

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
First Session—Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 22, 2003

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Dialysis Services

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. These are the reasons for this petition:

Kidney dialysis is an important procedure for those with kidney failure who are unable to receive a kidney transplant.

Mr. Speaker, those receiving kidney dialysis treatment are able to lead productive lives despite the continual commitment and time-consuming nature of the process.

Kidney dialysis patients from out-of-province must be able to access dialysis services while in Manitoba to sustain their health and lives.

Although a person's province of origin covers all of his or her dialysis costs while she or he is visiting Manitoba, individuals receiving dialysis are currently unable to visit this province due to the lack of dialysis nurses to oversee the procedure.

The travel restrictions placed on out-of-province dialysis patients due to the growing nursing shortage in Manitoba's health care system presents concerns regarding freedom of movement and quality of life for those on dialysis.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health to consider enhancing training programs for dialysis

nurses in Manitoba, such that staffing shortages in this area are filled.

To request the Minister of Health to consider the importance of providing short-term dialysis services for out-of-province visitors to Manitoba.

Signed by Debora Wiens, Cindy Stewart and Susan Gill.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from R.H.G. Bonnycastle School 49 Grade 3 students under the direction of Mrs. Susan Laspina, Mrs. Linda Mozol and also Mr. Ron Vermette. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen).

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

* (13:35)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Cash Advance for Producers

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with some young families over the weekend who are being affected by this BSE crisis. One of the young girls I met with, Katie Kruk, recently wrote an essay on the impact that this crisis is having on her, her friends and her family.

I would like to table copies of what she said to the House, Mr. Speaker. She said and I quote:

"It might even come to moving far away from the farm my family has been on for generations."

Mr. Speaker, Katie's family and the other 12 000 farm families dealing with this crisis need a cash advance. It will cost this Premier less than \$20 million. Will he today show some compassion to those farm families, do the right thing and offer a cash advance?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have authorized \$100 million in low-interest cash advance.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, today is the 126th day of this crisis and it gets more critical with each passing day that this Premier does not understand the programs he has put in place do not work. It is a cash advance that Manitobans are looking for.

As Katie said and I quote: "This mad cow scare isn't only affecting us now, but in years to come. Down the road when its time for me to go to University, there will be no money in our savings."

Think how it feels to be feeding the world and not being able to feed your family. If you knew how hard and the suffering it takes to be a farmer, you would have a little more respect for us.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier show Katie, show her family, the other 12 000 farm families that are out there struggling through this crisis, will he show them the respect that they deserve and give them a cash advance today?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we respect the Canadian farmer and we respect the Manitoba farmer and we respect Katie's family as farmers here in Manitoba. Three out of the last four years, we have taken money out of the rainy day fund, two years running to deal with the grain and oilseeds crisis. Now this year—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you. The member opposite should remember he asked us to drain the rainy

day fund completely in '99, 2000, 2001. If we had done that, Mr. Speaker, we would not have anything left for the beef program today.

Mr. Speaker, we obviously are dealing with multiple stress in the system with the closure of the border since May 20, extreme stress for families that do not know when the next stage of the border opening is going to take place.

We are dealing also with the compounded impact with some areas with drought and the inability to manage their herd with those weather conditions in two of the areas that we know of in Manitoba. That is why we have announced without any federal support to date the drought transportation assistance program. We have also announced funds and more funds to be available on the cattle slaughter issue.

We know that one of the great disadvantages Manitoba has, even in the middle of this national crisis, is the fact that we process so few of our own cattle here in Manitoba. It was some 290 000 cattle that were processed some 10 years ago, well, in fact, 10 or 12 years ago and we are now down to a situation where it is under 20 000, which is an unacceptable situation for Katie and her family and for all Manitobans in terms of dealing with this challenge.

* (13:40)

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, there are more than 12 000 farm families who are struggling to pay their bills, to feed and clothe their children and winter is fast approaching. The young Manitobans who I have talked to over the weekend have already accepted that Christmas this year is going to be the harsh reality, that they will be fortunate to have food and just bare necessities. Surely in Manitoba, when families are suffering, as they are suffering under this Doer government, those families deserve better. This is Manitoba.

Katie said and I go on to quote: "So please, if you are listening, I just want you to understand, this doesn't only affect adults, but the kids too. If the Government doesn't give us the help we need we won't have a home to go back to just a lot of bad memories."

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier please, today, show some compassion, do the right thing for

those 12 000 families who are suffering because he has programs that do not work? Flow the cash advance. Do the right thing today.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we signed a mirror agreement today in Ottawa to follow the advice of farm organizations that are representing the family the member referred to. They feel the cash will come from that. It was essential to sign the mirror agreement. We did so to consider the reality that the member opposite points out, that people are without income if they cannot sell their cattle. We are trying to replace some of that income with the mirror program.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Cash Advance for Producers

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): The toll of the BSE crisis on the young people in rural Manitoba is mounting. Our leader and I met with several farm families on the weekend. Sarah Kruk wrote a compelling story on the emotional and financial reality her family is facing.

I will table her letter to the House, as well, please.

She writes, and I quote: "But this year decisions had to be made. I chose not to take my Grade 5 piano exams and only necessities for school were bought."

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) must understand the sacrifices these young women are making and these young families are making, both academically and emotionally. Can the minister today respond to Sarah's family and the other 12 000 farm families by implementing the cash advance program?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): As I stated last Thursday and I will reiterate again today, there is the low-interest loan program, one of the two options suggested by the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, there is a separate program to deal with drought transportation. I understand that there is a little more moisture in the Souris area today. Hopefully, that will provide some hope for our next planting season.

I also know that all the organizations that we listened to said, yes, the program has been

approved with the national government; yes, the program has been enhanced but you have no choice but to sign the program. We are listening to the organizations that represent farmers because I am sure those organizations are listening to all the family members as well.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, yes, there is rain in the southwestern area of the province. It is going to help for next year, but it is not helping this year. The drought assistance program is a joke because it is not helping 90 percent of the farmers in the area. That was a major point of discussion from the fathers in the family yesterday. It was a major disappointment.

Sarah Kruk writes and I quote: "When Christmas comes around it will be necessities only and not a lot of extras. During these past few months I have learned that when you have a big decision to make it has to be made and that not everything is easy."

Mr. Speaker, Sarah shares how difficult it is to make tough decisions and that they have to be made. Will the Minister of Agriculture make the right decision and give the families like Sarah's the cash advance program today?

Mr. Doer: We have the low-interest loan program, a recommendation that was also made by members opposite in letters they wrote to producers last August.

Secondly, we have the mirror program that we are signing today because of the advice of the KAP organization, the cattle producers, the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, the municipalities.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities of Canada recommended at their meeting in Windsor that there needs to be a national federal program to deal with the economic uncertainty for cattle producers. Even the slaughter subsidy program, the Province of Manitoba is on our own hook after August 31 because the federal government would not extend that. Even that program has a disproportionate benefit where you have greater slaughter capacity.

* (13:45)

Mrs. Rowat: Recommendations are great, but action is more important and the people want the

cash advance program. Sarah quotes right now: the border is still closed to live cattle. Calves have not been sold and bills are piling up. Today my family and I try to remain optimistic. Unfortunately, though, in the end the worst did come.

Mr. Speaker, given that the worst has now come for so many family farms, will the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) stop being so oblivious to how the BSE crisis is affecting the farm families and provide the cash advance today?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the minister has been listening to farm families and she has listened to the farm organizations. All three major organizations dealing with the cattle producers have recommended that we sign the mirror agreement. Members opposite have listened to that advice.

Department of Agriculture and Food Advertising Campaign

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): We have just heard from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) and the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) a very compelling and an emotional story about the plight of rural Manitoba families stricken hard by the BSE crisis. The resilience of these people should never be underestimated.

Today when I opened our two city newspapers, I have to wonder if this Government has any understanding of the pain that is out there in the rural areas.

My question to the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) is: How dare you spend thousands and thousands of dollars patting yourself on the back with half-page, self-congratulatory advertisements in these papers when people could use those same dollars to ease the suffering that is going on in the rural areas today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Agriculture has an advertising budget; I expect that they are using it.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, this advertising is absolutely atrocious. This Government is waging a public relations campaign in the city of

Winnipeg to cover up its failure to provide much-needed cash flow, a cash advance program that is truly going to help the families in crisis. This advertisement does not even explain how the programs work. They are strictly intended to highlight the phantom accomplishments of this Government.

Will the Minister of Agriculture stop wasting taxpayers' money and cancel this ad program today?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are into the early part of Question Period and I would just like to caution all honourable members: When putting a question, put it through the Chair and –

An Honourable Member: Put some money out there.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know all members are passionate about the issue. I understand that, but we need to maintain decorum in this—[*interjection*]

I want to once again remind all honourable members, when the Speaker is giving caution to the House, all members should listen to the caution and not carry conversations back and forth, because I was speaking to all the members.

Order. We are early in Question Period and I know all members are very passionate about this issue, but we have to maintain some control, and I expect decorum to be maintained at all times in this House. I am sure that all members in this Assembly expect the same. I ask all honourable members to put their questions and their answers through the Chair, not directly to one another.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Acting Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with a number of dairy producers and beef producers on Friday. Being from the southeast part of Manitoba, I know a lot of families are certainly affected in one way or another. I know the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) in Manitoba and the Premier (Mr. Doer) have worked extremely hard over the last number of months to not only make sure that the

border is open, which is the key issue, but also with regard to signing the APF which ensures continuation of the income stabilization programs. This program is not perfect and the Minister of Agriculture worked hard to get areas in it changed and to ensure that the best benefits would flow to Manitoba farmers.

* (13:50)

**Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
Cash Advance for Producers**

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether to laugh or cry. If this was not such a blatant misuse and a blatant attempt to deceive Manitobans, it could be humorous. This is absolutely tragic. It is a time of crisis. The Government is wasting money, tens of thousands of dollars in an attempt to make itself look good.

My question to the minister, Mr. Speaker, is: Will she hear the pleas of families like the Kruks, end their self-congratulatory ad campaign and put money in the hands of these people today?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Acting Minister of Agriculture): It is important to put on the record how hard the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has worked as well as this Government. Not only is there \$100 million in low-interest loans to producers through MACC loan program but also another \$43 million in funding is available through the APF to producers, and also under the BSE Recovery Program another \$15 million, drought assistance another \$12 million, the BSE slaughter program another \$10 million. Mr. Speaker, in total it is \$180 million that this Government has on the table to assist farmers in Manitoba.

**Sunrise School Division
Labour Dispute—Funding**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Last week during Estimates the Education Minister confirmed that \$428,000 of taxpayer money was given to Sunrise School Division to help end a strike. No formal request for help ever came from the school division and Lloyd Schreyer, a Treasury Board employee, was the Government's representative in negotiating the settlement.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Why did the minister direct his employee, Mr. Lloyd Schreyer, to get involved in the Sunrise School Division's labour dispute just prior to the election?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): In March, the chair of the Sunrise School Division wrote to government expressing concern about the disparity in wages between the two divisions that were merged together. The situation appeared unique in that there was a 56% gap disparity between the two divisions and a strike was imminent and, in fact, a strike came into effect before Lloyd Schreyer contacted MAST. MAST, in turn, contacted the school division and both parties felt that he could play a useful role in resolving this dispute and ensuring that children and families were able to get to school and have the programs they need.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should bring the Minister of Finance up to date with this issue. There was never any formal request from the school division for funds from the Government, so perhaps he should take that into consideration when answering his question.

Why did the Minister of Finance authorize his employee, Mr. Schreyer, to negotiate on behalf of the Department of Education in a labour dispute in Sunrise School Division just prior to the election?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, after receiving this information from the chair of the Sunrise School Division that they had an enormous wage disparity of 56 percent between the two divisions that were merged together and after consulting with MAST who, in turn, consulted with the school division, Mr. Schreyer was asked to come in and work with them to find a solution to ensure that the strike which was underway could be brought to a conclusion and that programs would be available for school children and their families before the school year was terminated.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, why did the Minister of Finance have one of his employees offer almost half a million dollars of taxpayer money to end a strike in a targeted riding just two weeks prior to the last provincial election campaign?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I would like to remind all honourable members when the Speaker rises, all members should be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence. I once again ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

* (13:55)

Mr. Selinger: The solution that was found required the school division to provide two thirds of the resources, one third provided by the provincial government. This is over a three-year period.

When you have a situation when there is a 56% wage disparity between two units that have come together and you have a strike underway and there is a desire to ensure that children can continue to go to school until the end of the regular school year and the school division believes they can come up with two thirds of the resources, it seemed reasonable and prudent to find the other third to assist that school division, including a collective agreement to ensure the children were back in school.

Sunrise School Division Labour Dispute—Funding

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): This Minister of Finance is saying he authorized his employee to intervene in the mediation process. Did he in fact authorize his employee to intervene?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the employee contacted MAST, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and asked if there was a problem that required any assistance. They in turn talked to the school division and both parties indicated they thought he could play a useful role in helping resolve this problem. Only then did he enter the situation to help find an equitable solution to a problem that was leaving children outside of the school system at a time when they needed their education.

Mr. Cummings: The Minister of Finance seems only to be concerned about strikes just prior to the election. There is one going on out there now. Mr. Speaker, the wide discrepancies

between school divisions is a result of the actions of this Government.

On what criteria did he authorize this grant?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, there appeared to be a disparity between the two units coming together in the two school divisions that was extremely wide, 56 percent. That disparity was beyond the capacity of that school division to address it immediately. They were able to find two thirds of the solution. They required some additional assistance spread over three years to resolve the problem.

We must remember the strike had already begun. Children and families were being dislocated from having access to the school program. They were out of school. With those kinds of immediate and imminent problems before that school division, they were very happy to get additional assistance to solve the problem.

Mr. Cummings: The Minister of Finance being the chief financial officer of this Government should always know, or should be expected to know, on what criteria government spends this amount of money. This is not an insignificant amount of money. I asked him before and I ask him again: On what criteria did he authorize his employee to intervene?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I think I have made it extremely clear. There appeared to be a unique situation where the wage disparity was 56 percent. That situation was larger than the average wage disparity between units that were merging as a part of the school amalgamation process. This large disparity appeared to be beyond the capacity of the new merged school division. Even though they thought they could come up with two thirds of the solution, they were appreciative of the remaining third being spread over three years, available from government.

Hells Angels Trial Witness Protection

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Hells Angels associates are currently representing themselves in court because—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I would like to ask the co-operation of all honourable members. I am sure we all want to hear the question.

* (14:00)

Mr. Hawranik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hells Angels associates are currently representing themselves in court because their lawyers are asking for more money from Legal Aid. Their lawyers are asking the courts to dismiss the charges of violence and intimidation-related offences against them. Hells Angels associates could walk out of the courtroom free men without having to undergo a trial for the criminal acts that they have committed.

Will the Minister of Justice take responsibility if the Hells Angels associates are released without a trial and set free to terrorize innocent Manitobans?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned a practising lawyer who has done criminal work would violate the sub judice convention. He knows full well that members in this House should not undermine a trial, something that is before the courts, that is being determined by and supervised by the judicial system and by a judge. This side does not want to see any charges dismissed because of political interference.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, I am not asking for evidence in the trial. I am not bringing forth any facts that have not been presented in the *Free Press*. The Hells Angels have been making a mockery out of the justice system in this province. The Justice Minister has shown no leadership and is not in control of the Justice Department. Because of this, the Hells Angels associates may be released and all charges against them may be dismissed.

A release of the Hells Angels associates will send waves of terror through Manitoba, especially to those witnesses who have agreed to testify against them at the trial. Will this Minister of Justice take responsibility for the safety of those witnesses and those families?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, if you dissect the question that is being asked, it is quite clear

the member is trying to assist the defence in their argument on the Legal Aid funding issue. The other side obviously just wants more money to Legal Aid.

This Government, I am not speaking about any particular case, has and will continue to attempt to ensure that taxpayer interests as well as the interests of fairness in the justice system are respected when it comes to Legal Aid funding.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the safety of Manitobans is in jeopardy. The Minister of Justice is responsible to ensure the safety of Manitobans. He has let the Hells Angels wrestle the justice system to the ground and the minister has sat back and let it happen. If those Hells Angels associates are released and set free because of the lack of action by this minister, what will this minister do to protect the witnesses and their families?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, as to the accuracy of any allegations from the members opposite, the true facts will be discussed and adjudicated in a court of law and not in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting, as a practising criminal lawyer can you imagine him making a case in his local community for the defence when all of a sudden he gets word that, as a result of questions in Question Period, the Attorney General is going to step in? Political interference is not something I think a responsible Opposition would demand.

Lake Winnipeg Environmental Recovery

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Conservation. On August 12, the *Free Press* reported that the Government was committed to making sure that within two or three years Lake Winnipeg will be well on the way to recovery. Manitobans were pleased to hear that the Government will have Lake Winnipeg on its way to recovery in two or three years but somewhat skeptical of the Government's ability to deliver, particularly since it took four years to set up the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board.

I ask today if the Minister of Conservation can provide the specific measures and time lines that he is going to deliver to make sure that Lake Winnipeg is recovered in two or three years.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the action we have taken in terms of Lake Winnipeg and, in fact, in developing a water strategy for Manitoba, something that is long overdue. I am glad the member referenced the CEC because one of the main problems we are dealing with was back in 1992, even though the CEC had recommended that the matter of the operations of the city of Winnipeg be referred back in terms of their sewage water systems. This never happened, and we saw the kind of situation that could lead to last year.

Mr. Speaker, we have now received the CEC report. We have agreed to it in principle. We have indicated we will be responding, and, in fact, we have already indicated that we are responding in terms of all the matters within provincial jurisdiction.

We are now looking to the City of Winnipeg, as well, to do the right thing, in this case implement the kind of planning that should have taken place 10 years ago that we will now see under this Government.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, yesterday's NDP promised action in 1973 and 1974. It is 30 years later and we are still at the starting blocks with the Clean Environment Commission report.

The Clean Environment Commission said that there is a 25-year time line for action. I ask the minister, you know, it is not very credible to propose that he is going to have a 25-year time line for action under the Clean Environment Commission, yet Lake Winnipeg is going to be cleaned up in two or three years. Give us a break.

I ask the Minister of Conservation what specific action plans he is going to present that will clean up Lake Winnipeg in two or three years.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had been paying some attention, he would

see we have already acted. I would like the member to note, on the record, it is not just the city of Winnipeg. All 1.1 million Manitobans are part of the problem and have to be part of the solution. In fact, upwards of 30 percent comes from outside our jurisdiction, and I hope his friends in Ottawa will work with us to work with the U.S. The fact is we are currently on a bilateral basis to reduce nutrient overloads and other sources of pressure on Lake Winnipeg.

But we have already acted in terms of regulation in terms of septic fields, in terms of sewage, Mr. Speaker. We have already acted by, in this case, major changes in terms of livestock regulations. Unlike the member opposite, we are putting in place action. Action speaks louder than words and you will see improvement in Lake Winnipeg under the NDP government.

Canadian Beef Promotion

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, at a time when the cattle industry is in need, we recognize the importance of public support. In fact, Manitobans, businesses, in fact Burger King, they had this nice "I love Canadian beef" promotion, as Manitobans get behind an industry that is in need.

I had an individual that I met recently, and he was quite upset. He was upset with the fact that the NDP in Swan River, where we have the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), was having an annual pork event. I am wondering if the Minister of Agriculture would see it appropriate, maybe not necessarily to include the beef component, not necessarily you have to exclude, but at least recognize the sensitivity of the industry as this particular individual did. Does the Government not have the sensitivity—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to eat beef, pork, chicken, turkey, pickerel, lamb. I have ordered a couple of lambs, you know, bison, caribou—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: I find the people in Swan River are still talking about the member from Inkster whose biggest concern during the emergency debate was where he was sitting as opposed to where he was standing for beef producers, Mr. Speaker.

(14:10)

Workplace Safety Government Initiatives

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): I noted that there are new advertisements on TV regarding the SAFE Manitoba campaign which has been very effective in getting the message out to the public that we all are responsible for work safety.

