite, in response to the question, why we did not meet with people from Leaf Rapids who had been evacuated.

I tried to explain to the members opposite that we made every effort to meet with the evacuees but that we had to come back for a vote, that we had to return based on our pairs, that we had to return based on a pair

being granted, that we had to return based on these pairs being granted.

The member opposite talks about planning and organization, yet the very reason that we were late coming back was due to the compassion that this government feels for those people who were evacuated. It was due to the fact that we were trying to meet with as many as we possibly could of those who were evacuated in these communities. It was due to the fact that we were making every effort, and I would hope would have the support of the members opposite in this, to express support and comfort to these people.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about organization, management and so on, but there is a human element to this, a human element that the members opposite should not forget, and as they jest and as they talk about timing and scheduling and so on—the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) chirps from the steps where he belongs—the fact of the matter is that the member opposite perhaps does not understand northern travel.

He does not understand the vagaries of travel in the North, as many members opposite do. He does not understand it because the fact—[interjection] Certainly the reality is, if the members recall on that day, there were tornadoes that touched down. There was a storm. We had to go around the storm when we came back from Thompson. The reality is that it took longer than it was scheduled to.

The member talks about schedules, planning and management, and the member needs to understand and perhaps should feel some understanding and sympathy for the fact that in an effort to do what I think is right and express compassion and support for these people who were evacuated, which is precisely what we did on behalf of all members of this House, we were unable to be back at the preordained time that the pairing that he alludes to had been arranged.

* (1120)

Yes, he is quite right. That could be taken as a lack of good planning ability, as a lack of proper management. He is right. That could be interpreted in

that way, and it could be interpreted in other ways as well. So I would ask the member to interpret it in those other ways.

Mr. Doer: The minister made four allegations when I was sitting here that the reason why they could not visit the Leaf Rapids people was for a vote. The minister also said that the only reason they were late was for compassion.

Can the minister explain why the pair request made by him, in his role as the minister responsible for this tour, stated that the pair request would be for four o'clock when they submitted a press release to the media at the same time saying that they would not be back till 5:30? It was not as a last-minute delay. It was not a last-minute delay, as the minister has just said. It was not based on compassion. They did not know what they were doing.

Mr. Pallister: I would tell the member opposite that in the most important way we knew what we were doing, because the most important thing about that day—the members are concerning themselves with questions about process, silly questions about process in many respects, when really what matters is the people who were evacuated from their homes. That is what matters.

The members are concerned, and they are getting joyful glee out of a procedural wrangling question that is trivial in the minds of all outside this House. It is trivial to the evacuees from these northern communities. It makes no difference to them whatsoever.

If the member wants to continue with that line of questioning, I invite him to do it, because it has no effect on the people of this province who care mostly about the results as to how we are treating these people, as to how we are doing our utmost to comfort them and care for them when they need that comfort and care. This member may try to score those points. I invite him to try to do that. Continue along those lines. I encourage him to do it. I have honestly attempted to address the concerns the member made, and I encourage him to continue along this line of questioning.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Before we continue with this line of questioning, I have been hearing the odd bells ringing somewhere in the Chamber, and I would ask any member who has got such a thing with him to have it removed from the Chamber at this time, please.

Mr. Doer: I guess I really take exception to a minister lecturing the opposition with such an appearance of arrogance and talking about planning and compassion when he had no planning or compassion in his schedule to begin with. The minister opposite could have asked for a pair for as long as it took, in fact, the whole day; and he knows the opposition would have considered the priority of the people, of the evacuees and the fire sites to be a priority. We handled our responsibility in terms of votes completely with integrity and by the rules. We did not move any motions of votes. In fact, we delayed a vote on an item we were vitally concerned about, i.e., the government breaking its word on taxpayers' money going to a hockey arena beyond the \$10 million. We delayed the vote until after the four o'clock pair requested by the minister.

For him, then, to say that they had to come back and could not visit the Leaf Rapids residents, as I heard four times, because of a vote in this Legislature, is patently untrue. To let them lecture us on planning when he, in fact, did not have the proper plan to see all the people who needed to be seen by himself and the other two ministers, also falls like a house of cards.