Can the minister tell this House what progress has been made to reduce Manitoba's injury rate?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Labour I want to indicate that one of the top priorities for this Government has been in terms of workplace safety and health, improving our record in terms of workplace safety and health.

I am very pleased to say that since 1999, as a result of such policies as increasing inspections, the fact that we have also more than doubled the number of prosecutions in terms of workplace safety and health as a result of public awareness, which is continual and ongoing, we are starting to see some real progress, in fact a 14% decline in time-loss injuries from 2000 until the year 2002.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, working in partnership with the labour movement and with business, and with our new act, by the way, which was voted against by the Conservatives, unanimous support by the business and labour committee. We will move ahead. Our goal is to reduce injuries in the workplace and we are doing it.

Gang-related Crime Reduction Strategy

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, Guy Ouellette, an organized crime spe-

cialist indicates that there have been 37 gang-related murders or attempted murders in Manitoba since November 1, 2000. Those 37 murders or attempted murders are more than occurred in Ontario, Québec and British Columbia combined.

Since this Doer government took power in Manitoba, we have seen a proliferation of gangs and criminal gang activity. When will this Minister of Justice come up with a plan to reduce the number of gangs in Manitoba and the number of gang-related crimes in Manitoba?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am very pleased that the member opposite recognizes the status of Guy Ouellette as an expert in dealing with the challenge of organized crime in Canada. I am also very pleased that Mr. Ouellette has cited this particular Government as the only government in Canada that is showing leadership and the political will, Mr. Speaker, in bringing in the toughest provincial legislation in the country to counter organized crime.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, I find it shocking at the number of gang-related murders and attempted murders in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, 37 is more than Ontario, Québec and British Columbia combined, particularly since those three provinces have more than 20 times the population of Manitoba. Manitoba currently holds the dubious distinction of having the most biker-gang violence in Canada. What does the minister expect Manitobans to do when he has no plan and the effort that he has made and put forward has clearly failed?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, in addition to Mr. Ouellette citing Manitoba's efforts at the provincial level, I cite the *Toronto Star* report earlier this year by Peter Edwards who says, the Manitoba Angels will struggle to hold their membership at 12, losing manpower to prison, cocaine addiction and deportation. Five Manitoba Angels are in prison, are facing charges. This is as of January.

In contrast, the Ontario Angels have shot up from 168 members in December 2000 to about 270 members today. Ontario accounts for almost half of the gang's national membership and

fewer than 10 of those Ontario members are either in jail or facing charges. Mr. Speaker, this article is headed: No welcome sign in the window, Manitoba passes tough laws to fight biker gangs.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that statement. However, our Chief Justice disagrees with him. Clayton Sumner was a member of a street gang and he pled last week guilty to manslaughter for the stabbing death of Winnipeg cab driver Pritam Deol. Associate Chief Justice Oliphant said during sentencing: Our community continues to suffer from an epidemic of brutal, senseless crimes committed by people like you. You and your fellow gang members contribute nothing positive to society.

When will this Justice Minister end this epidemic of brutal senseless crimes committed by gang members in this province?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I remind the members opposite that last year the crime rate went down in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, I also remind members that it was this provincial government alone in Canada that brought in the courthouse security legislation, The Fortified Buildings Act, The Safer Communities Act, The Civil Remedies Against Organized Crime Act. We are not finished.

The Hells Angels arrived in Manitoba in 1997 under the watch of the former government. They did nothing except put in place a so-called hotline that went cold for tips on gangs. They did not answer it for five months at a time. We do not need lessons from members opposite on countering organized crime.

Sunrise School Division Labour Dispute—Funding

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance has done nothing to deny that he instructed Lloyd Schreyer to intervene in the mediation process. Therefore, I ask him again: What criteria did he give Mr. Schreyer in order to encourage him to be involved in that process?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have been crystal clear that the

situation in this school division was unique in that there was a 56% disparity in wages. I have also been very clear that the provincial employee only entered the situation after the strike had started. He did not interfere with collective bargaining or mediation. Only after the strike was started did he come in to resolve a uniquely wide wage disparity for which the school division could find two thirds of the money and the Province, through the Schools Grants program, was able to find the remainder.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Parklands/Mixed Woods Gallery

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to attend the grand opening of the new Parklands/Mixed Woods Gallery at the Manitoba Museum on September 18. The new Manitoba Mixed Woods Gallery, with two floors and a total of 1000 square feet, was designed as a replication of the mixed-woods region of Manitoba and as a replication of the cultural and natural diversity of our province. This area includes the western border north of the Duck Mountains, southwest through the Interlake, across to the Whiteshell and south to the U.S. border. This immense area includes the most populated regions of our province, including the city of Winnipeg.

The gallery includes magnificent displays of the natural features of our beautiful province. It provides a learning place in which people of all ages can explore giant lakes, rivers, sand hills, snake pits and bat caves. It also features displays of people from our diverse Manitoba heritage, our First Nations peoples and early immigrants. This astounding display is all included within the two floors of the gallery. It is the largest history classroom in Manitoba, home for over 100 000 students every year.

The gallery has been six years in its design and construction. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the curators, artists, the staff and the board of directors, it has culminated in an incredible mosaic of our heritage. I would also like to thank museum members, donors, friends,

sponsors, volunteers and their families for their dedication to this project. The capital campaign was launched over 10 years ago to make this gallery a reality.

I was privileged to participate in the opening and accept, on behalf of the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer), a recognition award for the Government's investment and support of the Urban Development Initiative to enhance this gallery. It is projects like these that help preserve the history of Manitoba for current and future generations.

Honourable Duff Roblin

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Honourable Duff Roblin for being the recent recipient of the Health Sciences Centre Foundation's 2003 Laureate of Excellence Award. Established in 1991, the Laureate of Excellence Award recognizes excellence on the part of an individual, organization or group for a special contribution to society, whether it is local, national or international.

As an upstanding citizen, Mr. Roblin was successful in private business and also served in the Canadian Armed Forces during the Second World War. Most notably, Mr. Roblin has played a vital role in the history of Manitoba, both as a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and as Premier from 1958 to 1967. He later went on to become a member of the Privy Council of Canada and the Canadian Senate.

* (14:20)

The 2003 Laureate of Excellence award recognizes Mr. Roblin's insightful leadership and his many achievements that have contributed immensely to the social, cultural and economic betterment of our province and ultimately improved the quality of life for all Manitobans. His vision led to the construction of hospitals, seniors homes, highways, provincial parks and the introduction of the province's first medical insurance plan. The legacy of his achievements were most notable during and after the flood of 1997, when he was applauded for the construction of the Red River Floodway, popularly known among Manitobans as Duff's Ditch.

In his many years of dedicated service to Manitobans, Mr. Roblin served with integrity

and compassion. In 2000 he received the province's highest distinction, the Order of Manitoba, which was fitting for a man who gave so much to this province.

I would like to thank Mr. Roblin for his commitment to Manitoba and congratulate him on receiving the Laureate of Excellence Award.

Northern Tykes Day Care

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report new funding for the community child care centre located in Snow Lake. The Northern Tykes Day Care in Snow Lake received \$78,208 for 24 preschool and 4 infant spaces. Funding was announced last week by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Caldwell) as part of the \$1.5-million commitment to create 788 new child care spaces.

The new funding will go a long way to building better, more accessible child care programs in the community of Snow Lake. This new support will develop options for families in the community as they look at balancing work and family life.

The Northern Tykes Day Care was opened in May of this year and addresses an urgent need in the community. The centre's board of directors and staff have worked hard to ensure high-quality child care is available. The centre has spaces for children from 12 weeks to 12 years. The centre is located in the Snow Lake Family Resource Centre.

Increasing numbers of rural and northern mothers of young children are working outside of the home. Many families today find that two incomes are essential to maintain a sufficient standard of living. For example, the number of two-parent families living below the poverty line would increase by 78 percent if working women in those families withdrew from the workforce.

Our province cannot afford to miss opportunities to develop rural and northern child care programs. By supporting families now as they raise their children, they will contribute to a healthy child, good outcomes and indeed will save money later. Quality, accessible, affordable child care is an integral piece of the puzzle that

will ensure all Manitoba children will become productive members of our workforce in the future.

In the past four years, the Province has increased its commitment to early childhood development and families by a total of over \$50 million. Of this amount, the federal government transferred \$14.8 million in 2002-03 and will contribute \$19.4 million next year.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Northern Tykes Day Care for being selected as one of the child care centres to receive new funding. I think the announcement by the minister shows that Manitoba's five-year plan for child care is working and is improving the quality of life for many Manitobans.

Minister of Justice

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): This past week has left Manitobans wondering what has happened to their justice system. Unfortunately, it also left Manitobans wondering what has happened to their Justice Minister (Mr. Macintosh).

Today, the Department of Justice through Legal Aid is negotiating to give over \$20 million of taxpayers' money to Hells Angels associates, over \$20 million of taxpayers' money that was earned by the hard working people of Manitoba. While the Minister of Justice gets ready to write the cheque for the Hells Angels, we are left to wonder where else these millions of dollars could have gone.

Could it have gone to help farmers who are affected by the BSE crisis? We heard today from the leader of our party and from the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) the suffering that is going on in our farm community. We are left to wonder if that money would be better served than in the justice system.

Last week we also heard that an accused child pornographer has been waiting for five years to be brought to justice. Could it go to the crumbling infrastructure in Manitoba?

Manitobans say yes and I say yes but instead these millions of dollars are going to Hells

Angels so they can get the best legal representation that Manitobans can afford. Where is the former Member for St. Johns, who once said and once cared about the appropriate resources and spending in the Justice Department? Where is the common sense of this Minister of Justice?

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Manitobans we ask: Where is the justice?

South End United Titans

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize the recent success of the South End United Titans premier U-14 soccer team, which won the Manitoba Soccer Association's Provincial Championship in Brandon, August 8, 9 and 10.

South End United will probably represent the province of Manitoba in the 2003 under-14 girls Canadian Soccer Association National Club Championship in Halifax, October 9 to 13, where they will compete with teams from across the country. The South End United Titans U-14 soccer team is a member of the South End United Soccer Club and is a team of girls ages 13 to 14. The girls team has been active in Winnipeg since 1986.

Coaches Hugh Swan and Bill Warnick, took over coaching duties one year ago. The two have been coaching together for nine years. This will be the fifth time they will have coached a Manitoba team to the national championship. Reaching this point has required not only the dedication of talented coaches and managers but also the support of parents and volunteers. Most importantly, the devotion and sacrifice of these talented young athletes make achievements like this possible.

Activities like soccer are important to the development of young people, teaching them the value of teamwork and focus. South End United and teams like it could not continue without community support. The success of this team demonstrates the real benefit enjoyed by Manitoba's young people when the community supports their goals.

The opportunity for this team to participate in the national championship is wonderful. They

will be joined in Halifax by the South End United Titans U-14 boys team representing Manitoba on the boys side. All of them will no doubt be great ambassadors of Manitoba, showing the rest of the country what Manitobans already know and that our young people have the talent and spirit to make them champions wherever they are.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate these young people. We should all be proud of this team and I invite the members of the House to commend the team on their achievements thus far, to wish them success in the national championship and to encourage continued community support for activities like soccer.

MATTER OF GRIEVANCE

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Emerson, on a grievance?

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Yes. I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to grieve on behalf of all cattle and livestock producers in the province of Manitoba and their families.

What we have seen since May 20, since the U.S. border was closed in this province and how governments have reacted, I say reacted, to the crisis that has developed since the cattle exports have been terminated to the U.S. and other countries is nothing short of irresponsible government. I believe what we have heard in this Legislature over the last couple of months and especially during the time we have been in session, through Question Period, is an indication of who truly understands the compassion that is required by government to deal with these kinds of matters if and when they arise.

It is clear this Government, this Premier (Mr. Doer) and this Cabinet have forgotten what their true role is, that is to serve, to serve the people and the needs of Manitobans. There are many, many people in this province who have spoken to me and my colleagues very passionately. Our leader took the time out of his busy schedule over this past weekend to go visit with families, to stand or sit down with people and listen to what their needs are and how their families are not able to participate in community activities such as their normal 4H activities, such

as their normal school activities, such as not being able to attend music classes when all others can. Yet we have a sector in society now that are the food producers, they are the only food producers we have in this province. They are the ones that are today not able to buy the food because they have no income and they have no source of income.

The Premier and his minister have said to them, we will lend you more money, we will put you deeper in debt and we will charge you interest on money you should have normally been able to receive out of the marketplace. The only reason they cannot derive any source of income from the marketplace is because they deal in cattle. These are farmers that raised the meat that families all over the world put on their tables for sustenance. It is one of the key sources of protein that people need to survive, and yet we say to our meat producers, our farmers, you do not matter in society anymore. We do not care about you.

* (14:30)

There was such a simple approach, Mr. Speaker, that we have laid out time and time again to this Premier of our province who seems to have no compassion at all, nor does he understand the real issue. Nor does he want to understand. If he wanted to, if he wanted to truly understand, he would have gone out and visited these farmers. I have yet to hear that that Premier has taken the time to even go visit with one farm family. I have yet to hear that he has set foot on a family farm, on a livestock farm, on a beef farm.

Why is it that we have relegated, or that this Government has relegated our food producers, our primary sector food producers, to the lowest level in society by not allowing them an income to provide for their family?

You see, there is such a simple remedy to this all and the grain sector. The federal and provincial governments through a cash advance system that was invented when the quotas were developed to give equal access to the grain sector and to the marketplace, and there was a cash advance system announced at the same time that would allow farmers to draw through that

cash advance system on commodities they could not market because of no fault of their own, because of quota limitations, because of non-markets and other matters. They could then go to government, apply for a cash advance, which was given to them based on a portion of the value of the product they had in inventory.

Yet this Government, this Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), and I honestly do not know what she did in Swan River. She says she farmed, but obviously that is questionable because she has yet failed to recognize the meanness of the programs that she has announced and put forward. Instead of a simple method of paying these farmers a cash advance which would come back to government the day they sold their cattle, automatically deducted from their cheque back into the Treasury, Mr. Doer, our Premier, has constantly said and I am sorry for mentioning his name, our Premier has constantly said that we want to drain the rainy day fund. No such intent, Mr. Speaker. Never was that the intent.

The intent was for our Premier to understand that he should only use that as a temporary bank account where he would take the money out of the rainy day fund, extend it as a cash advance to the farmers in recognition of their plight and say, manage your own business, go pay your bills, as if nothing else has happened. We recognize the dire straits you are in. We know what difficulty you live in, and we want you to send your children to school, and we want your children to participate in community activities, allow them to do that. Here is a cash advance. You can pay it back when you market your cattle.

Nobody is out any money except for the interest that the Premier would have had to give up for the investment that he made.

An Honourable Member: A small price to pay.

Mr. Penner: A very small price to pay.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have seen day after day announcements. We asked the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) last week in Estimates and in concurrence: How much money have you announced? How many programs and how much money would that be if those programs had all

been delivered? His response was \$186 million. And none of them have worked. None of them.

I attended two major functions this weekend. Many cattle producers there in southeast Manitoba and the only industry that we have in southeast Manitoba is the cattle industry. There is no grain amount of any mention to be grown there because the soil just simply does not allow for that. So it is cattle country. It is pure and simple cattle country, and many of these cattle producers I asked how much money have you been able to access out of the \$186-million program that the Province has announced. You know what their response was? None, except if we want to go borrow some more money and we are deep enough in debt now they said. We do not want to borrow any more money. We do not need further debt. What we want is a cash advance.

See, Mr. Speaker, this is something that good farm managers recognize as something that will work and they will tell you time and time again it would cost government virtually no money at all to do this. As a matter of fact, the payback of that kind of short-term intervention through a cash advance system would pay back many, many times the cost that government would actually incur in lost interest because the seven times spin that you get out of those dollars invested in rural Manitoba would more than, far more than offset any costs that government would incur, and what is the liability. Virtually none.

We know these cattle are going to at some point in time go to market. We know that but our Premier has yet to realize that. Why his fear is there instead of announcing the provincial BSE programs, the \$100-million low-interest loan program, the drought assistance program, which cannot work unless the farmer has money to buy the hay that he can transport and the Premier knows that he would not pay out that \$12 million as long as he does not give the farmer enough cash to buy the feed so he can actually put it on the truck and transport it to his farm. He knows that, that the limitations within that transportation program are so strict that very few of those dollars will flow.

We have critiqued the Government's programs every time they have announced them,

and we have told them why do you not come ask us. We will help to design programs that will work. We will do this. We have offered this time and time again, and we have said we will do it behind closed doors and it will be nonpolitical, no comments will be made after. But, no, no, he talks about all-party committees but only as long as those all-party committees do what he wants them to do.

Mr. Speaker, our cattle industry, our livestock industry, our bison industry, our elk industry, our sheep industry, our goat industry are far too important. They are the true essence of diversification. They are what we worked for for 12 long years. For 12 long years, the Progressive Conservative government initiated diversification methods and mechanisms and they worked. We encouraged the increased production of beef. We encouraged the increased production of hogs and pork. We encouraged the development of a Maple Leaf pork plant in Brandon. We encouraged the introduction of industries all over this province, the smaller meat packers, through programs and government support, yet this Premier was a member of Cabinet when most of the large processing industry that we had in this province were done away with because the then-NDP government did not want to spend one single dime to support those industries to stay in Manitoba when they had to modernize their facilities. Swift's Canadian, Burns, Canada Packers and a number of other smaller ones that had their homes here in this province left during the late seventies and the eighties. By the time we took office in 1988, they were gone, and what has that done to this province's beef industry? It has virtually decimated it, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

I say to you that if this Government would stop for a brief moment and do away with its pride of not having invented the cash advance program and adopt the cash advance program and use it today to give to farmers and say, here, here is the money, go manage your operations, send your kids to school, allow them to go to music, as the Kruk family has said so emotionally in their presentation. Please, Mr. Speaker, maybe you could speak to the Premier, maybe you could speak to Cabinet and maybe you could suggest to them that what the

Progressive Conservative caucus has put forward as a viable alternative to what they have tried to do is workable and can work. That is what people all over this province, including the AMM, the Keystone Ag Producers, the cattle producers and all other farm organizations have asked for and have begged for.

Mr. Speaker, I say to this Government: If you truly want to deal with the beef industry, if you truly want to remedy it, if you truly want to intervene in a meaningful way, put in place a cash advance system. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Arthur-Virden, on a grievance.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to put some words of grievance on behalf of the constituents, Manitoba's rural citizens in all of Manitoba, on the record today in regard to the BSE crisis. The devastation that has affected farm families because of the drought and grasshoppers is just compounded by the seriousness of the whole situation of BSE.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today in Question Period, I was able to deliver a bit of compassion which I feel for the citizens out there today in regard to the misleadings of the present government and the way they are treating callously this whole situation of dire crisis in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all the years that I farmed in rural Manitoba, I have never, ever seen such a devastating situation as is before the cattle producers of Manitoba today, not only the cattle producers but those in bison, goats, elk and other sectors of the ruminant industry. All of them are impacted by the decision to close the American border because of one case of BSE that was found in western Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even the Americans, Ms. Veneman herself, the Minister of Agriculture, the Trade Minister in the United States, indicated that she knows the safety of the Canadian product is unquestioned in relation to the quality of our product in Canada that these

people are producing on their own farms, yet they have not seen fit to open the border.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have opened the border to boxed beef, and we are seeing some progress, some slight progress made in that whole process that has allowed our packing industry to continue to export some product today. But that is small solace to the farmers and cattle producers and their families who have been basically bankrupted by the fact that they have not had a paycheque since May 20.

I challenge anybody in this House, anybody anywhere in Manitoba who is not in the farming community, what situation would your family be in today if you had not had a paycheque since May 20, and this Government makes light of it.

In the two major papers that we have in this province today, they are in there with paid advertisements. It is unfortunate that one of them is on page 13, because it could almost be humorous if it was not so tragic. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government is advertising in our major city-wide newspapers. Yes, they cover all of the citizens of Manitoba, but they are delivering a message in Manitoba, in the city of Winnipeg, of false hope.

They are leading people to believe that they have put—and they have done it very strategically. They have absolutely said there is over \$180 million, and the Minister of Finance himself has indicated in Estimates that there is about \$186 million that they have made available to the farmers of Manitoba. That is a direct quote from the paper today. Over 180 million in assistance is available to Manitoba producers through a number of programs and it goes on to name a few of them.

The problem is how many dollars have they delivered on these programs to Manitoba farmers. It is an absolute insult to the integrity of our rural population to think that this Government is trying to hoodwink the citizens of Winnipeg into thinking that they are doing something for the rural areas, when actually most of this money is not flowing into the hands of the farmers at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this was not such a serious situation, as I said, it could be humorous.

We heard today from the Leader of the Opposition, the honourable Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray), the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) and the passion of other members in the House on our side of the House, talking about the Government putting its money where its mouth is.

If it is down in Ottawa today, and I was there when they signed the agreement on Friday morning and I watched the federal Minister of Agriculture stand up and say to the citizens of Manitoba that it was great to have them on board now because the money would flow equally to all provinces in Canada all of a sudden. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) in Manitoba led us to believe in this House that she had some special agreement. That was the only reason, with a gun to her head, that she signed on to the federal Agricultural Policy Framework. If that is the case, then why do you not come out with a half-page ad in tomorrow's paper after she gets back from Ottawa tonight, explaining how those programs work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure the farmers of Manitoba will be very interested to know that out of the \$1.14 billion that the federal and provincial government announced for the use of Manitoba on Friday morning, that 22 percent of that, over \$250 million of it, will be producers' own premiums, 22% unrecorded high premiums to belong to any kind of a program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government would lead you to believe that they have found and dipped into the rainy day fund or dipped into, we know that they have dipped into Manitoba Hydro. They have stolen from them, but nevertheless they have not put one dollar more on the table than they have put in the old CFIP agreement and the NISA program over the last three years in Manitoba. It is equivalent to \$44 million, and that is just a continuation of the same program over the next five years that we have had.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely necessary that we have some kind of long-term agreement. I do not have any problem with a five-year

agreement. Let us put something on the table of significance for these farmers. These farmers are, as I have said, in the worst crisis in the history of the livestock industry of Manitoba.

This Government, as well as the federal government, the best they can do is say we have a few dollars for some kind of a disaster program based on BSE. They have forgotten about the people in the drought, impacted by the worst infestation of grasshoppers that this province has ever seen. There is nothing special on the table for any of these producers.

They are the ones who are extremely hurt out there today. That is why our Leader of the Opposition was out in the rural parts of Manitoba over the weekend listening to the high school students who cannot access the things they would like to have to attend school with or any of their extracurricular activities. It is very hard on the mothers and fathers in these circumstances. I, myself have learned over the weekend of three more long-standing farm couples in our region who are having personal difficulties keeping their marriages together.

Mr. Speaker, that is an absolute, it is hypocrisy for the Premier to sit over there and laugh about the situation, even smile about the circumstances raised in this House today when he does not really understand the need and the hurt in the households out there in Manitoba. I challenge him to get out in the rural areas and meet a few farmers, face to face, out in my area. Come back out in the area of Hartney and Pipestone and Broomhill and challenge him to come out to some of those farms where the grasshoppers have stripped the corn, stripped the oats and stripped the alfalfa, where the first cut is still completely brown in spite of two inches of rain over the last two weeks. There is absolutely no regrowth in those areas.

So the minister comes up with a plan to put transportation subsidies in place to move feed around this province when she absolutely missed the opportunity to put green feed in place on these farms back in the first part of July. If she had done something then, she could have saved herself \$12 million. The feed would already be in those farms. Now she is out there with a \$12-million program.

*(14:50)

What are we going to haul? For \$12 million at 16.5 cents a pound for straw on a loaded kilometre, how many times are we going to haul this stuff around the province?

This program does not do one thing to give those farmers the opportunity to buy a bale of hay or to buy a bale of straw, to put it on the trailer, to haul it 300 kilometres to the livestock operation that is going to need it in this province.

That is why I was so incensed in Question Period today. This Government is doing phantom accomplishments, trying to put a good-news story out there, \$180 million, when they have not got a damn cent on the table. They have not got a cent on the table, not one red cent. Most of the cents that they handle are red too.

Here we are out there with half-page documents, half-page ads, tens of thousands of dollars around the province of Manitoba. As well, I hear there are radio announcements out there today patting themselves on the back for the goodness that they are doing for the Manitoba farmers.

All I get is that there are more families going into divorce situations. There are more families that cannot put the extracurricular activities on the tables for their families. They cannot pay their Hydro bill. How in the blazes are they supposed to get food to these animals? We are in a situation where these culled cows that the Government thinks is their only problem are just going to be a small portion of the problem that they have if they do not put a cash advance in the farmers' hands in Manitoba to make sure that they can compete when the minister continues to say the border might open in a couple of months. She repeated that to me in Estimates the other day. She has repeated it in phone calls to constituents in my constituency. She has not got a clue when that border is going to open unless she knows more than the federal ministers of trade in both countries of Canada and the United States.

Maybe she should go and talk to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and find out what they are saying about how ineffective the

programs are in Manitoba compared to our neighbours in Saskatchewan that are laughing at the programs that the NDP, that their own party, the NDP in Manitoba, are making available here in Manitoba as opposed to what is available even in the neighbouring province of Saskatchewan.

They always like to refer to Alberta and Mr. Klein's oil and Mr. Klein's lumber. I will tell you, Mr. Klein also looks after the agriculture in that province. Now their own party in their own neighbouring province of Saskatchewan has way better programs and looking after.

They are laughing at this minister down in Ottawa. She signed onto this federal program. What kind of sidebar agreements, she may have a small one that she signed today, but the bottom line is the farmers do not have any money. They have not flowed any kind of cash to these people. They cut off the one good program that they may have had on the feeder side for \$2 a day a head. They cut it off because, oh, the cattle producers overestimated the number of cattle that might be affected by this in Manitoba.

What are they doing? Who do they listen to? They have a Department of Agriculture that could have very well told them how many cattle are out there, but, no, no, no this was due to public pressure. Our Leader of the Opposition and our Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) belittled this Government into any kind of a meeting with the Manitoba Cattle Producers, but it took about 72 days.

If they were not on the front page of the *Winnipeg Free Press* back in July, I doubt that this Government would have ever met with the cattle producers. I know it is the only reason that the minister showed up in my hometown of Hartney at the first public meeting that she ever came to. She appeared at a few after that. I want to say that the feeder program that they had was so successful that it was cancelled. That would show you the need. The problem is they cancelled it after only about \$6 million of the \$10 million that they had on the table was used. They did not even wait for the whole \$10-million program to get used. They cancelled the damn thing. Now they are on to a \$15-million program, or a \$12 million for drought assistance—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would just like to remind all honourable members of parliamentary language. I would just like to caution all honourable members.

Mr. Maguire: My apologies if I was a little carried away there. The Minister of Agriculture should have been at some of the meetings that I was at over the weekend with the farmers in the southwest portion of Manitoba. I was not even in the worst drought-stricken area. I was not in the worst areas that have been handled by this province, of the drought and the crisis in agriculture that is out there because of the grasshoppers. This Government thinks that things are rosy.

I tell them the story about the Commodity Exchange. As a former director of the Commodity Exchange in the province of Manitoba, I can tell you that many days they have been accused of having perimeteritis themselves, of looking around Winnipeg and seeing if there is rain happening there that the market goes down when it could be drier than blazes from Portage la Prairie to the Rocky Mountains.

Well, this Government treats rural Manitoba the same way. They are looking around and there have been some good crops in Manitoba this year, but you have to get out into the rural areas to find out how bad it has been in some of those drought-stricken regions where, as I said to the Premier in Executive Council Estimates, there is more feed value on the carpet on this floor in this House than there is in some of the pastures west of Hartney and between there and Highway 83.

And this Government does not care. They have come out with a self-placating campaign advertising \$180 million that they know full well there has been less than 10 percent of that money flow to the farmers of Manitoba as we stand here today. I think that is absolutely deplorable that this Government is out in the papers of Manitoba, I mean if they were going to do something, it would have been a good idea to have at least put an ad in there to show how the program worked, how farmers could access it. Maybe even put an application form in the paper. I do not care if it is a full page, you might actually get some results from the government of the day

if they—something simple for the farmers to fill out.

Lord knows there have been examples that they could have used in this House if they go back and look at previous governments, previous Conservative governments in this House on the kinds of mechanisms and simple programs they can use to get money in the hands of farmers and deal with the complications of the formalities of filling out the programs later. We have had many examples of if farmers have been overpaid in this province, they will pay it back. They will pay it back. So why does this Government not flow money to the farmers of Manitoba today, even top it up with some kind of a program for the drought-stricken regions of this province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time has expired.

The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you canvas the House to see if there is leave for the following Estimates sequence changes? First, to move the Department of Education and Youth from 254 to the Chamber, with this change to apply permanently; to move the Estimates of Status of Women from the Chamber into 254 to replace the Estimates of the Department of Education and Youth, with this change to apply permanently; in Room 255 for the Department of Conservation to be moved ahead to the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and for the Estimates for Labour and Immigration to be moved from the Chamber into 255 to follow Conservation and to be placed ahead of Intergovernmental Affairs, with this change to apply permanently.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the following Estimates sequence changes? To move the Department of Education and Youth from Room 254 to the Chamber, with this change to apply permanently; to move the Estimates of the Status of Women from the Chamber into Room 254 to replace the Estimates of the Department of Education and Youth, with this change to apply permanently; in Room 255 for the Department of

Conservation to be moved ahead of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and for the Estimates for Labour and Immigration to be moved from the Chamber into Room 255 to follow Conservation and to be placed ahead of Intergovernmental Affairs, with this change to apply permanently. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

STATUS OF WOMEN

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now be considering the Estimates for Manitoba Status of Women.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Yes, Mr. Chair, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: You have the floor.

Ms. McGifford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me begin by taking the opportunity to congratulate the member from Minnedosa on her election, her position as critic for the Status of Women and also, I believe, critic for Family Services and Housing. I know it is her first Estimates, so I am sure she will find the process interesting. I know she has been very active in the House to date, so I am sure she will be active here as well.

I am pleased to present the Estimates for the Status of Women for the fiscal year 2003-2004. The Status of Women includes both the Manitoba Women's Directorate and the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. The Women's Directorate works within government to influence decision making through research support,

policy development and evaluation of government programs, policies and legislation to determine their impact on women.

The directorate's work is concentrated in four priority areas: economic security, violence, women's health and gender-inclusive analysis. A number of initiatives have been undertaken in support of these priority areas. The statistical profile of women developed by the directorate includes data on women's family status, income, labour force participation, work and family responsibilities, health and justice issues. The profile will aid in developing policies that better serve the needs of women. Let me add parenthetically here, if the member would like a copy of that publication, we would be very pleased to pass it along.

Efforts continue to institutionalize Power Up, the computer literacy training program for women in partnership with adult learning centres, school divisions and colleges throughout the province. Trade Up to Your Future encourages women to expand their career horizons to include the skilled trades and prepares them for work in an industrial setting.

The directorate administers the Training for Tomorrow Scholarship Awards and grants 50 \$1,000 scholarships to women entering community college diploma programs in math, science and technology-related fields.

The directorate is active in interdepartmental committees such as the Family Violence Court Steering Committee, Family Violence Prevention and a number of the Healthy Child working groups. The Women's Directorate offers its expertise to departments in carrying out gender analysis of proposed programs and services.

Mr. Chairperson, at the national level, the directorate is active in collaborative work to promote and strengthen women's equality. Most recently, in partnership with the Conference Board of Canada, the Federal-Provincial Territorial Forum developed a business case targeted to the industrial sector, showing how their skilled worker shortages could be addressed through efforts to attract women. Work will continue locally to promote this initiative.

Mr. Chairperson, the issue of domestic violence has been a high priority for the national forum. On December 6 last year, ministers responsible for the Status of Women released *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile*. The information in this document will serve as a valuable tool in assessing the effectiveness of legislation, policies and programs designed to eliminate violence against women.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my remarks on the Manitoba Women's Directorate, and I now turn to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council is an arm's-length body charged by legislation to, and here I quote, "advise the Government of Manitoba on matters related to the achievement of full and equal participation of women in society." The Advisory Council is comprised of 13 members who are representative of Manitoba's diverse population base and geographic distribution.

Kim Claire, chairperson since January 3, 2000, resigned recently to complete her doctorate degree. I wish to thank Kim for her stewardship and dedication to improving the lives of women during her tenure as the council's chairperson, as well as throughout her 25 years of community involvement. Her successor is soon to be chosen.

The Advisory Council provided information and recommendations on a wide spectrum of issues ranging from eating disorders to urban development and the changing profile and gender dimensions of HIV to female gang association. The underlying theme of the council's advice reiterated the need to incorporate gender and diversity analysis in the development of programs and policies.

The Government sought the council's input on such matters as the program needs of incarcerated women and the proposed amendments to The Domestic Violence and Stalking Prevention, Protection, and Compensation Act.

Mr. Chairperson, the council works to build strategic partnerships among women's groups, community organizations and relevant government departments. The round table discussion and resource-sharing sessions on violence-

prevention programs and services for girls and young women was established three years ago and participation has almost doubled since its inception.

On a national scale, the council has played a pivotal role in the formalization of the Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils as a venue to collaborate on national issues such as employment equity, child support, custody and access, and recently the need for a renewed Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

Mr. Chairperson, the council hosted monthly community information sessions on such topics as the correlation between poverty and health, mother work and the law, prevention of sexual exploitation for at-risk youth, and older women and AIDS. Commemorative events were held to mark the anniversary date of the Montréal Massacre and International Women's Day. The council provided administrative support to numerous women's organizations and participated in many of their activities. The council also acted as a referral base and provided an interactive Web base and on-site library resource and weekly calendar of events and information of interest to women and their families.

A second printing of the sixth edition of council's *Parenting On Your Own: A Handbook for One Parent Families* was published in partnership with the Manitoba Women's Directorate and Healthy Child Manitoba. This edition has been distributed to more than 20 000 single parents and service providers. It was also posted on the council's Web site. The Web site had 10 460 visitors during the first five months of 2003. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in requests for information via this electronic format, as well as increased interaction generally between the council and the community throughout the last fiscal year.

*(15:10)

Council's direction will be informed and guided by its members and by the women throughout the province who individually or as participants in women's organizations bring forward their concerns to the council. The council will continue to act as a two-way conduit between government and the community by giving voice to women's concerns and providing advice

to government. This process will facilitate the ongoing development of gender-sensitive policies and programs and give women stronger voices in the legislative process.

I am proud of the work of both the Women's Directorate and the Advisory Council. They have worked to inform government on issues of concern to women. I know that both organizations will continue to work towards that goal, the goal of ensuring equal participation by women in all aspects of our society.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was speaking when the page brought the coffee, so I just wanted to thank her for bringing me my coffee too.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the Official Opposition critic, the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), have any opening comments?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Very short, Mr. Chair. I am honoured to be given the critic role for the Status of Women. I thank the minister for her kind words and comments in welcoming me to the process.

I have had a great interest in all aspects of this portfolio and would have enjoyed spending several hours learning of the minister's expectations and plans for the upcoming year or years, finding out what her priorities are and how these priorities would be achieved. However, we are limited, so I will spend my time wisely and do follow-up on areas outside of this process that I feel passionate about. I would like to ask the Chair if we could do a global analysis.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the Official Opposition for those remarks. Is there leave to have a global discussion on this topic? *[Agreed]*

Before we start our discussion, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 22.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 22.1.

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

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, if I might introduce the staff?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, introduce the staff, please.

Ms. McGifford: On my immediate left is Theresa Harvey Pruden, who is the ADM for the Women's Directorate and the Status of Women. Sitting beside her is Ruth Mitchell, who is Acting Policy Manager. Ruth is a former employee. One of our employees is dealing with some health issues, and so Ruth is filling in for that woman. Then on Ruth's left is Sue Barnsley, who is the Executive Director of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council; and on Sue's left is Gerri Thorsteinson, who is the policy analyst with the Advisory Council.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank you for those introductions. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: I would like to just get on the record a listing of the specific staff in the minister's office and the deputy minister's office, please, names and employment status and positions.

Ms. McGifford: I want to inform the member that there is not a Deputy Minister for the Status of Women. There has always been, I think, in the history of the Status of Women in this province an assistant deputy minister. The persons that I have introduced, first of all, Theresa Harvey Pruden is the assistant deputy minister, and as I said, Ruth Mitchell is acting as the policy manager, and then we have Sue Barnsley, who is the Executive Director of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. The member will remember from my remarks that the chair of the Advisory Council has resigned her position. She did resign her position, I believe, on July 15, and we are currently looking to reappoint that person.

The other persons who work in the Advisory Council are Norma Jean Ciglar, who is an administrative assistant; policy analyst Betty Owen, who is on leave and, hence, we have Gerri Thorsteinson. Now, Betty Owen is not really on leave, she is seconded to Justice, let me correct myself, and then an administrative assistant named Lynda Saelens. So those are the staff in the Advisory Council.

As far as staff in my office, I do not have a specific staffperson designated for the Status of Women. I have one special assistant who works with me in Education and with Seniors, but my executive assistant, Doreen Wilson, works with me on the Status of Women as part of her assignment. I hope that was clear.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, who is your special adviser? Did you indicate the individual's name?

Ms. McGifford: I do not have a special adviser. I have a special assistant who works with me in my capacity as Minister of Advanced Education and Training and Seniors. She does not work with me in the Status of Women, but her name is Susan McMurrich if you are interested in knowing.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, the role and mandate of the Women's Directorate, I guess I would just like some background on that and also if that has changed or evolved over the past year under the ministers responsible.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, I think that the role and mandate of the Women's Directorate, and I am putting it very basically right now, is to provide policy advice to government. In my remarks I mentioned four things: policy advice, advice on programs, gender analysis on pieces of legislation, et cetera. The Women's Directorate also does work on economic security, and I am missing one thing out of the four, health and violence issues. In fact, I am sure we will get to them a little later.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I just need some clarification on the Women's Advisory Council and what their role and mandate is and how that fits with the directorate.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, my staffperson, you can see, has just given me some information. It is quite lengthy, so I think I will summarize it and say that the Advisory Council consists of a council of women appointed by government. As you will remember, I think, from my introductory remarks, I said that it is a council that reflects the geographical diversity of our province, that reflects the ethnic diversity of our province, so that we have people from all over

and people from the different groups that comprise the province.

The Advisory Council tends to work more with the community. I suppose you could say, in a way, it is the eyes and ears of the minister in the community, so it interfaces with many community groups. At least sometimes, meets out in communities outside of Winnipeg and therefore is in a position to hear the concerns that members bring to the council. The council, in turn, formulates papers and positions which becomes advice to the minister.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, you indicated that there is representation on the council from various sectors and various regions of the province. I was wondering if you would be able to share with me who is represented on this council.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, I have a list. As I said, the former chair, Kimberley Anne Clare is no longer with us and we will be replacing that position very soon. Gisèle Barnabé from St. Agathe; Ila Bussidor from Tadoule Lake; Marie Fleury from Grand Rapids; Nahanni Fontaine, Winnipeg; Keith Louise Fulton. Keith is not with us. Keith has left the council. Esther Fyk from Garland; Bonnie Hoffer Steiman, Winnipeg.

I have a new list. I had mentioned Ila Bussidor, Tadoule Lake; Nahanni Fontaine of Winnipeg; Esther Fyk, Garland; Bonnie Hoffer Steiman of Winnipeg; Elaine Huberdeau of Winnipeg; Mary-Anne Kandrack, Winnipeg; Molly McCracken, Winnipeg; Christine Nnadi of Winnipeg; Margaret Platte, Winnipeg; Gisèle Saurette Roch of Winnipeg; Brenda Sevcik, Winnipeg; Rae Smith of Brandon; and Barbara Toews of Lowe Farm.

We are willing to forward a list to the member if that would be helpful to her.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, that would be helpful. I would appreciate a copy of that list.