All we want from this minister is more humility and more honesty and less arrogance and less making up stories as you run along. That is not too much to ask. I would suggest very strongly to this minister, instead of inventing things as he goes along, which obviously just happened this morning, that he stick to the facts. They did not plan their trip to allow for as much time as necessary to visit the people in Leaf Rapids. The planning was wrong because they did not ask for a pair past four o'clock. That was in writing. The opposition would, of course, agree to a pair in a co-operative way as we have been doing all the way along in this House.

So for the minister—I think he should apologize for saying that the reason they could not visit the people in Leaf Rapids was because of a vote in this Legislature.

I think he should really—I mean, his own request for a pair in writing disputes his point. I think the government obviously should have built in more time for the tour. I believe they should have built more flexibility into this tour, and I think that they should have visited the people of Leaf Rapids where they were all located at an arena site where everybody knew where they were.

Either we had bad planning and an incompetent minister, or there were decisions made to choose not to meet the people of Leaf Rapids. At no time during the day did we get a request back from your House leader to extend the pair. You have modern communication devices, I would suspect, in Thompson called telephones. You have modern communication devices in airplanes. At any point in time that you wanted to extend the pair I say to you that we would have granted it. If you needed more time to visit the people in Leaf Rapids—it was not as if you were taking a scheduled flight back, you had your own government plane there or our plane there.

I think the minister should not have accused the opposition of being the reason for not visiting the people in Leaf Rapids, because his own request for a pair in writing completely refutes his arguments that he is obviously making up on the run. More humility, more honesty I think would go a long way to having a more intelligent debate and for all us to learn from our mistakes rather than to feign something that is completely false, that being the case about the vote necessitating the return. We would have extended your pair. We could have had our vote on the Jets any time that we chose.

We fulfilled our end of the bargain, sir, and for you to argue that because the vote was taking place was the reason you could not visit the people of Leaf Rapids is just not true. I heard you say it four times. I hope the minister withdraws it and we can start off for more honesty and integrity in this debate rather than putting things on the record that are not true.

Mr. Pallister: I believe that if the Leader of the opposition party would peruse the records of this discussion he would find I misspoke myself once, corrected myself immediately after. The only person

who is saying that plane had to return for a vote is him. He has said it repeatedly. He is the only person. I invite the members to peruse the records of this conversation and then evaluate what was said.

I have, in terms of admitting mistakes, said numerous times to members opposite that we aspire for perfection but we are not going to achieve it. We recognize that, and there have been judgments made which had consequences that we did not want to see happen. Whether those decisions were made at the community level by community people or here in this House, we do not pretend, as the members opposite do, to be capable of perfection.

As far as the planning, the member talks about our planning being something other than compassionate in terms of this trip. He makes the same essential error in judgment when he makes that observation that other members of his political party have made when they questioned decisions in hindsight about the management of evacuations for example or about the treatment of evacuees in certain circumstances. By suggesting that somehow it is not compassionate to have arrived back later than a pair was offered is, I think even the member for Concordia knows, quite a stretch.

As far as the compassion that was felt by myself or my colleagues in visiting with these evacuees, that is something that it is hard to convey, something that is not easy to convey to members opposite. Certainly I believe in the vast majority they are compassionate people, and I think they appreciate the fact that this was a very important exercise in supporting those people who were evacuated. It was something that—any event—[interjection] The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) chirps again from his seat about PR.

* (1130)

The member needs to understand, and he can consult with members of his own political party who were members of the government in the 1980s, they know full well that any time a government representative does something which is worthwhile and something which is deserving of being undertaken, any time, they are open to charges of seeking public relations gain.

That happens, and it is a common charge that is made by members opposite. It does not have any substance to it, as they know full well, particularly those of them who have been involved in governing. Any time something is done that is worthwhile and deserves support, members will tend to say it was done for PR or it was done too late. Those are the two weakest and most common charges that this particular opposition party lays against members on this side of the House when we undertake something that is indeed worthwhile and does deserve the support of every member of this House.

When the Leader of the opposition party claims that preparation and planning around the visit to these evacuees could have been done better he is right, it could have been. It could have been done better, in hindsight, but so could the evacuation of the people of Leaf Rapids had been done better, in hindsight, and so too could the evacuation of the people from Gods Lake Narrows to Portage la Prairie have been done better, in hindsight. In hindsight, most things could be done better. That does not mean to say that the attempt was not an honourable one or that every attempt was not made to do what was best at the time.