You had indicated that the chair had resigned. Would there be an indication or a reason for her resignation?

Ms. McGifford: Actually, the chair's appointment was up in January, and she agreed to stay on for a while. She is currently in the throes of writing her PhD dissertation, and she found that her regular employment coupled with working on the Advisory Council was getting in the way of her writing of her dissertation, so she made a decision to concentrate on the dissertation, to take a leave from her regular employment and devote the next while to writing it.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Rowat: When will the chair position be filled? Are you saying there is somebody acting in it at this present time or not?

Ms. McGifford: No, I believe the legislation does not allow us to appoint an acting chair. We are going to be going forward, I think, in the very near future. There is a process for appointing members which is very lengthy, but I could explain it to the member if she would like another time. We will be going forward very soon, I think in the next couple of weeks and I do have a person in mind for the chair.

Mrs. Rowat: I was reviewing past Estimates and you had shared four goals and you shared them again today. I was thinking that I would really maybe just focus my questions in those four categories and goals.

The economic self-sufficiency area which was used as a goal under the previous Estimates, you had talked about Planting the Seed conference on economic development for Aboriginal women, which was hosted in '02. I was wondering: Is there anywhere where I would be able to access the results from that conference?

Ms. McGifford: I am advised by staff that we have the proceedings of that conference. I would be pleased to share them with the member.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, was there a communications plan developed? That was indicated in some correspondence that I had read that there was going to be some type of a plan developed to connect with the Aboriginal women's community. I wanted to know if there was a follow-up on that?

Ms. McGifford: My staff think there might be a point of confusion here. They are not sure that that referred to them.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, it was in the Estimates. The minister had indicated that her department, the directorate, would be putting together a communications plan from that workshop or conference and presented.

Ms. McGifford: It is clear now what you are referring to. Yes, we shared the proceedings from the conference with everyone who attended it, with other women's groups that were interested in the proceedings, and the relevant departments of government.

Mrs. Rowat: In my most recent former life, I was an economic development officer, a community resource person. I guess an area that was of interest to me and our communities was immigrant women and the support programs that would be available for them. I just wanted to know if the directorate or the Women's Advisory Council have done some work in this area. If so, what has been completed to date?

Ms. McGifford: I am advised that we liaise with the immigration and settlement branch, which is run from Labour and Immigration. We advise them of special concerns that we are aware of. Again, as I explained in my opening remarks, and as I am sure the member understands, the Status of Women provides advice, policies, et cetera. We do not really run programs. What we really do is provide advice and ideas to whether departments and that is one of them.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, is there a working committee that the Women's Directorate would be a part of or a resource to?

Ms. McGifford: Yes, there is an interdepartmental committee from immigration and settlement. We have a position on that departmental group.

Mrs. Rowat: The women's Mentorship Program, what is the status of that? Do you have some statistical information on the numbers who have participated and the success rate factors?

Ms. McGifford: Apparently, we devolved the mentorship program to become part of the Canada-Manitoba Business resource centre, which is a link to ITM.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, Trade Up To Your Future, that program and the connection to the industrial sector. I understand that in some of the rural communities the apprenticeship ratios are becoming a bit of an issue with some of the people who have worked with the programs in the past, and I am wondering if the directorate has found this a red flag or an issue at all and if they are working with the community in addressing some of that.

Ms. McGifford: I am wondering if the member is referring to the relationship or the ratio of apprentices to journeypersons, if that is—

Mrs. Rowat: Yes.

Ms. McGifford: I am told that in the electrical field it was a problem, and for that reason we have switched to electronics, machining and welding where it is not a problem.

Mrs. Rowat: Okay, I will leave on that.

Mr. Chair, the next goal or area that I want to ask some questions, too, is the violence-free environment for women and children. You had touched on a round table process that has been going on for several years, and I am wanting to know where you would have hosted some of these round tables over the past year and if the results of those round tables would be available.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, staff is just looking for the information that you are requesting. I did want to say that it is work that has been done through the Advisory Council. Apparently, the council has facilitated eight discussion and information-sharing groups among relevant service providers, researchers, policymakers, women's organizations working on the common goal of preventing violence against girls.

You had asked where those round tables had taken place. They have all taken place in Winnipeg but I see at different venues in Winnipeg. I think the first one actually took place in

conjunction with the LEAF breakfast last year. *[interjection]* No? A couple of years ago, okay.

The second session concerned Aboriginal women and the child welfare services and Aboriginal communities. The third was held along with the status of the health. you know, they all took place in Winnipeg and I thought I was going to find out exactly where, but they took place at different venues. They seem to have different themes: one was involving Aboriginal people; one was involving education; one involved the police and sex crime units; one involved pornography and the Internet presentation, I think, which is quite famous called Beyond Borders.

Another featured Senator Landon Pearson, of course, who is internationally known for her work. Another one involved the Human Rights Commission. I think peace was its theme. Another one took place at IKWE which had to do with Aboriginal gang initiatives. Then, the most recent, June 17, 2003, featured presentations by Child Find Manitoba, Women's Health Clinic, New Waves and a lot of women's organizations. It took place in Winnipeg at 155 Carlton which, of course, is the office of the Advisory Council.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I was wondering if in the next year they would be considering offering some of these workshops or round tables, I guess, in rural or northern Manitoba. I know that sitting on several committees, economic development boards, parent advisory councils, learning for life initiatives, that a lot of those topics would be of great interest to people who live outside of the boundaries of Winnipeg.

Is that a consideration in the future?

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, the premise of the round tables was to bring together women's groups, experts in the field, so that they could share ideas and expertise. Presumably that way it could be disseminated through the province. We do not have the resources, the financial resources to go out into the communities and do this work in all the communities.

Now, having said that, I know that the Advisory Council has been very supportive in

the health consultations that we have done out of town, in Thompson and Flin Flon, Brandon, Dauphin and one more, Lac du Bonnet. Issues of violence came up, I can assure you, and I think you have just hit the nail on the head. Women are so glad to see a government representative there. They turn up and talk about all their issues, because in a way everything kind of works together.

So, I am sorry, the answer is that we will not be holding those workshops, those round tables in the various communities. We do not have the resources. We think that the work that we have been doing is a beginning step. It is a way of disseminating to communities, a kind of preparing, not exactly training the trainer but that sort of theory behind it.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, if it is train the trainer and sharing with the professionals in the areas. I am encouraging the minister to ensure that representation could be made available for individuals in the rural and northern communities to attend these workshops. It may already be happening, but I would encourage her to provide that support.

Ms. McGifford: One of our ways of doing that is through our council members who are from rural or northern communities, so that they attend the workshops, the round tables, pardon me. I should not call them workshops because they are round tables. Then they do take it back to the community.

* (15:30)

Mrs. Rowat: In the spring of 2003, a women's justice clinic was held, or was indicated that it would be held. Where is this at and what is the expected results? I am curious to learn more about that.

Ms. McGifford: I am advised that the justice clinic does not relate to either the Advisory Council, or at least it was not an initiative of the Advisory Council or the Women's Directorate. Staff think it might have been an initiative of the Justice Minister who put forth the idea of a one-stop shopping resource for women to have information on all their legal needs, I suppose, in issues like violence or family break up.

For example, if a woman was in a violent situation she might need to find a place to live, to relocate, et cetera. So the Justice Minister was looking to set up this kind of facility. It was not our initiative, although we are on the committee.

An Honourable Member: You are on the committee.

Ms. McGifford: Yes.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, a topic of interest to me is child prostitution. I was just wondering if your department is aware of this moving into Child and Family Services. Being the Women's Directorate, I was just wondering if there was any role you had played in this issue and in providing direction on it.

Ms. McGifford: I think the member is probably referring to an initiative of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. It is a multi-jurisdictional implementation team, which was established to implement a strategy to address the issue of the sexual exploitation of children and youth. The committee has representatives from across government, including Justice, Family Services and Housing, Health, Education and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

It has quite some detailed plans. I do not know whether the member would like me to go into them or whether she would like to defer this discussion till the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Caldwell) is with her.

Mrs. Rowat: I can defer this and also discuss it with Healthy Child as well. That is fine.

In the notes I have been reviewing I came across a national project that I was fairly interested in. It was developing indicators to help track progress in eliminating violence against women. I just wanted to know if she could provide the status of this and the expected results, giving me an indication of where they are at now and if there are any results that have come forward.

Ms. McGifford: I know what the member is talking about because it has been very much a part of our discussions at the federal, provincial and territorial meetings for the Status of Women.

Mr. Chairperson, the statistical profile was launched on December 6, '03, I think—[interjection] '02, thank you. Right, we are not at '03 yet. Sometimes it feels like we are but we are not.

Mr. Chairperson, what we have identified are some data gaps, some information we are finding it very difficult to obtain, which would be really helpful in understanding more about violence. Consequently, I have written to Stats Canada and I believe Jean Augustine, the federal minister, has written to Stats Canada, asking that they include certain questions in the next census in the general social survey. If that is done that will enable us to develop the statistical profile even further than we have been able to do and address these gaps.

If I might, Mr. Chair, is there some information that you could share with the member at this point.

Ms. McGifford: The member just showed us a book. That is the provincial profile. There is a federal one. We would be happy to share that piece of information with the member too.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I would appreciate a copy of *The Canadian*.

I just want to put on record and I want to know if there is any reporting—I know that you do not run programs, but just some background on the monitoring and rating of violent video games. I just want to know if there is any background or assistance being provided in researching this.

Ms. McGifford: I am glad that the member brought up that issue. It is one that is near and dear to my personal heart. As the former Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, it is in that department that the classification of films resides. We actually under current statutes do have legislated authority to classify video games. The problem is in the immense numbers and complexities and whatnot of classifying these along with all kinds of other complexities like bootleg ones and all this sort of thing.

I have just been given some information that says that we are trying to do something

nationally. Now I remember this from my old stint that the chairs of the film classification boards are called different things in different provinces. I do not think that they are always called chairs and they are not all called film classification boards—have this item on their agenda, and they are concerned about it. I think we are working towards something. One of the recommendations is the enforcement of the ESRB rating, but we are not there yet. I am glad you brought it up, it is something that concerns me greatly. I find video games absolutely shocking, many of them.

Mrs. Rowat: Women's health issues, Mr. Chair, I would like to know what the role is of the Status of Women in support taken with regard to the BSE issue and crisis in rural Manitoba. I want to know what they are providing in a role.

Ms. McGifford: I have been told that to date what the department has done is been in touch with the Ag people at the Home Economics department and also has been in touch with folks who staff the rural stress line and have been providing input and advice. Most of the work that we have done with health as of recently has related to the health consultations that I mentioned or alluded to earlier throughout Manitoba. I am collecting information for the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) when it comes to those matters of specific health issues for women.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I am an advocate of population health and understanding the correlation between health and poverty or crises, financial situations. I strongly encourage the Women's Directorate and the Advisory Council to take a strong, active role in this situation. It is becoming very, very serious. I do know that the Ag offices I was meeting with in the Southwest Region just on Friday are strapped for resources, strapped for individuals to help in this area. Any resource or assistance you can provide in that area I would greatly appreciate.

Ms. McGifford: I thank the member for her advice and also suggest to her that my office is always open for people who would find it helpful perhaps to phone and receive advice, get direction as far as resources, et cetera. I thank you for your words.

Mrs. Rowat: I just to put on the record as well that even through our offices in the constituency, my office staff are being trained to handle crisis calls. Any information that you can share—and I have also indicated that through Ag and Health we would welcome and appreciate, because, as I indicated, my staff people are not trained in crisis situations or calls. Anything that you can do to help in that area would be greatly appreciated, especially when the majority of calls that we have been getting lately have been women and children.

Ms. McGifford: I was going to say that we do have members from the agricultural community on our Advisory Council. I am sure that those issues will emerge when we have meetings in the fall.

Mr. Chair, we as the department do not have the expertise in educating people. I know, for example, my office staff, and I am moving away from the Status of Women in a sense now, but just to share this information with you, my constituency people have availed themselves of the training at Klinik, where there is some training for crisis people, but I realize that that is very difficult for people who come from your area in Minnedosa.

Mrs. Rowat: I appreciate the minister's comments. Actually, it would help some of my constituency people who live in rural Manitoba who do not know about the resources or the assistance programs that are available. I guess I am just putting the word out that if there is any type of opportunity for information it would be greatly appreciated.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, I am advised by my staff that they could certainly do any referral if anyone were to call. I kind of have the feeling that Klinik, for example, will often go out into communities. My daughter worked there for years, will often go out into communities and do work in communities for people, so just an idea, whilst we are talking.

Mrs. Rowat: Okay, I think that would be very useful for the groups that I had indicated. Also the farm women's groups would probably find this information useful because they are right in the industry. I thank you for that.

As I am a new MLA, I am still trying to get a handle on the Healthy Child component. The program is available in our areas. I just want to know what the role of the Women's Directorate or the council is with the healthy communities. Do they sit on the working committees, and what type of working committees would they be associated with?

* (15:50)

Ms. McGifford: Well, the Minister for the Status of Women was invited to be part of the Healthy Child committee because she was the Minister for the Status of Women. We know that the health of our children is really affected by their moms. Theresa Harvey Pruden, who is the ADM for the Status of Women, sits on the deputy minister's committee. We have staff-people on all the working groups of Healthy Child. I think we are well represented in the work of Healthy Child.

Mrs. Rowat: Another initiative, Neighbourhoods Alive!, which is an urban initiative supporting communities in rebuilding and promotes safe neighbourhoods and affordable housing, I just wanted to know what the status of the role of the directorate would be on that committee?

Ms. McGifford: We are kept apprised of Neighbourhoods Alive!, and we are also part of the working group which is looking at renegotiating the new urban development agreement.

I wanted to point out that *Parenting on Your Own*, which is a publication of the Advisory Council, is also supported by Healthy Child. I cannot remember how much money they put into it, but \$15,000 into its publication. It is very popular of course among single parents, probably other parents too in Manitoba and service providers, and it is available on the Internet. It does not address itself to crises per se. I do not know whether there is any information there that would be helpful to some of the people we were speaking about earlier. It is more single parenting, but it is also living in crisis, to some degree, living with difficulties, anyway.

Mrs. Rowat: That publication would be available through the social work or public health

within the communities, is that where you would access that publication, other than on the net?

Ms. McGifford: It is obtainable through the Advisory Council's office. It is also available widely to government offices. I think we send a copy to every MLA. So it is available at constituency offices. You may get one. It is also available to service providers.

Mrs. Rowat: I am looking forward to a copy of the publication.

Gender-inclusive analysis, you were indicating that there is a statistical profile on women. I have the provincial; you are going to get me the federal. I just wanted to touch base on the increase in violence against women and wanting to discuss that a little better just to what role you would have had with Justice and trying to address some of the issues on increased violence?

Ms. McGifford: Once again, as the former director of the Women's Resource Centre, you have certainly hit on an issue that is really important to me and obviously important to all of us as women.

My department has been extremely active in Family Violence Court at the founding stages and indeed as the court has proceeded. It is, of course, very important because I think we have improved our record in dealing with family violence in a timely manner which is always better than its taking a long time to be drawn out.

I am told that there is an increase in the incidences of violence. There is also statistical evidence that women in Manitoba are far more likely than women in other provinces to report violence to the police. I am assuming this is because we have had some very successful public awareness programs, both under your government and under our Government.

I think we are recognized for the work we have done in family violence. We are recognized as a province having one of the best overall programs in the country. I am just told that the dedicated Family Violence Court is the model for Canada.

One of the pieces of good news is that spousal homicides are actually on the decrease. So, while there appear to be more incidences of family violence, it could well be that it is being reported more. It could be that there is not more. It could be a question of reporting it.

I think that we in Manitoba, and I include the former government as well as our Government, have done good work in this area.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chairperson, I have one question regarding a subappropriation in the Women's Advisory Council under Other Expenditures. The category or the area is Other Operating. It is 26.1 percent. It is about 25 percent of the budget. I was just wondering what that would entail, what that would include.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, Mr. Chair, I believe the member's question was under the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. She had a question about Other Operating under Other Expenditures. I think it is on page 15.

I am told that Other Operating includes desktop management, food, beverages, Internet fees, subscriptions, library resources, attendance at conferences, employee training and incremental allowances. All of those things are included under that category.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Just very quickly, the Women's Advisory Council, how is it determined for the appointments? Are they based on specific positions that they hold throughout the province, or is it just strictly who the Government feels is the most appropriate person to be appointed to the council?

Ms. McGifford: As I was saying earlier, the Women's Advisory Council is a council appointed by government. On that council, we endeavor to represent the racial, the ethnic and the geographical diversity of our province, as well as young women and older women and middle-aged women.

So, Mr. Chair, I guess to answer the member's question, we try to represent the province in

every possible way, but government does make the appointments.

Mr. Lamoureux: So, Mr. Chairperson, there are no groups or associations that are out in Manitoba from which representation is taken. It is just strictly ministerial appointment as to who they feel is the most appropriate person.

Ms. McGifford: No, there are no groups, although that is something that we pay attention to. It really, I think, depends on the minister. Various ministers probably have different attitudes towards who their selections will be.

One of my goals with the council was to make sure that women of colour and Aboriginal women were represented on the council. I am also concerned that rural women be represented on the council and, well, I suppose immigrant women.

Mr. Lamoureux: I guess the final question would be: Does the minister or could the minister acknowledge how many, what the actual size, not the individuals, how many people sit on that particular council and how many people who are currently on that council would have served anytime on that council prior to her Government taking office in '99?

Ms. McGifford: The number of women, it is determined by legislation from eight to eighteen. I am currently advised that the areas that are represented or the kinds of women with different things that they bring to the council is that we have Aboriginal women, we have women from the agricultural community, Francophone community, business community, health, medical and research communities, social services, education, we have seniors, volunteer community, visible minorities and the disability community.

Now, as to whether there are any members who were there when we came to government in '99, you have to understand that a member can only serve for two terms of two years. So the answer to your question would be that there has been turnover. I do not think there are any left but I do want to assure the member that certainly my attitude to members was not that we should come in and get rid of anybody who had been there before and that is not what we did.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Rowat: I just wanted to go back to something that is sort of an interest to me and I am sure to the minister, voting trends. I just wanted to know if there was any work being done on determining the interest in working with women to ensure that they do come out to vote, workshops or some interest.

Ms. McGifford: Well, last year I worked with our federal member, Anita Neville, on getting women to run for politics. As far as getting women to come out and vote, well, like the member opposite, I go door to door and try and beg them to come out. But, no, we have not had a workshop on that particular issue.

You know, it would be a very interesting thing and we were talking about statistical profiles in another area just to see what the percentage is. We know we need to do something about getting all our folks out to vote or more of our folks out to vote but I have not seen any statistics at all on how many women as opposed to their male counterparts are voting. That would be interesting.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, See Jane Run, I think, is the workshop I am going to be involved with in this next year. But that was just something that I wanted to touch on and see if there was anything that had been researched or considered.

Mr. Chairperson: No further questions? We will then continue with our resolutions.

Resolution 22.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,900 for Status of Women, Amortization and Other Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Mr. Chairperson: The last item to be considered for the Estimates of Manitoba Status of Women is item 22.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 22.1. At this point we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item.

I will make a slight correction. The Minister for the Status of Women does not get paid for

this work. So we will just continue with the resolution.

Resolution 22.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,070,900 for Status of Women, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Mr. Chairperson: This completes the Estimates for Manitoba Status of Women.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Family Services and Housing.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates? Is there a will to have a recess? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:05 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:13 p.m.

FAMILY SERVICES AND HOUSING

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg) : Will the Committee of Supply please to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now be considering the Estimates for the Department of Family Services and Housing. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Chair, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is yours.

Mr. Caldwell: I guess first and foremost I would like to welcome the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat). This is her first Estimates. I know that during my first Estimates so many, many years ago now, in a different sort of a position, I was defending Estimates and not in the Member from Minnedosa's position in terms of questioning them. I know that it was an exciting moment for me and something that I am sure that the Member for Minnedosa will reflect

back on in years to come as an exciting moment for her as well.

I am pleased to present to this committee for its consideration the 2003-2004 Expenditure Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Housing. I look forward to engaging in a constructive discussion regarding the direction of our Government.

Recently, our Government outlined its funding commitments for this fiscal year in the provincial Budget. It is a Budget that focuses on building the foundations for a stronger, safer Manitoba. Our Government's priority of supporting children and family today will provide for a brighter future for tomorrow.

This year's Budget provides \$869.4 million for the Department of Family Services and Housing. This represents an overall increase of \$47.5 million or 5.8 percent over the 2002-2003 adjusted vote.

Key areas for investment include improvements for our child care system; a restructured Child and Family Services system to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Metis people; better supports for persons with disabilities; and enhancements to our income assistance safety net.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my colleagues in government—the Finance Minister is here with us today—particularly for the support that the department received. Certainly all Manitoba families and children will benefit from the support that you have given the department this year. I would like to thank, in particular, the members of my caucus for their support.

I will later elaborate on these priority areas when we look at the department's main operating divisions in more detail, but first I would like to say a few words regarding the department as a whole. The Department of Family Services and Housing is fundamentally committed to social, economic and labour-market inclusion for all Manitoba citizens. We strive to ensure that people feel accepted, valued and safe in our province. We work with the community to support Manitoba children, families and individuals to achieve their fullest potential.

Family Services and Housing provides a broad range of social services to Manitobans, and is responsible for providing financial support to Manitoba citizens in need while assisting them to achieve greater self-sufficiency and independence; is responsible for supporting persons with disabilities to achieve full participation in society; is responsible for keeping children safe and protected; assisting people facing family violence; is responsible for promoting the healthy development and well-being of children in families; and is responsible for assisting Manitobans to have access to adequate and affordable housing.

The department has three major program divisions: Employment, Income and Housing; Services for Persons with Disabilities; and Child and Family Services, a new division dedicated to the delivery of community services. In addition, the Administration and Finance division is responsible for maintaining a comptrollership function for the department as a whole.

The department also has two internal service providers: Policy and Planning; and Human Resource Services. Two other units within the department report to me directly. The Social Services Appeal Board is an independent board that hears appeals for the majority of programs and services provided by the department. The Disabilities Issues Office co-ordinates disability policy across government and reports to me in my capacity as Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities.

The department will be undertaking a number of initiatives this fiscal year. Some of the areas that we will be giving attention to include (1) expanding supports and services for citizens with disabilities; (2) providing greater support to families on income assistance by restoring the National Child Benefit Supplement for children aged 12 to 17; (3) increasing employment and income assistance benefits by \$20 per month per adult for adults who are single persons or childless couples in the general assistance category and for all adults in the persons with disabilities category; (4) implementing year 2 of Manitoba's five-year plan for child care; (5) implementing a restructured Child and Family Services system that will expand and extend services to First Nations Child and Family Service

agencies to all off-reserve areas in the province as well as create a Metis Child and Family Services agency office province-wide; (6) working with community organizations and other northern stakeholders to address housing issues for northern Manitobans in conjunction with other social and economic issues that contribute to the lack of adequate and suitable housing in northern and remote communities; (7) continuing to rehabilitate neighbourhoods in the inner-city areas of Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson; (8) implementing initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing in Manitoba under the federal-provincial Affordable Housing Agreement; and (9) continuing the implementation of the integrated service delivery initiative so that we may better address the needs of citizens, shift away from program focussed delivery toward a broader emphasis on the multiple needs of the individual and family, and better co-ordinate social services to reduce barriers and create more accessible and tailored services for citizens.

Our Government believes the initiatives we have in place and those we will be implementing will further our goals of supporting children and families in Manitoba and building safer communities throughout the province.

* (16:20)

Before I turn to the main operating divisions, I would also like to say a few words about the department's focus on improving service delivery. Many people in receipt of social services have multiple and diverse needs which are often complex, interconnected and cross the boundaries of departmental programs and service delivery systems. The department's integrated service delivery initiative has begun to consolidate our field delivery systems into an integrated whole which will reduce fragmentation and improve co-ordination of services to all citizens.

I would like to acknowledge in particular the work of all the front-line staff in our department who have been so instrumental in ensuring this transition is smooth. Indeed, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all the staff in Family Services and Housing who I believe set an extraordinarily high standard of service that is recognized across this Government.

Now I would like to address briefly the main operating divisions. The first division is the Employment, Income and Housing division. The Employment, Income and Housing division is responsible for the department's income assistance and housing programs for low-income Manitobans. For the 2003-2004 fiscal year, our Government has committed \$203.6 million to this division. Ensuring that Manitoba's low-income citizens are treated with fairness and dignity is a commitment of our Government. We will continue to build on the steps we have taken to improve circumstances for Manitobans who rely on Employment and Income Assistance benefits.

Over the last three provincial Budgets, we began to restore the National Child Benefit Supplement by allowing the federal increases to flow to all Manitoba families on income assistance and by restoring the National Child Benefit Supplement for families with children under age 12. This year we will fully restore the National Child Benefit Supplement for families with children 12 to 17 years of age. We have committed \$900,000 for this initiative, which takes effect at the end of January 2004 for the February monthly benefit.

Mr. Chairperson, in addition, an increase of approximately \$2.8 million is included to cover the annualization of the 2002-2003 National Child Benefit Supplement restoration for children ages 7 to 11. Additional funding has been allocated to provide for a \$20 per month increase per adult for adults in the general assistance category for single persons or childless couples. This increase will be effective January 2004 for the February monthly benefit.

Mr. Chairperson, the division supports Employment and Income Assistance participants in their efforts to obtain employment and the means for self-support. Building Independence provides Income Assistance participants with supports such as voice mail services, improved job readiness assessments, links to training and employment and partnerships with community agencies and other departments.

Mr. Chair, ongoing partnerships include such programs as (1) Opportunities for Employment; (2) North End Community Renewal

Corporation's Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope, the PATH Resource Centre; (3) Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; (4) the Conservation Corps; (5) Sara Riel Incorporated; (6) the School Crossing Guard Project wage subsidy programs with Advanced Education and Training; and the Rural Jobs Project.

In addition, Mr. Chairperson, employment and Income Assistance staff deliver the Steps to Independence sessions, administer the Community Home Services Program, operate a job centre at the central intake office and administer the Connect 2 community voice mail project.

I am pleased to indicate that the Building Independence initiative has helped in over 22 600 contacts from low-income Manitobans, including Income Assistance participants, in their efforts to become self-supportive through personal employment.

Mr. Chairperson, the development of safe and stable neighbourhoods is integral to maintaining healthy communities. Our Government is working with community organizations to provide them with the support they need to make deteriorating neighbourhoods safer and healthier places to live.

In addition we have been maintaining our support for Manitoba's social housing portfolio. In 2003-04 we are supporting the administration and delivery of the \$7-million annual federal-provincial renovation and repair program. These programs provide assistance in the form of forgivable loans to low-income homeowners and to landlords who provide rental accommodations to low-income tenants to upgrade their homes and rental units. We have committed \$3 million again this year to the Neighbourhood Housing Assistance program which we introduced in 2000-2001. The Neighbourhood Housing Assistance program, which is a component of the Neighbourhoods Alive! urban renewal initiative contributes to the revitalization of housing in declining urban neighbourhoods in Brandon, Winnipeg and Thompson.

In September 2002, Canada and Manitoba signed the Affordable Housing Agreement, a five-year, \$50.8-million cost-shared initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing in

Manitoba. Components of the Affordable Housing Initiative include creating new affordable housing, new affordable rental supply, increasing home ownership, ensuring that low-income Manitobans have access to new supply through income support options such as rent supplements and downpayment assistance and renovating the existing supply of housing stock.

Earlier this year, Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg signed a memorandum of understanding in which the City commits \$17.5 million over the next five years to enhance the supply of affordable housing for low-income Manitobans residing in the city of Winnipeg.

The second main operating division I would like to touch upon is the Services for Persons with Disabilities division. Our Government has demonstrated national leadership in building an inclusive society where persons with disabilities can participate in community life to their fullest capacity. We have demonstrated our commitment to the disability community with the appointment of Manitoba's first Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities in 2000. The following year, we released the strategy paper, Full Citizenship, a Manitoba provincial strategy on disability which proposed measures to facilitate the full participation of persons with disabilities in our society.

Mr. Chairperson, in 2002, we established a Disabilities Issues Office which will serve as a centre for co-ordination of disability policy across government. Reflecting this commitment to the disability community, the department established a Services for Persons with Disabilities division. The division combines program areas for children and adults with disabilities, including a portion of the Employment and Income Assistance program that focussed on persons with disabilities. Consolidating these programs into one division will provide better co-ordination and improved access to programs for persons with disabilities.

* (16:30)

The department will be providing over \$360 million for programs and services for adults and children with disabilities representing an increase of \$29.3 million in 2003-2004. Of this

amount, \$113.7 million will be dedicated to the Supported Living program. This is an increase of \$10.9 million which will provide more opportunities for adults with mental disability to live in the community through the expansion of residential day and support services.

Also included in this year's commitment is funding of \$500,000 for the Staffing Stabilization Initiative to assist agencies with staff recruitment and retention difficulties by providing additional support for pensions and other staff benefits. The department's Children's Special Services program provides a variety of supports to eligible families who have children with physical and/or developmental disabilities. Staff use a family-centered approach in the delivery of services. Families can receive information referral, respite, child development, therapy, supplies, home modifications and transportation depending on their unique circumstances.

Children's Special Services has been allocated an additional \$2 million for the provision of family support services to more children with disabilities and their families. Included is additional funding to support a provincially funded treatment program for children with autism, referred to as applied behavioural analysis or ABA. Funding for Children's Special Services now totals more than \$14.7 million. Additional funding has been allocated to provide for a 20-dollar per month increase per adult for Employment and Income Assistance participants with a disability effective January 2004, for the February monthly benefit.

Funding has also been provided to cover projected volume and price increases in the Health Services drug program and for an anticipated caseload increase for persons with disabilities. The division is also responsible for the Office of the Vulnerable Persons Commissioner which is, in turn, responsible for administering the substitute decision-making provisions of The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act.

The third division, I will touch upon, Mr. Chair, is the Child and Family Services division. The Child and Family Services division is responsible for programs that primarily serve children and their families to keep them safe and

healthy. For 2003-2004, \$214.6 million has been allocated to the Child and Family Services division, an increase of \$16.6 million over last year's budget. The division, through the Strategic Initiatives and Program Support branch, has been managing the major restructuring of the Child and Family Services system in Manitoba.

Mr. Chair, this initiative, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative, will expand and extend services to First Nations Child and Family Services agencies to all off-reserve areas in the province, as well as create Métis Child and Family Services offices province-wide.

Mr. Chair, if I might, I just noticed that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) just entered, and I would like to welcome him here. I would also like to note in this regard that the initiative received unanimous support of the House when it was undertaken, and I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that. I know we both attended the Manitoba Métis Federation's assembly last weekend. It was certainly a moving event for all people in attendance at that gathering. There was a tremendous degree of gratitude expressed to the members of the House for their unanimous undertaking in this regard. So I would like to thank the Member for Kirkfield Park.

Mr. Chairperson, you may recall that in 2000, our Government announced this new direction in the delivery of Child and Family Services in recognition that Métis and First Nations people are entitled to develop effective community-based services that reflect their unique status and culture. As part of this important initiative, The Child and Family Services Authorities Act was unanimously passed by the Legislative Assembly. Again, I would like to take a moment to recognize in particular the contribution from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) and the amendments he introduced at third reading to make that a stronger bill.

I believe that our collective work as all members of the Legislature will go a long way to ensuring that all Manitoba children receive high quality appropriate care. This legislation that is unprecedented in Canada provides for the creation of four new authorities to manage service

delivery under the restructured system. The new authorities include (1) a Métis Child and Family Services authority; (2) a First Nations of northern Manitoba Child and Family Services authority; (3) a First Nations of southern Manitoba Child and Family Services authority; and (4) a general Child and Family Services authority for Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson, Manitoba is the first province in Canada to give Aboriginal peoples province-wide responsibility for Child and Family Services. The implementation of this initiative honours the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in 1991 and will ensure the development of programs and services for First Nations and Métis people that respect their values, beliefs, customs and traditional communities.

The Child Protection branch provides policy and program support to the Child and Family Services authorities. The branch provides program management and co-ordination for court protection, emergency, crisis and related support services for children in need of protection. For 2003-2004, we have committed \$112.4 million to the Child Protection branch representing an increase of \$9.4 million over the 2002-2003 funding levels. The family and community support branch performs the lead responsibility for the co-ordination of programs including child day care, family violence prevention and a number of community-based initiatives.

Child day care is a fundamental support for families and communities in Manitoba. It is well known that high-quality early childhood care and education has a long-lasting effect on a child's social, intellectual and emotional development. Our Government's 2003-2004 Budget demonstrates our commitment to child care by providing for an increase of over 7 percent over the 2002-2003 Budget. In total we are committing \$63.8 million in grants and financial assistance for the provision of child day care services in Manitoba.

Last year our Government announced Manitoba's five-year plan for child care, which sets the future direction of our child day care system. The plan involves three major elements to be pursued over a five-year period: (1) maintaining

and improving quality of child and day care; (2) improving accessibility; and (3) improving portability.

As part of the 2003-2004 Estimates, child day care, including the children with disabilities program, will receive an increase of \$6 million for the continuing implementation of the Manitoba plan for child care. Our Government's increased funding to child day care acknowledges the importance of the work of family child care providers, early childhood educators and child care assistance in building a comprehensive child care system throughout Manitoba that addresses the needs of our families, our children and our communities. In partnership with the child care community and Red River community College, we have reinitiated a retention and recruitment strategy to enhance our efforts to train more early childhood educators in Manitoba. This Government is committed to ensuring that Manitoba's child care system continues to be one of the finest in North America.

Family Violence Prevention provides funding to shelters, second-stage housing programs, women's resource centers, supervised access and exchange services and longer term therapeutic programs for their important work on behalf of individuals and families experiencing domestic violence. We have allocated \$10.6 million for this important program in 2003-2004.

In addition, we have allocated \$8.5 million for the Community Support branch to support a number of community agencies that provide early intervention and prevention services for children and families who are at risk. Finally, the Child and Family Services division provides management support to Healthy Child Manitoba.

Healthy Child Manitoba focuses on policies and programs including the parent-child centred approach, prenatal and early childhood nutrition programs, healthy schools, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder prevention, and healthy adolescent development. The expenditure Estimates for Healthy Child Manitoba will be examined separately from the Department of Family Services and Housing.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I would like to touch upon the Community Service Delivery division.

The Community Service Delivery division is responsible for the delivery of the department's social services and income assistance programs to the public. The division was created in keeping with the improved service delivery goals and the integrated service delivery initiative. The division brings together a number of field delivery networks that were managed and operated separately in the past. Throughout the province, for example, the department maintains separate employment and income assistance and regional operation offices. The new division consolidates responsibility for service delivery in order to facilitate a more integrated, holistic and accessible service model that can better address Manitobans' needs.

Mr. Chair, Community Service Delivery operates through the following branches of specialized units: (1) the Service Delivery Support program provides expertise and support to service delivery management and staff and maintains communications between the regions and program divisions regarding policy and program information; (2) Rural and Northern Services delivers departmental social services, income assistance and child and family services to eligible Manitobans in rural and northern regions of the province; (3) Winnipeg Services delivers departmental social services and income assistance to eligible Manitobans in Winnipeg in co-operation with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority; (4) Provincial Services administers income benefits and shelter assistance programs throughout the province; (5) The Manitoba Developmental Centre provides long-term resident-centred care and developmental programs for adults with mental disabilities; and 6) Winnipeg Child and Family Services provides a comprehensive continuum of child protection and family support services in Winnipeg.

The former agency was transitioned to the department in March of 2003. For 2003-2004 nearly \$120 million has been allocated to the community services delivery division representing an increase of \$4.6 million over the 2002-2003 funding level.

In conclusion, I am very much looking forward to the committee's review of the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Housing for 2003-2004. I welcome the comments of

committee members. I would also like to once again thank and acknowledge the department, the Civil Service and acknowledge how much I personally appreciate their work and support in our work together in supporting Manitoba's children and families. I would like to now, if I may, take the opportunity to introduce my deputy minister and members of the department staff.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for his comments. We will introduce the staff later. Does the Official Opposition critic, the honourable Member for Minnedosa, have any opening comments?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I do. I will be brief. I am honoured to be named critic for this critical portfolio, which is so important to Manitobans. I am looking forward to seeking opportunities on ways we can work together to help all Manitobans participate in a social and an economic life that is positive within our province. I also am looking forward to meeting staff from within the department to learn more about the important work that they do.

As a new MLA, I am looking forward to learning a lot more regarding Family Services and Housing and Persons with Disabilities. I will be using the Estimates process to do a part of that process.

Through Family Services, Manitobans make a substantial investment in making and keeping communities healthy and our citizens expect us to work in the best interests of all Manitobans and to be fair, transparent and respectful. As I have indicated I am a novice in this area so my questions will probably be fairly basic and the interests will be hopefully shared in the areas that I need information on.

We are looking at how we are going to be able to help Manitobans and their families help themselves. Do the programs and services being offered encourage Manitobans to participate to the greatest of their potential? What is government doing and what can government do to support independent, strong families?

I guess on this note our role in the communities is to build a stronger social net. I look

forward to working with the minister on pursuing this.

* (16:40)

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the Official Opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 9.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 9.1.

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

Mr. Caldwell: I would like to introduce to my immediate left, Tannis Mindell, the Deputy Minister of Family Services and Housing; to Tannis' immediate left, Mr. Drew Perry, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Administration and Finance; we also have present in the gallery, Mr. Martin Billinkoff, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Community Service Delivery; Mr. Peter Dubiński, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Family Services; Mr. Keith Watts, the manager of Human Resource Services;

Mr. Grant Doak, he is Executive Director of Policy and Planning; Ms. Sheila Lebrecht, Director of Financial and Administrative Services; Mr. Jim Derksen, Executive Director, Disabilities Issues Office; Ms. Kim Sharman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment, Income and Housing; and Ms. Pam Goulet, Executive Director, Adult and Children's Programs in Services for Persons with Disabilities.

I think I got everybody. Yes, I did.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that introduction.

Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Global.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave to have a global discussion?

Mr. Caldwell: I always strive to accommodate the critic, so global would be fine with me.

Mr. Chairperson: We will have a global discussion, agreed and so ordered.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Minister, could I get some information on the political staff, the names, positions and employment that he has available out of his office?

Mr. Caldwell: Always pleased to provide the hit list. Political staff, there are three: Lonnie Patterson, Carolyn Ryan, and Tom Garrett.

Mrs. Rowat: And the positions they hold, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Caldwell: Special advisor, special assistant and executive assistant.

Mrs. Rowat: And which to who?

Mr. Caldwell: It is hard to keep track in that office, but Carolyn Ryan is my special advisor, Tom Garrett is my special assistant, and Lonnie Patterson very ably serves as my executive assistant.

Mrs. Rowat: Any new staff through the minister's department over the past year, reductions or additions, permanent or term?

Mr. Caldwell: I have not served as minister for an entire year. This would be about 11 months since I was appointed. In that regard I am the newest one in the block—well, I guess Tom Garrett is the newest one in the block. He just came on recently. Lonnie Patterson came on board some time after I was appointed minister and Ms. Carolyn Ryan has been serving the department for a number of years.

Mrs. Rowat: There are several questions I am going to ask regarding the role of Persons with Disabilities. I would like to get a clearer

understanding of the offices that you touched on during your presentation.

Mr. Caldwell: I would like to ask if Jim Derksen, the executive director, could come up. Thanks, Jim.

Mr. Chair, we are joined by Jim Derksen and Pam Goulet who are going to be able to provide some assistance to me in hopefully educating the Member for Minnedosa on the disabilities office.

Mrs. Rowat: I would like to know what the role of the Disabilities Issues Office is and how long that has been in place.