Certainly I would hope that the Leader of the opposition party is somewhat more charitable, for example, to his own children in raising them than he is being to me today, because it is easy, as the member knows and as any members who have children know, to look at a child who has failed and accuse them of that failure. It is very easy to do that. I would hope that the member for Concordia is somewhat more charitable in the raising of his own children or in his participation for example with volunteer organizations in which the member has been involved, as I have with great joy in volunteer organizations, and has spent a lot of time in that.

I admire that in the member for Concordia. He knows too that involvement with those organizations where you are working with volunteers, things do not always go exactly as planned or things do not always work out exactly as you would like.

I do not question the member opposite having done his very best in every involvement that he has had in

the volunteer sector. In fact I congratulate and praise him for that. I know he understands that those involvements were not perfect and there were things that could have been done differently. I know he understands that too.

We seek perfection here, and we are trying our very best to work with the evacuees and with the communities as best we can to accommodate their every need. The reality is that the members opposite will never run out of ways to have done things better in hindsight.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Chairman, I think my five-year-old daughter will be very impressed to know that the minister wants me to treat him like I do my five-year-old daughter. When she can understand this concept, she will be very, very pleased to hear that. It will give us new insight of how to deal with the minister. My children are five and eight months old.

Yes, there are certain ways in which—maybe I have to apologize. The minister is right. I do treat a five-year-old differently than I treat an adult. I would like to thank the minister for giving us the advice to treat him similar to how I would treat my children, a five-year-old daughter. You might have to go to bed early tonight for speaking out. You know what, I try to teach my daughter, and I am not totally successful—I try not to let her get too arrogant either. Humility is something I am trying to teach my own daughter.

I would like to thank the minister for his profound advice to all members of the opposition: treat him like a five-year-old, treat him like children. We all treat our children as well as we can. If that is the level that the minister is advising us to deal with, so be it. I thank the minister for that new insight into his—I do not know whether we should use more operant conditioning with the minister or what kind of child psychology we will have to think about.

I do not know any child psychology. I just go from the old-fashioned school. [interjection] No, we do not want a Skinner box, no. He will be sure to have a standard test very shortly from members opposite to make sure that he is up to speed with the rest of the province.

I would just like to ask the minister one further question. When they took too long at Portage—and I respect that. We have all been on tours before where meeting people does not—I still find it awkward that we are having air conditioning when it is only going to 19 above today, Mr. Chairman.

We all talk about energy conservation, and then we have an air conditioning machine going when it is going to go to 68 degrees outside.

An Honourable Member: You are spreading a lot of hot air.

Mr. Doer: That is probably very true. When we have the senator, the deputy premier, the heartbeat away, in charge here, I guess we maybe need the air conditioning machine.

I would just like to ask the minister, when they were faced with two choices, visiting the people in Leaf Rapids and being late or coming back to be on schedule for the media time, outside of the schedule for the pair time, why they did not just call the House leader, make a telephone call and say, we need a couple of more hours to visit people in Leaf Rapids, can we please get paired for a longer period of time? Why did they not request that? We did not receive any request from the minister. When the time was obviously backing up, why did they not request a couple of hours more so they could have visited the people in Leaf Rapids?

I understand how his tour was delayed; I respect that. I respect that they took more time in different locations; we understand that. Why did they not just ask for a couple of extra hours and request that from the opposition, because I can assure the minister we would have granted it?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for the question, and it is a valid question. I would just tell him that we did encounter a storm over, I am told it was over the Arborg area, but that did happen on the way back, and we had to go around it, so I do not know how much time that took. I really do not know. I guess we could check with the pilots on the aircraft, and they may be able to tell us roughly how much time that took off our arrival. I think the rules, as I understand it, are

something about an hour before you can vote, and the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) and many members have far more knowledge of the rules of this House than I. I do not believe that there was an understanding until that late a date, so I do not know.

The member says he would have granted an extension, and I appreciate that. I hope it does not happen again, that we would need to ask him for that favour or that sport in doing that, but I know it would be appreciated if it is made necessary by circumstances in the future.

The member says, and I do try this too and perhaps we both have the same problem in terms of trying to teach our children, I guess we all have that problem not to be arrogant. It is a difficult thing for any of us to do, especially those who are sometimes arrogant. The member says he will treat me like his daughter, and I do look forward to that in many respects.