Mr. Caldwell: Well, the disabilities office, as the member may recall from my opening remarks, the Doer government appointed a Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities in 2000. Manitoba at that point became a national leader in promoting issues for persons with disabilities. I think it was a very forward-thinking and positive office that was initiated with that decision by our Government. The disabilities office proper is expected to provide co-ordination across departments in government to ensure a consistent approach to disabilities policies. It acts as a central resource as well, Mr. Chair, to assist with the development and review of initiatives for persons with disabilities using a disabilities lens.

The Disabilities Issues Office facilitates round-table discussions within the disabilities community and government on various disabilities issues. It has developed a reporting process to identify priority disabilities issues for consideration. It has certainly been an office that has been extraordinarily well received by a part of our community in Manitoba that previously did not have an advocate and a policy office, frankly, within government. It has been a very, very well-received and positive initiative.

The planned activities for 2003-04—and I am anticipating the member's next question, but in 2003-04 the second annual round table on disabilities issues will take place. The Disabilities Issues Office will identify agenda items for this round table and topics for discussion in consultation with the disabilities community.

Round table recommendations and future consultations with community members will guide the future work of the disabilities office as well as guide future policy development within government to better serve persons with disabilities in the province of Manitoba.

Mrs. Rowat: Representation from which departments are affiliated with this office?

Mr. Caldwell: Every single department within government, every single ministry within government is represented through the disabilities office. There is an ADM committee on disabilities issues that co-ordinates the work of the committee, as I mentioned in my answer to the previous question.

Mr. Chair, the disabilities office provides co-ordination across departments to ensure a consistent approach to disability policies for the entire Government of Manitoba.

Mrs. Rowat: I have been receiving several calls from individuals who receive respite services from your department, and there are concerns and issues that they are not receiving—there are challenges, I guess, in their receiving assistance or support. I just wanted to know if you would speak to that and let me know what the status is of that.

Mr. Caldwell: Well, this is the first that I have heard of that, Mr. Chairman, but I would certainly welcome the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) to provide us with information or meet with staff to better serve her constituents. This is the first opportunity I have heard of that, so I would encourage the member to work with the disabilities office and serve her constituents.

Mrs. Rowat: So the funding is in place and there is no issue with the funding or resources within that department?

Mr. Caldwell: Funding for respite has been increased in this Budget over last year's Budget. The 2003-2004 Budget has seen an increase. I would certainly welcome the member advocating within her caucus for increased funding for Family Services housing, because we could certainly use the support.

So I would welcome the member's party joining with us and providing increased resources in this area.

Mrs. Rowat: You touched on a Staffing Stabilizing Initiative. Within the constituency that I represent is Rolling Dale Enterprises Inc. in Rivers. It is an impressive facility which is offering excellent services for the residents of the community, and I have been approached to touch base with you regarding this initiative.

Mr. Chairperson, they are having a bit of an issue with I guess the phased support that they have received. They received phase one and are having trouble with phase two. I just wanted to know if the minister can provide some insight in why phase two and initially phase three are not accessible for the group.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I am familiar with Rolling Dale. Rivers is in my constituency of western Manitoba itself, and they do do good work, as I am well aware.

The question as to difficulties in phase two, again, as I indicated in an earlier question, if there is an individual case or an issue that the member would like to raise with the department to provide better service to Rolling Dale, we certainly have an open door in the office, my office and the Disabilities Issues Office.

We would be pleased to take a look at the challenges expressed. There is no awareness of that specifically amongst senior staff who are present here today.

Mrs. Rowat: I have been forwarded some information that they felt was received by the department, and I was just doing a follow-up on it. They have indicated a serious wage compression issue with their co-ordinators and their staff, as well as the program manager issue.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, senior staff here are not aware of that particular issue, but, certainly, if the Member for Minnedosa wishes to bring that casework forward to the office, we will certainly look at it.

Mrs. Rowat: What is the role of the Social Planning councils? I believe there is one in

Brandon and in Winnipeg. I would like to learn a little bit more about the councils.

* (16:50)

Mr. Caldwell: We do not have any direct relationship, funding relationship, organizational relationship with Social Planning councils. I can, just for information's sake, indicate to the member from Minnedosa, in an earlier life as a city councillor in Brandon in the mid-nineties, that as a city councillor myself and others on the Brandon City Council were advocates for the formation of a Social Planning Council in Brandon to provide a community organization for advocacy and policy advice on issues of affordable housing, poverty, neighbourhood renewal and a wide range of other issues. There is no connection between government and any of the Social Planning councils in Brandon. They are one of many advocacy groups that present themselves to government on a regular basis. I should add that they do extraordinarily good work, as well, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Rowat: As a new MLA, it was probably a question I could have saved. I thank you for your answer. A few questions regarding The Intoxicated Persons Detention Act. The Ombudsman's report of 2001 indicated that he consistently stated a correctional facility is not an appropriate place for detoxification for youth. I wanted to know what steps the department was taking in order to ensure that intoxicated youth will not continue to be held at the MYC. Has an organization been identified that is suitable for undertaking this responsibility, and will this responsibility be transferred to such an organization?

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate the question. That entire area falls under the Department of Justice and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), so I cannot answer the question. It is something that should be raised during the Estimates with Justice.

Mrs. Rowat: I wanted it on record though that this is children and youth, and putting children at risk and in situations where there may not be medical care is something that I think the Family Services Minister should be made aware of, and if he could approach the Minister of Justice and

consult with him regarding this issue. It would be concerning to have a situation.

Mr. Caldwell: I thank the member for those remarks.

Mrs. Rowat: What role does the Children's Advocate office have with the Department of Family Services?

Mr. Caldwell: The Office of the Children's Advocate is responsible for and reports to the Legislative Assembly, not to our department.

Mrs. Rowat: Would there be any role that this advocate group or office would have in the devolution of the Family Services office?

Mr. Caldwell: Her purview is under the Child and Family Services Act. The Office of the Children's Advocate's purview is under the provisions of The Child and Family Services Act. The Advocate's office itself reports and is responsible to the Legislature as a whole, to the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Mrs. Rowat: Could I ask the minister, through the Chair, when the next scheduled report will be to the Legislature?

Mr. Caldwell: It is difficult to answer for the Children's Advocate because I do not have any responsibility for the office. The Children's Advocate does issue an annual report to the Legislature. I am trying to think back in my head. I was not the minister here last year myself; I am a rookie here, too. She does issue an annual report to the Legislature. I am trying to think when last year's annual report was issued. Suffice to say that the Office of the Children's Advocate does issue an annual report to the Manitoba Legislature, and I see Mr. Dubiński is coming after, so he may have some further insight into approximate dates or seasons for the release of the report.

Last year's report was released in the spring. I will try and get a precise date for the member, Mr. Chair, when it is found.

Mrs. Rowat: I would like to see if I can get a copy of that report as well.

Mr. Caldwell: I would be very pleased to provide one of the copies of the Children's Advocate to the member.

Mrs. Rowat: The Manitoba League for Persons with Disabilities, I do not have a current annual report. I was wondering if I could get one of those as well.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I will phone the Manitoba League and get a report and relay it to the member from Minnedosa.

Mrs. Rowat: Regarding the devolution to Aboriginal agencies, where are you at on that plan?

Mr. Caldwell: The transition of Child and Family Services to the Métis and northern and southern Aboriginal First Nations agencies is in process. The formal transition will begin after the proclamation of the act that was passed during the last session.

In my opening remarks, Mr. Chair, I made mention of how proud all of us in the Legislature were on the day that we had unanimous consent of the House to proceed with this initiative, which is unique in Canada in setting a course for other provincial jurisdictions in the transition of child welfare services in Canada. I know the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) was instrumental at committee in further refining the bill as it moved back into the House, and for that I am very grateful to the Member for Ste. Rose. We have got a better bill as a consequence of that committee process, and I also would be remiss if I did not thank each and every sitting member of the Manitoba Legislature for their good work in rising to support this transition.

* (17:00)

Mrs. Rowat: I am familiar with the structure. Will there be a board of directors appointed to this?

Mr. Caldwell: Yes, Mr. Chair, there will be boards in place for each authority.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, what is the status on that at this point?

Mr. Caldwell: I am sorry, can I get—

An Honourable Member: The status of the appointments to the board.

Mr. Caldwell: All interim boards are in place and ready to move forward.

Mrs. Rowat: If you could indicate to me who are on these boards, if I can receive copies of that and the terms.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to bring back tomorrow the list of the interim boards, names of the individuals on the interim boards.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I would like to know how they will be accountable to government and will there be an annual funding agreement with them.

Mr. Caldwell: All the boards report through the Director of Child Protection for the Province of Manitoba, Ms. Joy Cramer, currently.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, will there be an annual funding agreement with these?

Mr. Caldwell: Yes, there will be.

Mrs. Rowat: So the structure, is it similar to the Winnipeg Child and Family Services?

Mr. Caldwell: No, because the authorities will have the ability to direct agencies under their jurisdiction.

Mrs. Rowat: Does the minister know what the cost will be for this structure change?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, the intention is to achieve this through the existing funding envelope.

Mrs. Rowat: How will children be assigned and to what agency? What is the process for intake, and how will these decisions be made?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, one of the key elements of the implementation and transition process is the authority determination process. This speaks to the member's question. The

authority determination process is a standardized process that will be used throughout the Child and Family Services system to direct families to the most culturally appropriate of the four authorities. While the newest system is based on an assumption that people would want to be served by a service provider from the authority with which that family identifies, the choice of service provider will be available to all families with children who are not permanent wards.

Mrs. Rowat: I guess this is a two-point question. What are the rights and the responsibilities of the current caregivers and what safeguards are in place to ensure that these children do not fall through the cracks?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, the best interests of the child will continue to prevail. In fact, as recognized by the House in the unanimous support for this initiative following on the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry recommendations, the best interests of the child were recognized by the House as being best served by culturally appropriate authorities.

Mandated agency and regional office staff will investigate all reports of a child whose life, health or emotional well-being may be put at risk. Child Protection staff handle all allegations against someone who provides services to an agency or a regional office, and if those were children at risk, agency or regional office staff provide family services and may arrange other services as required.

Mrs. Rowat: The children that are already in care, how will these changes be handled?

Mr. Caldwell: Children already in care will transfer to the appropriate authority. There will be an aspect of choice involved in that transfer, as I indicated in answer to the previous question.

Mrs. Rowat: I will go to the staffing aspect of it. Will there be any current workers that will lose their jobs or will they have a choice of where they want to work?

Mr. Caldwell: In December of 2000, the Province committed to ensuring that no current employee of the Child and Family Services system would be disadvantaged as a result of the

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative. Every regular employee would retain his or her job or receive a reasonable job offer.

Mr. Chairperson, this commitment has led to a set of workforce adjustment guidelines among non-Aboriginal Child and Family Services agencies, the unions and staff associations representing the employees and the Province. The workforce adjustment agreements established the guidelines for implementing the Government's employment commitment and workers' secondment arrangements. This agreement has been signed by the Manitoba Government Employees Union and negotiation continues with the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Brandon staff.

Mrs. Rowat: Back to the children and the family, it looks like the staffing aspect has been taken care of, but the children will possibly be moved from one care to another care to another care, depending on the services that are available and their background. I am a little bit concerned about the care. I am encouraging the minister to ensure that all nets are in place to make sure there is no situation that occurs based on them.

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate those concerns. They are shared by the department and all of the authorities that have been established, the northern Aboriginal authority, the southern Aboriginal authority, the Métis authority, as well as the general authority. The safety and well-being of children is the paramount consideration in all placements, in all movements forward on the Child Welfare Initiative for the Province of Manitoba.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, regarding adoption process, families that are in the midst of adoption process, how would this structure play?

Mr. Caldwell: The children stay where they are.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, regarding the BSE issue, I have to bring that up. It is a situation that is very stressful and as the minister knows a lot of families are at risk and in crisis. I just wanted to know what type of leadership role—I have been asking in the House and I have not been receiving a clear answer from the minister—I

would like to know what role his department is taking in addressing this issue.

Mr. Caldwell: The combined effect of trade sanctions around the export of Canadian beef arising from the BSE or mad cow disease and the regional drought conditions have placed extraordinary stress on Manitoba cattle producers. With exports to the United States being unavailable the present size of Manitoba's cattle herd of 530 000 cannot be sustained due to depleted feed stocks. If conditions persist, the humane slaughter of a portion of the herd may be considered as early as late September. An interdepartmental committee is exploring options for the maintenance and/or reduction of Manitoba's beef cattle herd.

In addition to the impact on Manitoba's cattle producers, 10 000 to 12 000 of whom derive 50 percent or more of their income from cattle, Manitoba producers of sheep, elk, bison and goats are also affected by the trade sanctions and regional drought. Manitoba Agriculture and Food is the lead department for this issue and Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization is co-ordinating agencies in activating Manitoba's support for cattle producers.

Other departments involved include Conservation, Intergovernmental Affairs, Communication Services, Health, Transportation and Family Services and Housing. Health, through the regional health authorities, is taking the lead role with respect to mental health issues and counselling services, which the Member for Minnedosa is most concerned with. A psychosocial support committee has been established to ensure the provision of an integrated and co-ordinated response in support of families and communities.

The committee consists of representatives from three delivery departments: Agriculture and Food, Health and Family Services and Housing, with four sectors managing the response and activities under their mandate. The committee's focus is on co-ordinating and integrating the programs and resources of member departments. Activities will include monitoring client needs, monitoring the system's ability to meet these needs and requirements for change, monitoring demands and stresses on the delivery system of

resources and providing recommendations on improving psychosocial support to the farm community, the families and individuals involved, as well as to members of the responding departments, agencies and organizations.

Rural community support teams consisting of interagency teams of local professionals are being established and existing crisis intervention services will be enhanced to assist Manitoba farm families in dealing with the psychosocial impacts of the crisis. The plan is based on the use of existing infrastructure programs and resources. Where required these will be adjusted to meet the realities of the situation as it unfolds, and all of us hope that the American border opens up, Mr. Chair, to Manitoba beef and Canadian beef rather sooner than later.

Family Services and Housing will provide support to the rural communities' support teams and families as the need is identified. This may involve advocacy and linking persons in need to departmental programs.

* (17:10)

The following departmental programs may be of particular assistance to farm families who are experiencing a loss in income due to the crisis. Employment and Income Assistance offers income assistance to eligible Manitobans in need. Municipal assistance is available under the Municipal Assistance Program, where it is anticipated the majority of farmers would be enrolled if they requested financial assistance. Child Day Care provides financial assistance to eligible families. Child Day Care recently published a reminder to cattle producers through Rural Voices and the farm stress line that they may be able to apply to have their child care subsidy re-assessed to take into consideration the current financial situation. As of this date, a number of farm families have responded to this reminder.

55 Plus is a provincial income supplement program providing quarterly benefits to Manitoba residents who are 55 years of age and over and whose incomes are within certain levels. Shelter Allowances for Family Renters and Shelter Allowances for Elderly Renters provides direct monthly cash assistance to eligible

families and persons aged 55 and over who rent their living accommodations in the private marketplace.

Mr. Chair, participation in the above programs, of course, is subject to an income-assessment test. The department exempts from consideration in its financial resources income from Canada's child tax benefits when determining overall eligibility and benefit levels for its income-tested programs. All of the department's asset-tested programs have a capacity to review and update their income tests to take into consideration a change in circumstances including a significant prolonged reduction in income which may be the case in certain BSE-stressed farm families. This contrasts with the Canada child tax benefit where eligibility is based on the previous year's income and assessed annually, with re-assessment during the year only in the event of a change in marital status or a change in the number of children in the family.

In addition to these programs, other programs of the department including Family Conciliation, Child and Family Services, Children's Special Services, Supported Living, Vocational Rehabilitation and the Homeowner Emergency Loan Program have some ability to assist some people in need. Family Services and Housing staff, particularly those serving the southwest region of the province, the southeast region of the province and the Interlake areas are being encouraged to be proactive in responding to eligible farm families in need. They are also being encouraged to work closely with the rural communities' support teams. Where families are connected to existing Family Services and Housing programs, regional staff are being asked to reach out to the families to see if additional assistance is needed.

And, Mr. Chair, I would be remiss if I did not conclude by again stating for the record that the re-introduction of the rural stress line by the Doer government after its cancellation by the previous administration has given us a tremendous insight into the very real needs being experienced by rural families across Manitoba and giving us extraordinary insight into how best to assist farm families in need. The stress line has proved to be an invaluable resource in getting communities interacting with service

providers in government. Without that resource, I do not know where we would be in terms of the development of policies and the development of support for those farm families who are seeking assistance from government.

Mrs. Rowat: As I had indicated in the House during Question Period, the stress line is great, but, unfortunately, the farmers and the families that are calling me are not using that line. Those are the ones that I am really worried about, and I do not want to lose them without having some supports in place.

Because I was not receiving answers during Question Period, I had to then go out and ensure through my contacts within Agriculture and in Family Services and in Public Health to ensure that there have been meetings and the resources in place to meet these families' needs. So I feel that if I myself have to go out and search for the assistance, I am a little concerned for the people who are in a crisis situation who do not have the resources or the mental stability at this point to be able to resource that help. I am encouraged to hear all that you have said, but I think that it needs to get out there that there are supports in place for them, and I am encouraging you to continue to do that.

Mr. Caldwell: I do appreciate those remarks. Certainly the Government is concerned for all rural Manitobans, those using the stress line, those who make themselves known to workers within communities.

Last week, just in addition, as we continue with this discussion, I had the privilege in western Manitoba to announce the creation of a little over 100 day-care spaces in Hamiota, in Neepawa, in Carberry, as well as within the city of Brandon, for the Aboriginal community as well as the general community, at the Brandon YMCA. These will go a long way to further supporting families in rural western Manitoba, not only through this existing crisis, but for, in fact, years and decades to come, supporting families and children in rural Manitoba and western Manitoba in this case. Both the Member for Minnedosa and myself are from western Manitoba. I certainly view the entire region as one of fundamental importance to myself or from western Manitoba I certainly view the

entire region as one of fundamental importance to myself as a minister from western Manitoba. I know I can speak on behalf of my colleague the Honourable Scott Smith. We both look at western Manitoba as very, very important to us as western Manitobans.

* (17:20)

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, as the mother of two small children in rural Manitoban and a resident of rural Manitoba and having utilized child care, I also understand that there are families who cannot afford child care and also are actually trying to secure positions where they can work outside the home. The initiative is great. I appreciate it as a mom, but I also know that there are groups out there that are not able to access these programs. I encourage him to continue to provide or put pressure on the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to do the cash advance program, because, at this point, based on the conversations that I am having with producers and families out there, they need cash to be able to put food on the table and to be able to continue on in their daily lives. I appreciate his comments, but I also understand that there are bigger issues out there as well.

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate the member's comments. It is indeed a big issue. Again I would urge her to seek the support of her colleagues in advocating for more resources to be invested in this area. I certainly would love to see that sort of perspective being taken by the members opposite, that more resources should be allocated.

Mrs. Rowat: Another program that I am quite interested in is the Healthy Child Manitoba. I am a strong believer in population health. I want to know what role Family Services plays on these working committees and what committees the minister's office would be directly involved in in this process.

Mr. Caldwell: The deputy minister of Family Services and Housing chairs the Deputy's Committee for Healthy Child. There is a separate Estimates process for the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet and the Healthy Child Initiative. Family Services and Housing is one of the departments represented on the Healthy Child

Committee. There are, I believe, seven ministries that are part of the Healthy Child Manitoba initiative, seven departments, I am sorry, that are part of the Healthy Child Manitoba initiative. We are but one of them.

Mrs. Rowat: The Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative, which is an urban initiative, has been something that has been sort of a thorn in the side with some rural economic development officers. It is an excellent program. The supports that are available to help neighbourhoods and affordable housing, can you tell me what the status of your role is on that initiative?

Mr. Caldwell: There is another Estimates process for Neighbourhoods Alive! The Department of Intergovernmental Affairs is the responsible ministry. The questions are best put to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Wowchuk) during that Estimates process. I can indicate that I am one of a number of Cabinet ministers that sit on the Neighbourhoods Alive! Committee of Cabinet, but that is the extent of my role. It is an initiative under Intergovernmental Affairs. That is the proper place to ask about the initiative.

Mrs. Rowat: You said your status or your role on there would be advising in what area?

Mr. Caldwell: As I indicated in the Healthy Child Committee, I am one of seven ministers who sit on that Cabinet committee. I have the same status on the Neighbourhoods Alive! Committee of Cabinet. I am one of the number of ministers.

Mrs. Rowat: How many ministers?

Mr. Caldwell: Five ministers, I believe.

Mrs. Rowat: In your comments regarding the role of your department with BSE, you talked about a provision of financial assistance of 55 Plus. I am looking at the *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review*. There is a seniors component and a juniors component. Can you clarify the difference between the two and what each is? Page 42.

Mr. Caldwell: I thank the member for referring to the page, indicating the page that we should refer to. It is age related, Mr. Chair. I appreciate

the question. It is one of these nuance things in the Estimates. The junior program is directed towards recipients between the ages of 55 and 64. The seniors portion is for 65 and older.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): While you have got some of the staff there in regards to Housing, I believe, in front of you right now, maybe I can ask a few questions. One of the questions I was wanting to ask is when there was a devolution of the federal responsibility to the provinces, there was sort of a negotiated settlement of a certain amount of monies that were forwarded to the Province in sort of a lump-sum amount. I wanted to ask the minister what the status of that fund was and whether it is still showing up somewhere in the Estimates book. I could not seem to find it.

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate the question. It is a good question. It is not in the Estimates book for the department because it is a separate trust fund administered by the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation.

Mr. Reimer: Could the minister give me a status update as to the amount of money in that fund?

Mr. Caldwell: There is approximately \$14 million existing in the risk reserve fund.

Mr. Reimer: That money, I believe, is under the MHRC. Is that right?

Mr. Caldwell: That is correct.

Mr. Reimer: Has any of that money been earmarked toward new housing initiatives?

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5:30 p.m., committee rise.

CONSERVATION

* (15:00)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Doug Martindale): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Conservation.

Does the honourable Minister of Conservation have an opening statement?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Conservation): Yes, I do.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Doug Martindale): Go ahead.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the opportunity to present the Estimates of the Department of Conservation. It is the tradition in Estimates to give an opening remark that outlines some of the key developments in the department. What I am going to do is, I am going to read through this and highlight it. I may also table part of it because of time considerations. We have now moved to a 10-minute time frame, which I think is appropriate because the main purpose of Estimates is, I believe, to obtain information and provide it to members of the Legislature, to MLAs in this committee and to members of the public.

Madam Chairperson, Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, in the Chair

First of all, I want to highlight some of our progress, some of the new initiatives for this past year. I want to stress, too, that this is a department that includes the former Natural Resources Department and former Environment Department, so if you look at the responsibilities that we are charged with in this department they are very extensive and very important, I believe. We have been trying the last year, in particular, to really integrate our decision-making process, to involve sustainability in all our activities. I think it is important that we have been dealing with new challenges and challenges that have evolved to a more significant degree.

Climate change is very much a focus of the department working in co-operation with the new Department of Energy, Science and Technology that now has responsibility for the climate change branch. Obviously though the Kyoto accord was a priority for us in seeing some real action on the ground in terms of climate change. Energy conservation has been a concern. Water quality has been a particular focus. We have developed a water strategy that we believe is one of the most comprehensive of any jurisdiction in Canada. I had that opportunity actually recently to talk to my colleagues, in fact Wednesday, Thursday, Friday there were ministerial meetings in Québec and I can tell you we are certainly significantly ahead of many other jurisdictions but much more to do.

We formed a partnership with the federal government on the flood-proofing side, and also we have been working with partnerships with municipal governments. This includes the Community Ring Dikes Program and the expanded Red River Floodway, some very significant moves. The Red River Floodway over the last number of years, and I am certainly more than prepared to answer questions about what I think is one of the real legacies that we are going to have over the next number of years in terms of improved flood protection for Manitobans.

I think it is important to recognize that sustainability is increasingly a focus of our department. I think even the term "sustainable development" has gotten to the point of perhaps not fully reflecting the key priorities of our department and, I think, of society generally. But I look to the east side of Lake Winnipeg, for example, where we have been working very diligently on a land-use planning process that will really be unique in Canada, and I think will move us in the direction that is so important, and that is working on sustainability and also making sure that we are working with communities, with stakeholders, and with the province generally.

* (15:10)

I want to mention consultation is a key element of what we do. The water strategy is a good example of very extensive consultation that will continue, and I am prepared to get into some of the details of that. Flood protection, and I think that it is very significant that when we announced our intent to proceed in terms of floodway upgrading that we were particularly sensitive to the concerns both upstream and downstream of the floodway. We have been dealing with drought, very significant drought conditions in much of the province, water quality, water quantity, infrastructure issues including drainage. Once again, those are very important priorities and, increasingly, we are recognizing, I think the trans-boundary nature of what we are dealing with. I mentioned in the House earlier, in answer to a question from the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that we are working already with other jurisdictions, including the U.S. on issues related to water quality.

We have had issues on the forestry side. We are addressing Manitoba's forest inventory and

wood supply analysis. That is very important. We are also moving ahead in many wildlife issues. I want to note that we passed The Polar Bear Protection Act, which is just one example of how we are working to protect wildlife in this province.

We are also looking at some other legislation in other areas, the floodway compensation act, which we have committed to. We have introduced The Fisheries Act that will increase the maximal allowable fines. We are also reviewing The Environment Act. We are working on a new forestry act and wildlife act. In addition we are also looking at a new water act.

I would like to stress that is a very important part of it, consultation, the legislative framework, but also working with communities. We currently have a number of co-management agreements in the province, seven co-management agreements. We are working on some pilot projects, both with First Nations and the Manitoba Métis Federation. I think there is some very important work to be done in the next period of time to further develop co-management.

I want to stress in terms of the water strategy that this is a very important initiative for this Government. Key elements are planning our watershed basis, new and consolidated legislation, approved infrastructure funding. I want to also highlight the success of our drinking water strategy. We have a new drinking water office. We have now completed the staffing of this office with the placement of 12 new drinking water officers throughout Manitoba. This is a very important part of implementing the Drinking Water Advisory Committee report.

We have also started to subsidize testing for homeowners. This has been re-instituted. This was cut in the 1990s. We have also been a very important part of the legislative review process for The Public Health Act. We are looking at that in the context of drinking water regulations.

This year, the international year of fresh water, we have been very committed to that. I think this is a very important part of the process. I also like to stress the human factor because we are seeing a fair amount of success in graduating

trained operators. I think if one looks at what happened in Walkerton, Ontario, you will see the importance of having trained operators that are following all the regulations.

I want to deal very briefly with flood management and get into this in some detail, if members wish, but we are very aware of the impact this has on Manitobans. The remaining community ring dikes under construction are to be completed this year for Emerson, Ste. Agathe, Niverville and Grand Point.

I mentioned we are moving ahead in terms of the Red River Floodway. This will cost in excess of \$600 million to protect us from a one-in-seven-hundred-year flood. I can indicate there is much improvement that has taken place in terms of individual home and business flood protection and that we now have 93 hydrometric stations in the Red River Valley. That is under partnership with the federal government. We have, through the LiDAR studies that have taken place, a much greater ability to map and predict and plan in terms of flooding.

I am prepared to answer questions on our Livestock Stewardship Initiative. I think we have taken some very significant steps here. Currently that includes requiring all manure storage facilities to register with the department, expanding the inspection program to include above ground tanks constructed before 1998, reducing the threshold for reporting of manure management plans from 400 animal units down to 300 units. We already have 16 new positions that are in place to administer the livestock program.

The Lake Winnipeg action program, we are very proud of this. I want to stress this is very important to us. We are working through the stewardship board that has been set up, but I want to indicate we are acting already. I outlined in Question Period earlier some of the very significant improvements that have taken place. I want to stress the importance of dealing with water control, whether it be drainage ditches or dikes or the many other aspects of our provincial drainage system. We have made a number of significant efforts there, including improving maintenance.

I mentioned earlier in my introductory remarks about international water issues. This continues to be a challenge, the Northwest Area Water Supply project, in Devils Lake. The bottom line here is that we have to be very vigilant. In fact, I took the opportunity to meet with the state commissioner for Natural Resources in Minnesota earlier this year. We have had a very good working relationship with Minnesota on many of these issues and we plan to continue that. We have to make sure we protect Manitoba's interests. We will do so aggressively, both here in Canada; and we will work with our friends south of the border, both in our neighbouring states, and also in Washington to do that.

In terms of protected areas, we have had further progress. I want to stress we are working very significantly in terms of this, making sure First Nations are involved. This did not happen in the 1990s initially. We are preparing plans to announce upward of seven new ecological reserves this year. We will be adding to our list of parks with at least one new provincial park this year. We added to the number of parks last year and it is pretty significant.

In terms of camping and cottaging we have allocated a lot of time and a lot of money toward the development of this, a significant amount of money in terms of developing the plans to bring in the 1000 additional camping spots and the 1000 cottage lots. I am anticipating that within a matter of weeks we will be able to release a list of our potential cottage lots and a plan to implement that and consult with Manitobans on the specific spots that are available. What is interesting is that we actually found a significant number over and above the 1000 that were out there in terms of potential cottage lots, which shows the potential.

I mention about climate change. That is something I am more than pleased to get into in terms of that. Forestry, I should mention briefly, is a very important industry. It has faced some stresses in the last period of time. We are committed to working with the industry and working generally on sustainable forestry in this province. In fact, in keeping with one of the very specific challenges we were faced with, I raised the issue, last Friday at the ministers' meeting on

forestry, about the need for a national approach to forest fire fighting, including federal cost-sharing. The fact that we are facing upward of \$60 million to fight fires this year is very significant.

Fisheries is a very important part of what we do. We signed an MOU with the federal minister on Wednesday of last week. I think that will help both improve co-ordination of work in terms of habitat but also bring some greater certainty to the process. There have been a lot of delays, unnecessary delays in dealing with DFO. We have raised this concern. We plan on continuing with that. One of the key issues I want to stress is our effort to conserve the resource. We have increased maximum fines from \$10,000 up to \$100,000 in terms of fisheries. We take very seriously, both in terms of prosecution and in terms of the fine level, the need to make sure that our fish stocks are protected.

The Wildlife and Ecosystem system Protection Branch is working very significantly. We have a number of challenges. Bovine tuberculosis, there has been some significant progress around Riding Mountain National Park on that. By working with two federal agencies including Parks Canada we have been able to develop a TB management task team. It has resulted in some very significant testing, some very significant progress in reducing the number of elk in that area to a manageable level. We will continue to do that. We take that very seriously.

Chronic wasting disease is an on-going concern. We are working on a CWD surveillance program that will, in western Manitoba and along the Saskatchewan and American borders, make sure we can test for this potentially devastating disease.

*(15:20)

I want to indicate that under The Sustainable Development Act, we have been moving ahead in terms of not only our own department but for government generally. As was required under the act we have adopted a set of procurement guidelines. We have had an adoption of procurement goals, an adoption of a code of practice and an adoption of financial management techniques, along with the development of

sustainability indicators and sustainability reports. We are moving on requiring, in fact we have had to require departmental procurement action plans to be brought in place. We are continuing to work on that, and I look forward to discussions on this very important issue that is before the department.

I just want to finish by saying how proud I have been to work with the department with some very dedicated people out there. We are dealing with pretty well everything in this department; fish, trees, water, air and a lot of human factors as well. Our staff are very dedicated, and I never cease to congratulate them whenever I get the opportunity. I think sometimes when people put pressures on our department, they should realize it is a tough job but I think Manitobans expect nothing less than the top quality people we have in our department working for sustainability, working to preserve our environment, working to preserve our natural resources.

I am very pleased to be here as minister. I look forward to discussion with the critics and MLAs in this very important area. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the Minister of Conservation for those comments.

Does the Official Opposition critic, the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), have any opening comments?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his opening comments.

I know in reviewing Estimates from years passed, that will have been one of the briefer opening comments we have received in Conservation. I know the minister has done that because of the reduction of the number of Estimates hours that we are operating under with the new rules. I do, certainly, appreciate the diligence, but also the expediency with which he brought forward his opening comments.

The minister will know this is my first Estimates process as an elected official. I am not sure when the minister was elected into this

Legislature, it was probably in the early eighties, if I had to guess. In 1981, I am advised by a member. *[interjection]* I was not exactly six at the time but I was also not old enough to run for election.

Clearly, I think that puts me maybe not at a disadvantage, but the minister if he reached back into his memory, might want to think back what it was like the first time he went through the Estimates process. I say that because he will have an understanding then that my questions might be different than some of the members in the past, a different focus perhaps. I am sure that he will understand that as we go forward.

I do not have, obviously, the luxury of having been the Minister of Conservation in the past like some of my former critics, my predecessors, have been. That might put me at somewhat of a disadvantage. It is clearly a technical department that has a lot of technical elements to it. In preparing for my role as critic for Conservation, I was surprised at the number of areas I think that are covered and the importance that they are to Manitobans.

I would also then, I guess on that note—the minister has mentioned the congratulations that he gave his own staff within the department throughout Manitoba. I have some within my own constituency who are working in the Department of Conservation. I appreciate the work they do as well as the work that all of the staff in the department do throughout Manitoba.

I do not personally have a connection with the department by way of being a past minister. I do know that my two predecessors ago in the seat of Steinbach, Mr. Albert Driedger, was the Minister of Natural Resources, I believe it was called at that time. He often spoke very highly of the staff in the department and continues to, actually until this day, whenever I meet with him. He often remarks at the high quality of staff within the department. I know there has been an amalgamation within the department but I am sure that those compliments still hold true.

I notice that the Minister of Conservation is also now the Minister of Labour. I am not going to be asking Labour questions. I will leave that to my colleague the Member for Springfield

(Mr. Schuler), but the minister will know that, I suspect he knows, I have raised some concern about the fact that he has been doing double duty in these two areas. It is certainly not a reflection on the minister himself because I am not, at this young stage in my political career, going to talk about the competency of the minister. I think that he works hard and has been doing his best in both roles.

Because of the significant situations that have gone on over the summer in this particular department, whether it is questions that have arisen regarding safety in our parks, certainly, the quality of water has been a significant issue that we have gone through over the summer, these numbers of concerns, I think, deserve undivided attention. I am not sure always that the minister has been able to do that because he has been saddled with two significant responsibilities, both of being the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Conservation.

While the Premier (Mr. Doer) clearly has confidence in this minister to handle both jobs and to do both jobs adequately, I would say that probably in the best interests of Manitobans he also finds confidence in somebody else within the caucus to take over one of these roles. I am not sure if the minister has a preference to which one he takes over. I am sure he would not state it for me on the record. Clearly, I think that needs to be done sooner, rather than later. But, again, that is not a reflection of my feelings towards the minister or the job that he is doing within the department, but simply, I think, a reality of the workload that both of these departments take.

So, with those brief opening comments, Madam Chairperson, I think we are ready to proceed.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic from the Official Opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba Practice, debate of Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for the Estimates of a department. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of this item and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 12.1.

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

Mr. Ashton: I want to introduce the staff. Dave Wotton is the ADM of Conservation Programs; Wolf Boehm is the ADM of Corporate Services; Serge Scrafield is the ADM of Environmental Stewardship.

Mr. Goertzen: I would also like to welcome the staff to the table. I know they were dutifully listening to the opening comments provided by both myself and the minister and, certainly, heard the accolades that were passed along by both sides of the table to the staff. It is well deserved. I hope that you would pass on those comments to the staff that work with you, and for you as well.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister and the critic for those comments.

We will now proceed to the remaining items contained in Resolution 12.1, on page 44 of the main Estimates book. Shall the resolution pass?

Mr. Goertzen: I wonder, Madam Chairperson, if there is a willingness of the committee to move towards a global consideration of these Estimates. I believe it might have been the practice in the past of committees and I, certainly, know it is done in some of the Estimates within the Legislature. We are probably not going to have the time that would do justice to an examination of the department under the new restricted rules on Estimates hours and it would move things a lot quicker.

Mr. Ashton: In fact, I agree with the Opposition critic's suggestion. Also, I was going to indicate that, if there is agreement of the committee to do that, in view of the significantly compressed number of hours of Estimates now, that where there are questions that require more of a detailed follow-up, rather than take up the time of the committee for that, I will commit to provide the member with answers to detailed questions in writing. I am hoping by doing that we will be able to save more time for the members of this committee to ask questions. But, certainly, I would concur that we proceed on a global basis.

Madam Chairperson: Is there agreement that we proceed on a global basis? *[Agreed]*

* (15:30)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I thank the minister for that. Certainly, I will undertake to ensure that if there is flexibility needed in terms of answering the questions that would be provided. I know a lot of the discussions, because of the restricted time period we have, will probably be fairly broad strokes on the department. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that we do not have a bit more time to go into some of the minutiae of the department, but important minutiae, I think. That is just simply how it is going to have to be.

I would like to begin by asking the minister what the vacancy rate for the staff overall in the department is for this current fiscal year.

Mr. Ashton: It is 6 percent.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for the response. Moving on to a subject that, I think, is fairly topical, it was decided, I believe on Friday or Thursday of last week, that is regarding the Supreme Court decision that came in the Powley decision allowing Métis people in Canada, or at least the decision was specific to Ontario, I think in the Sault Ste. Marie area, allowing Métis people the right, giving them fishing rights and hunting rights for food for subsistence. I wonder if the minister could indicate if he has had the time to review that decision. I know that when I heard his comments late last week, at that point he had not had the time to read the Supreme Court decision.

As they often are, they are fairly lengthy decisions. I think this one was in the nature of 17 pages, although that is not the worst that we have seen. But I wonder if he has had the chance to go through that decision.

Mr. Ashton: In fact, since Friday, one of my top priorities has been to go through the details of the decision. As the Opposition critic pointed out, there are actually two separate decisions that were decided on Friday, both of which related to the issue of Métis hunting rights. The specific cases, one was from Manitoba, one was from Ontario.

In a general sense, I can indicate that the decisions are certainly fairly complex. We are, as I speak, as a government going through some of the ramifications of the decision. I think it is important to recognize, as I stated last Friday, that we, as the Department of Conservation, the Government has put conservation very high on our list, but we also respect any and all legal rights. Our conservation programs are reflective of that.

What we will be doing over the next period of time is looking at the implications on a day-to-day basis. What I can indicate, as well, is we have had a working relationship with the Manitoba Métis Federation quite apart from the decisions, which obviously, the decisions will certainly, I am sure, come up in the ongoing discussions we have, but aimed at increasing Métis participation in resource management. We signed an agreement with the MMF. We have had ongoing discussions on it. That will not change. We will be looking at the specific implications of the court decision.

I can get into some of the details of the court decision if the member wishes. It is, as I said, fairly complex. Whatever implications are on a day-to-day basis are not absolutely clear at this point in time. We have gone through this even, I think, all this morning, through our department, through the other departments. The impact to Justice, for example, obviously is clearly involved, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

At the end of day, as I said, our basic principle here is conservation. That is paramount in terms of our jurisdiction, our responsibility. But also we will be looking at the decision in terms of the Métis. We will respect any and all legal rights and obligations that flow out of those court decisions.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for his response. I recognize that the decision just came out recently. Supreme Court decisions, I have had some opportunity to read some in the past. Going through the specifics of the wording is often where you find things that are the most important.

When I did read the decision myself, though, there are certainly some things that

stood out for me. The Supreme Court was trying to establish, I think, what would qualify an individual, his obtaining rights as a Métis person in terms of the hunting and fishing. I note in the decision, announced as a unanimous decision of the court, that they said that an identifiable Métis community, with some degree of continuity and stability, must be established through evidence of shared customs, traditions, collective identity, as well as demographic evidence. That is a fairly broad stroke that the Supreme Court paints.

I wonder if the minister, because he has mentioned that he has had discussions with the Métis Federation in the past: Could he give some kind of an estimate in terms of what numbers we might be looking for in Manitoba people who would qualify as Métis?