I look forward to the respect that he will show me, and I look forward to the guidance he will provide. I look forward to the honesty and the sincerity with which we will build our relationship together, and I look forward to the love that he will show me in future as well.

Mr. Doer: I guess like the storm at Arborg, it seems to me that Arborg is south of Thompson, so you are already in the air heading back to Winnipeg, unless I am wrong. So you had already made the decision that you were coming back, right? So the storm in Arborg does not apply here to why you did not visit the people in Leaf Rapids. I just want to know why you did not ask us before you left Thompson for a couple of extra hours to visit those people in Leaf Rapids? It is not a favour we are doing the government on a pair. We give pairs to people not as favours, we give pairs to people as conducting the business of the people of Manitoba. That is our only criteria. Favours do not matter. If we think it is trivial, we will not grant it. If we think it is important for the people of Manitoba, the people we all serve, we will grant it.

I would like to ask the minister why he did not ask us for a couple of extra hours so the constituents, the people of Manitoba, the people of Leaf Rapids could

have been visited by the Premier, the minister of emergency services and the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Driedger), why he did not ask for that when his time schedule was wrong and an extra hour in Thompson could have made a lot of difference at an arena with the people of Leaf Rapids.

* (1140)

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his frankness and again for the offer and the understanding that he speaks of. I accept the fact that I do not know as much as I will, or as much as I would like to, about certainly the responsibilities that I have. I do not pretend to be as cognizant of every aspect of, for example, my department as I will in future.

I think learning is an ongoing process, as the member knows, and a life-long pursuit for me. So I will endeavour to learn more about every aspect of my department and at the same time I guess I would ask the member's understanding in knowing that I have not asked for a pair as a minister ever before, so I do not really pretend to know all the subtleties or nuances around the procedure, but I guess, certainly as a result of the events that the member describes, I have learned. And I guess that is the way people learn mostly, by their failures and by their mistakes.

Certainly I am one who has learned a great deal, because I have tried harder than lots of people in things I have done, and I have failed a heck of a lot more as a consequence of that. But I think that the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) expresses by his questions a sincere desire, a wish, in retrospect or in hindsight, that we had been able to meet with those people from Leaf Rapids, and I share that. I wish that we had been able to, too.

I again look forward to meeting with those people and hope that I will be able to offer them in some small way some encouragement and support which I know all members of this House feel for those people. I regret that it was not possible at that time, I sincerely regret that, but I do recognize, as I hope the member does, that we learn as much by our so-called mistakes as we do by our successes, perhaps more, and so in future with regard to scheduling, I will take the member's

suggestions to heart. I will hold him to his word in terms of offering pairs when circumstances warrant, as they certainly do in these circumstances.

With regard to the fires in the North, it is something that all of us—and certainly yesterday I was most impressed with the member's sincerity in suggesting a minute of silence which I thought was indeed a noble gesture. Thank you.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): I have a few questions for the same minister and perhaps also seek some clarifications.

The minister mentioned a few brief moments ago about a stress-debriefing team that will be available for the evacuees of Leaf Rapids, and I think that is a very laudable initiative. However, I think there are other communities that are under tremendous stress, and I think particularly here of South Indian Lake. As the minister well knows, yesterday we had some tragedies occur and there were three fatalities in that helicopter accident. Two of those fatalities are people who come from South Indian Lake.

My question to the minister is, is there any mechanism in place or is there something similar to the debriefing team, such as grief counselling, that will be available to the evacuees of South Indian Lake?

Mr. Pallister: I apologize for the slowness of my answer to the member but I did have some notes on that and I am just going to attempt to locate them. I can tell him that there is, I believe it is called, a critical-incidents stress-debriefing team that is affiliated with the Fire Commissioner's office. Our office was in immediate contact with them yesterday, as soon as we received word of the accident with the helicopter. Our department has been assured that they will be—we have been in contact with the person charged with the responsibility for designating the work of that particular group, and we have been assured that they will be brought into work with, not only the associates, fellow firefighters, but also, where appropriate, with the other family members if need be, and also with members of the community where that is appropriate.

(Mr. Jack Penner, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Perhaps I can get more detailed information for the member outside of the House. I would be happy to do that for the member. On the make-up of these stress-debriefing teams, it is not something that I have enough detail right now to give him, but I will undertake to get him more detail on the make-up of the teams, who is involved and so on. I am told it is a mental health initiative so there are, I would assume, trained and skilled people in those areas to help work with those people.

All of us, of course, are affected by this, and there was not a small amount of emotion in this House yesterday, certainly, but we all know that it pales significantly in comparison to the feelings of those friends and family of those people lost and injured. So certainly we recognize that they are deserving of support and we do our utmost to work with those people and give them the support they deserve and need.

Mr. Jennissen: I thank the minister for that answer.

With the focus on Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake and the tragedy surrounding that, I personally have lost a little bit of touch with Granville Lake and South Indian Lake in terms of where the evacuees are right now.

Could the minister update us a little bit on when could these people reasonably be expected to return home?

Mr. Pallister: I will undertake to get a forest fire update, the most recent one possible for the member. I have one from yesterday—it says they are progressing against the fires—but will undertake to get the member an update on the forest fire situation as we speak, and I am sure that he would appreciate having that.

The evacuees from Granville are located in two communities, I am told, and I am not sure of the exact numbers in each, but some in Thompson—and perhaps the member from Thompson has some information he would share with the member, I am not sure—but also some in Wabowden.

I should tell the member that the critical-incidents stress-debriefing team that I referred to in an earlier

answer is working with those people as well, because they have been evacuated, as the member knows, for some time.

Just generally—I think the member is aware of this, but it bears repeating that the decision on returning people to their communities has to take many things into account. Certainly first and foremost it is the safety of those people upon their return. We have already seen and have had some criticism. In my response to that earlier criticism the member knows I do not feel it is justified or appropriate but have had some criticism on the decision which was made, a joint team decision to return people back to Leaf Rapids and then having to re-evacuate them. This is illustrative of the outcome if a decision is made to return people to their homes too quickly or too soon.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

Though we can never be sure of fire, certainly given the circumstances around Leaf Rapids where our team believed that the fire in the community was such that they were not in any danger at all, and we had virtually a 180 degree swing in the winds. The circumstances that nature threw at us were such that the decision in retrospect was one that, had we known, we would not have made, but we did not know, and that is nature for you.

With regard to Granville Lake, the circumstances are somewhat similar, I guess, in the sense that we want to be sure, as sure as we can be, that these folks when they are returned home can stay in their homes, and I know they share in that understanding, as much as it is difficult and stressful for them to be away from their homes. We will, of course, and all of us, I hope, will try to make their stay as comfortable and as adequate at the very least as is possible.

* (1150)

Mr. Jennissen: I thank the minister for that answer. I have a particular question for the minister, and that relates to a constituent from Leaf Rapids who is living with his family in Winnipeg. He decided to come to Winnipeg because two of his daughters were—I think they still are—attending university. Now he has

absolutely no money, his car is broken down, and he wonders why EMO is bouncing him around to Family Services and expecting him to go on welfare and so on. Is there no short-term, immediate relief available for this man whose family is here, who I admit is not in the designated zone or town that he should be but feels that this is the place to be? Can he not get some short-term relief?

Mr. Pallister: I would just perhaps be best able to help the member if I knew more about the individual circumstances of his constituent. I do not want to express a circumstance that is not entirely accurate for the member, and so if he would make me aware of the individual's circumstances, I would be very pleased to look into that on his behalf. I appreciate his making representation on behalf of his constituent.

Mr. Jennissen: I did phone the minister's office, but I was referred back to have this person phone EMO and so on. We have gone through the route already, but I will supply the minister with the details.

I have one further comment or question and that is basically something that the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) touched upon, that was the aboriginal co-ordinator that was in place in 1989. I think, just for the record, the purpose of an aboriginal co-ordinator is not so much racial origin as the fact that we need this person because we are dealing with northern people often of a different language, Dene or Cree, and of quite a different culture, different from, let us say, mainstream southern culture. I think that is the purpose, to make things work smoothly. It is not a question of race at all; it is a question of making things work more smoothly. I think that is definitely what the member for Dauphin was trying to point out. So I ask the minister again if he is willing to consider that.

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his question. I did undertake, on behalf of the member for Dauphin, to investigate further a suggestion and will. I appreciate the references to making things work better because that is essentially, as I see it, what the evacuees and the disaster victims want us to do, to make the system work better for them and to benefit them and to protect them in their time of need. I thank the member for the question and have agreed, because of the earlier

questions from the member for Dauphin, to investigate further.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): I have a few questions for the minister in regard to the fires that we have been experiencing in the North. My first question relates to an assessment of the number of Hydro facilities that were damaged during these fires. Can the minister enlighten the House, or this committee, pardon me, as to the amount of damage that Hydro incurred?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for her question. I cannot enlighten the committee at this time, but I will undertake to get more detailed information for the member and will forward that in due course.

Ms. Mihychuk: I appreciate that. We know that service was disrupted for communities and various transmission lines across the North and certain emergency measures are available in communities. My question, the damages that Hydro experienced during the fire, are those costs also part of the disaster relief, or is Hydro required to repair those lines?

Mr. Pallister: I will take the question as notice from the member, and I will determine what the actual cost-sharing is. I think I made that information available to, I believe, the member for Interlake (Mr. Clif Evans) in terms of the cost-sharing formula generally as to how that relates in disasters between the municipal, provincial and federal governments. The member for Interlake just had that sort of general information on the cost-sharing formula, but as far as Hydro damage specifically, I do not know. I will undertake to find out.

I had have an update for the member which I will read. This is just an update as of an hour and a half ago from the EMO and provincial fire operations centre on the fire situation: Provincial stress-debriefing counsellors are in Leaf Rapids to assist survivors, firefighters and other emergency workers following yesterday's helicopter crash. Investigators remain at the scene of the accident. Power was restored to Lynn Lake at 5:30 yesterday afternoon; the community is still hosting 1,110 Leaf Rapids evacuees. South Indian Lake evacuees and Granville Lake residents are still in Thompson and Wabowden, respectively. Highway 391

is still closed between Nelson House and Lynn Lake. Cloudy, cool weather is helping fire suppression in the North. Further information on the fires burning in Manitoba will be available later on.

Ms. Mihychuk: My question to the minister is, does the government employ the provincial resources that we have in the North during disasters? More specifically, I am familiar or aware that there are 15 geological crews in the Snow Lake-The Pas area. These are people who are experienced working in remote areas, experienced working in wilderness environments. Does the government employ these people as well as others? We probably have wildlife officers available. What is the deployment of provincial civil servants in the case of disasters?

Mr. Pallister: I am not entirely clear on the question. If the member is asking, do we take steps to ensure the safety of government employees during disasters, yes, in terms of relocation and so on outside of the endangered communities.

As far as the issue of the specific deployment of geological teams or Natural Resources staff, that would be a question, I think, best answered by the ministers in charge of those departments.

I respect the question, but I do not believe that it would as effective and informative to the member for me to attempt to answer it as it would be for those ministers.

Ms. Mihychuk: I am going to try and clarify what I mean. In some jurisdictions, and I believe in Ontario, geological crews that are within reasonable distance of a fire, for example, are seconded for duty to fight fires.

I am aware that these individuals were in that area, and so my question is: Is there an emergency plan to deploy the resources that you have? These are experienced people who have worked in the North for many years. Are those people deployed during a disaster?

Mr. Pallister: As to the issue of geological crews being deployed to fight fires, I do not know. I will undertake to get the specific information for the member. As to the firefighting teams in place and so on, I am told that the Manitoba Association of Native Firefighters is working very closely with our Department of Natural Resources in that regard. I am sure the minister would be able to give again much more detail on the actual firefighting activities as they are undertaken.

We have obtained firefighting support in terms of additional planes, helicopters and so on from other jurisdictions during these last few weeks and, in an effort to do effective battle with the fires, have incorporated a lot of resources. Whether that is one of them, I will undertake to find out for the member.

Ms. Mihychuk: I am glad that the minister will investigate. It is my understanding, unfortunately, that those resources are not deployed. It is at times of emergency where Manitoba is looking for additional resources that I do think it is appropriate for the government to call on civil servants, and I am sure that they are fully willing and able to assist.

My second set of questions I would like to ask is to the minister: Has he approached the federal government with a partial claim, and can we expect a payment from the federal government before three years elapsing as was the case for the '89 fires?

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

The hour being twelve noon, as previously agreed, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The hour being after 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 29, 1995

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

Committee of Supply

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