Mr. Ashton: In fact, the answer to that is no. The discussions we have had thus far have been various proposals that the MMF has put forward. I want to stress again this all predates the court decision on Friday. We all were, obviously, aware that the court process was in place. I think both of the cases go back as far as 10 years. But, obviously, the evolution over time of Aboriginal rights in terms of interpretation, the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples, including the Métis, has been very much a process over the last number of years in the light of constant developments of constitutional law in specific cases, of evolution. This is, in the context of the Métis, very much an extension of that.

A lot of the items that are in the court decisions, a lot of the basic rulings that were part of the reasoning behind the decision clearly reference a new chapter. In that sense that will be one of the things we will be doing. We will be going through this.

I should also indicate, too, that we, I think, will also be looking to the experience of other Prairie Provinces. There is a shared history in the constitutional history with other Prairie Provinces, also with the federal government. The federal government has Ralph Goodale, the minister specifically responsible for Métis affairs. I mentioned ongoing discussions with the MMF as well. Certainly those, I hope, will continue. We originally had a pre-planned meeting that had to be rescheduled at the request of the MMF

today, but we are, certainly, more than willing to sit down and continue the ongoing relationship.

Really, the court decision does get into a number of areas that are really new in terms of potential impact, and that is what we are trying to assess right now, is basically determine the specific impact on a day-to-day basis. The one case, as the member pointed out, was based in Sault Ste. Marie. There are some specific issues in Ontario versus Manitoba, but, clearly, we want to make sure that whatever rights and whatever obligations which follow the Supreme Court decisions in terms of the Métis are respected. That is our prime focus now.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate what the time frame is that he might be able to provide more specific details in terms of what the ramifications for Manitoba may be on the Powley decision in particular?

* (15:40)

Mr. Ashton: I guess there are a couple of dimensions. We will have a clearer picture on the legal side probably over the next few days, next week or so, at least in terms of an initial impact. I have gone through a detailed preliminary analysis that has been provided by our legal counsel. I also want to stress these other tracks that I referenced, the other provinces, the MMF representing the Métis. That may be a longer process. I am not trying to prejudge that. As I said, it is a case of the MMF that is an ongoing process.

I also want to stress with the MMF, too, that quite apart from whatever the impact of the decision is, we see a role in terms of the MMF in terms of greater involvement in resource management that goes beyond the strict issue of hunting rights. I look at some of the work that was started by my predecessor, the current Minister of Northern and Aboriginal Affairs (Mr. Lathlin), in increasing Aboriginal employment in the department. There has been a very significant increase in the number of Aboriginal employees. That includes, of course, the Métis as Aboriginal people as well, but that is an area we would like to explore. It is something that we have been working on as looking at that.

I should perhaps explain, too, that the three agreements, the pilot projects, if you like, in terms of resource management, one of which is with the West Region Tribal Council, one of which is with Opaskwayak Cree Nation, OCN, and the other which is with the MMF.

Also, I think we have some other opportunities in terms of the other aspects of resource management, education and other ways in which we can work co-operatively. Our intention is to continue with those discussions, including with the MMF, continue our discussions with the MMF certainly in regard to that. Their aspirations have been to involve the Métis generally in those and other kinds of activities. We look forward to further discussion.

I think we will have a better picture of the legal side of it within the next few days, perhaps the next week or so, but in terms of any evolution with the federal government, other provinces, or with the Métis themselves, I think that may be a somewhat longer time period. I think in the long run if we can reach some sort of co-operative framework that is in the best interests of everyone.

Mr. Goertzen: I understand in the Supreme Court decision, the Powley decision—I may want to correct myself, it may have been restricted specifically to, I do not remember the facts, but moose hunting in that decision, that the Supreme Court stated—I know that, certainly, in Manitoba when we are talking about Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights there has always, I think, been a predominant concern for conservation if there is a need for restriction. The decision of the Supreme Court, I believe, stated that there would be priority allocation rights for Métis in the moose hunt, so that even in Ontario, in that particular case, had there been a conservation issue there would have been priority allocation for the Métis because of the rights they are now given under the Supreme Court decision. I wonder if the minister can indicate for me if there is that same kind of priority allocation in Manitoba for Aboriginals.

Mr. Ashton: What I can do, and I should provide a disclaimer here, I am an economist, not a lawyer, but as Minister of Conservation, I can give you probably a capsule summary of where

jurisprudence is in terms of the provincial jurisdiction of Conservation vis-à-vis Aboriginal rights. It is easier to do so on the First Nations side in terms of treaty rights, because the jurisprudence is longer. It is clearly established. But I think I can give you a good picture of some of the basic principles that would go into any of the impacts of the ruling on Friday. Essentially, when I said earlier that we have a responsibility in terms of conservation, that has clearly been echoed by every major decision that has come down, every decision that has come down in terms of Aboriginal hunting or fishing rights.

I think it is also important to point out that when we are talking about hunting or fishing rights it is essentially for subsistence. Here I am talking about the existing treaty rights that are exercised. So, for example, we clearly have the ability to license commercial fishing, whether the fisher is Aboriginal or not Aboriginal, treaty, Métis, as an Aboriginal or not Aboriginal. We are talking about subsistence hunting. The basic premise of jurisprudence is that the Province does have the ability to intervene where there is clearly demonstrated conservation needs. In fact, we have used that basic principle in Westman, working co-operatively with the West Region Tribal Council to work out what I think has been a very successful approach to Lake Dauphin.

But within that, obviously what then happens is there are the resource users, and there obviously are Aboriginal hunters. In this case, as I mentioned, we are talking essentially from the treaty side. There are sports hunters. There will be the case of fishing, commercial fishers. The key element in which the Province can intervene is where there is demonstrated difficulty in terms of the conservation side. So, in essence, we, obviously, have to be very vigilant on an ongoing basis, but within that context, if there is a sustainable resource, it then follows in terms of those rights that are established either by law in the case of Aboriginal rights which are inherent rights which have been interpreted by the courts or through the licensing system. We work through that.

We will be looking at this as one of the dimensions, obviously, in terms of the implications of Friday as well. Our goal is to conserve the resources and respect the rights of all who

clearly have rights, whether through law or through licence, and we will apply those same principles.

I think it is important to note, by the way, there have been some pressure points, but in a lot of areas this is happening anyway, and it has happened on a co-operative basis. It is not just the Department of Conservation that is spreading the conservation message. It is also First Nations. I know, as well, the fact that the MMF signed the agreement with the Province, I think, indicates the clear Métis commitment to resource management and conservation as well.

So, I think, quite apart from a very small percentage of people of whatever background who may ignore conservation as a principle or may ignore the clearly defined principles of conservation, the vast majority of Manitobans are committed to conservation. That is, again, why I emphasize that our hope with the court case on Friday is that we not only deal with the implications in a legal sense but also try and work out co-operative arrangements to deal with this. We are far better off working together than separately.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the minister has me concerned when he says that he is trained as an economist, because he might know that I am trained as a lawyer. So we have an economist and a lawyer talking about conservation, and I am not sure where that is going to lead us.

An Honourable Member: That is where they come in.

Mr. Goertzen: That is where the staff comes in, and perhaps it is a good thing that they are here.

Maybe the minister can clarify for me—the question that I have, in particular, is about the prioritization of stocks of animals that might be considered to be in jeopardy. Now, obviously, the minister through the department can limit through various means, whether it is limiting the hunt or other ways, the taking of animals that are considered to be in jeopardy for their overall population.

But does the department factor in that there are rights for Aboriginals, and he rightly points

out that it is for subsistence needs. Are those numbers factored into the restrictions that his department does on a yearly basis?

* (15:50)

Mr. Ashton: Well, actually, I want to start from the following premise, because I think it is important to recognize, whether as an economist or as a lawyer, that we have a bit of a paradox in terms of hunting, fishing and pressures that exist.

In some areas of the province, we have an overpopulation of certain animal species. In a significant part of the province, we have a deer problem. We also have problems with snow geese, for example. I expressed this concern at the ministers responsible for wildlife meeting, that, quite frankly, one of the implications of some of the recent legislation brought in by the federal government, C-68, is that we are actually having fewer and fewer hunters every year.

I am talking about hunters, whether they be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, especially a younger generation that just does not want to be bothered with a very complex system which already registers owners through the FAC process, firearms acquisition certificate process. I want to provide that context so that we could get into some of that detail if there is time because there are areas where there are not significant problems.

When we deal with any resource our prime focus, again, on the Conservation side is to determine if the harvesting of resources does exceed the sustainability of the resource that is in place. That is where we rely on our scientific expertise.

What was quite unique, like Dauphin, for example, was working co-operatively with West Region Tribal Council. We put in place a permit system that did clearly recognize the legal First Nations' right to subsistence fishing but also provided for the appropriate conservation as well. So, what we do is, we look at any given lake or any given animal species, determine scientifically whether it is sustainable, and we are able to intervene at that time. That is, basically, what the courts have said.

I think we have to go beyond that. When I say go beyond that, I reference some of the

partnerships we are working on. I think there is a real opportunity through education to really promote sustainable harvesting. By the way, that includes encouraging people to participate.

I am always struck by—when I go to a First Nations community, Métis community, a rural or urban community, there is one thing in common. There are a lot of younger people that are spending far more time on computers and watching television than, say, my generation in Thompson where we did not have much choice. We had one channel, taped for four hours a day from a week before. So, guess what? We grew up with the outdoors. You grew up fishing. My idea of excitement was going down to the Game and Fish building and shooting targets. There is a whole way of life out there that is under stress. It is not just C-68. It may be some demographics that are in place.

So, I want to stress that in many cases we are actually not faced with significant pressures. I have said that maybe one of the endangered species out there is actually the rural and northern hunter, part of the ecosystem in many areas. But where there are pressures, those are mechanisms we can put in place, conservation measures. We did it co-operatively in Lake Dauphin. We will do that on an area by area, lake by lake, species by species basis, which is, basically, what the courts have said we can do. We will continue to do that on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister will no doubt appreciate some of the concerns that always arise around issues like this. I guess now, with the Supreme Court ruling on Friday, there will probably be greater concerns. I know that I have received letters. They were copied to me. So, clearly, the minister received them as well, about people who were concerned in various areas of Manitoba that the rights that have been granted Aboriginals are being used in ways that most of us would not always agree with. We would recognize, of course, that it is, as it often is, a very small percentage of people with these rights who go forward in this way.

I reference, specifically, letters that I have received. If the minister wants, I can, certainly, table them for him if he needs the specifics, although I think these were directed to his

department, about fishing beyond season or whether it was in the spawning season or netting in areas of falls that were well beyond what these individuals would consider to be subsistence needs.

Clearly, the concern, again, it is a small group of people who might be engaged in these allegations. There are, obviously, concerns because wherever there are rights, there are also abuses of those rights to go along with it throughout society.

I wonder if the minister can indicate, within the department, how many staff they currently have that would be either dedicated specifically or as part of their jobs to monitor these types of occurrences.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I can get you sort of the total of our NROs and some other regional officers out there, about 150 people out there.

Mr. Goertzen: I will soon know that. Perhaps you can find this as well, but for the NROs, that would only be one out of many jobs that they would have in terms of responding to those types of concerns?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, but it would be a prime focus. They have, obviously, education as a significant part of their responsibilities as well. They have been developing some very good relationships with communities across Manitoba. Particularly our front line staff are out there. This is their job. They work with our scientific expertise in terms of what is happening, in terms of fish and wildlife, in terms of the levels that are out there. Conservation is more than just the title of the department, this is their key role.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I am sure the minister is quite aware of Larters Golf Course. Perhaps on occasion he has had a chance to go out, maybe even swing a club or two. They have a great banquet facility and certainly have tried to run a good operation. Currently, they are expanding onto approximately the Perimeter and 59. They are doing a secondary golf course and investing something like \$4.2 million. Again, they should be opening in 2004, a really great addition to our communities.

Phil Riese, who is one of the individuals who is driving these golf courses, has called me

on numerous occasions in that, to use the term, they are being eaten out of house and home by the geese, to put it mildly. It is just driving them to distraction. The new golf course is on 59 and the Perimeter, approximately. The minister has probably driven by. It is fresh grass, which makes it even tastier as a meal for the geese. It is just beyond comprehension the kind of damage that is taking place. It is such a problem for them.

Has the minister looked at what can be done about those kinds of situations? I have heard some bizarre ideas, but, as the geese population continues to grow, what are these facilities supposed to do? On the one side, certainly we want to see nature and we love to see the geese flying overhead, but it just cannot be to the detriment of individuals trying to do something productive for our communities.

Mr. Ashton: I referenced in my earlier comments, and I appreciate the member raising this question that paradoxically, while we have some species of wildlife in some parts of the province that may be at risk in terms of hunting pressures, that is not the case with the geese. I mentioned snow geese. The department advised me generally with all kinds of geese, there has been an explosion of some populations the last number of years. Climate apparently is a factor and the availability of habitat. I think people are not aware that golf courses can be considered habitat by geese. I think it is a good example that you have put forward.

We, obviously, are trying to promote hunting. We are trying to promote hunting on an ongoing basis. We have extended Sunday hunting in parts of the province. This is big game, but it also applies in terms of getting people back into hunting. We are currently consulting in terms of hunting on Sunday, which has not been allowed in the province, province-wide, looking at it as another opportunity for people to go out and hunt. We are promoting youth hunts. My concern again here is that we may have to look at other ways. We are looking creatively for that, to get more hunting available. It is a major problem. That really is the only mechanism that we do have, quite frankly, that would be appropriate in terms of that.

I want to put on the record again that, and I am not trying to say there are not things we can do provincially, we need to look at unique ways of promoting this. If we did not have C-68, and I do not want to keep hammering away on a political level, but that is creating a huge problem. A lot of younger people in their teens and early twenties just are not getting out. If they do, they get out once a year. It is kind of a symbolic hunt. That is not enough to deal with the explosion that is out there. I have asked for the department to come back with some other unique ways in which we can deal with it.

* (16:00)

Mr. Schuler: Again, this has just become of crisis proportion for Larters. I think the problem with Larters, minister, is that the main Larters is inside West St. Paul, which is considered a suburban, if not quite urban area, and Larters part 2, again, is in East St. Paul, which is again a suburban area. Is it possible for them to get some kind of permission to have hunting on the golf course for certain times?

They have to do something. They are just literally at wit's end in what to do. I know there have been some permits given to certain rural municipalities around airports. Is there anything else they are allowed to do to keep the population down or out of the golf courses, because it is a major detriment to the investment?

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Ashton: I want to indicate there is a goose hunting pilot project in the Rosser area near the airport. We could certainly consider other areas.

My suggestion is the R.M. and the department could talk about this. I would caution, though, that the member might have some concerns from other constituents if there is hunting in a relatively developed area or close to a developed area. We are always cognizant of that. That is why our prime focus has been on hunting pressures generally. If we can get the overall populations back to the levels they were even 10, 15 years ago, I think we would be able to avoid the kind of problems you are faced with. We have already had this discussion in the

department and we will get the department to contact the R.M. specifically on that case.

Mr. Schuler: Then just to conclude, could the minister have his department perhaps contact Larters, Mr. Phil Riese from Larters, the number would be in the phone book, and try to address this issue? The frustration level of these individuals is just unbelievable. I think we should be dealing with these problems. Again, we do not want the investment ruined. I mean, clearly, the golf courses are an important part of our community and well-being, et cetera.

So I would appreciate it if the minister and his department would just have a look into it.

Mr. Ashton: I think we have probably the highest per capita number of golf courses anywhere. I only wish I had the time to play in them.

To answer the comment that was raised before about my joint duties, what went out the window was checking out the golf courses or, of course, as Minister of Conservation I could always have checked out the fish stocks by going fishing, but I gave that up to do double duty, at least for now.

But I do take the concerns very seriously. I will undertake that the department will contact the R.M. Perhaps through the R.M. and the golf course, I suggest that maybe we set up a meeting with both the R.M. and the golf course, and we will discuss the specifics. So thanks for raising it.

Mr. Goertzen: So that the minister is aware, I will probably be moving around in a couple of different areas, but, certainly, later, in the time we are allocated, I would like to talk specifically about parks and water quality, and that will be the focus of a good part of the discussion. I also understand that the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) would like some time, as well, so we will try to accommodate that.

I have a question regarding—and you mentioned it. I am not bringing it up to give you free political airtime on the federal scene, but with the C-68 registration plan, the NROs, are they under any kind of directive to either look for or

ask for the registration certificate of people they come across or not ask for that registration?

Mr. Ashton: We, basically, have made it very clear that we do not enforce C-68, period. We are not checking for the registration. The key element for us, as a province in this case, is we are not suggesting it is not the law. It is. We are not counselling people on whether they should follow the law or not, but, clearly, we do not want to take the valuable time of our NROs away from the duties that the member referenced a few minutes ago and put them into, in this case, checking registrations. That, clearly, is the purview, in this case, we believe, of the RCMP.

I just cannot stress strongly enough on the record that the billion-dollar experience of this registration is, I think, appalling. Some of us, many of us warned that this would happen. I must admit I never expected it would hit this level. I was talking to some people a few days ago where I think the numbers will be considerably higher than the billion dollars.

I want to stress again, too, that the issue of gun control is not the issue. We have gun control. We have had it prior to C-68. Anybody who has gone through the FAC process, I think, would know we register owners. It is a very onerous process. This predates C-68. So, I hope that at some point in time the federal government will actually review the experience with C-68, and, you know, I mean, really—could we have used that billion dollars better?

I think we could have. If the concern is crime, we could have put it into policing. I tell you we could use a billion dollars across the country. We could put it to a lot of good purposes. So I want to stress again that this is something we opposed at the political level in Opposition, and we oppose it as government.

I know the member's party has also opposed it, as well. But at the administrative level we are not checking the registrations. That is not part of our NROs' job and we have made that clear in a directive to the NROs. We have announced it publicly.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister, I guess, could not simply resist going into the political end of that

question. Certainly, he would understand that we concur generally with that. The substance of the answer I do appreciate, though, that NROs are not asking for gun registration certificates. I will take the minister on that.

The Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), if she were here, I think, would be asking me to pose a question regarding artificial flooding south of the floodway, particularly with the expansion of the floodway that the minister's government is undertaking.

I think questions have arisen in that area whether or not the recommended dike levels and height levels that came out of the 1997 experience, whether or not those are still going to be adequate. I think we are talking about communities immediately south of the floodway gates.

* (16:10)

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the member's question. This certainly has been a focus of our approach to the floodway expansion. Clearly, the floodway expansion, to our mind, is the preferred option. The Ste. Agathe option would have had very significant consequences and very difficult consequences to predict in terms of the mitigation and many other issues that are involved.

What I can indicate is we have already committed to legislation, in legislation, as apart from in agreement. We have a Disaster Financial Assistance Agreement with the federal government, for example. That is subject to change. We will put in legislation provisions for compensation for flooding over and above the natural levels.

I think it is important to note, too, that at the same time we have moved very aggressively on what is called LiDAR mapping. In fact we have shared that with the municipalities, both north and south of the floodway. The one advantage of the LiDAR mapping is we are able to get a much better idea of what the impact will be, and I think it is also the distress too.

I could provide the member, or just perhaps, if the member is even interested in a briefing with our floodway authority or with our staff. It varies. The floodway protects up to a one-in-

seven hundred-year flood, but there are various scenarios all along the way in terms of the one-in-seven hundred-year flood. We are trying in particular that it have a greater prediction of what would happen. The LiDAR studies can play a very significant role in that.

We have also been working in terms of issues related to the operation of the floodway, as well. We have clearly identified that has to be something that is considered. I know there is often a debate on what is artificial flooding. In some cases flooding is assumed to be artificial when it is scientifically not proven to be the case, but we are going to build in, in legislation, the right of compensation where any situation occurs because of the floodway expansion that may impact on people.

Most of the initial indication thus far is that it is relatively minimal, but my view is if it was relatively minimal and you were impacted it does not make much difference, you are impacted. So our real goal here is to make sure that this is covered in legislation.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for the answer. Certainly, if there is a briefing provided and there is an impact that goes into constituencies south of the floodway, I think I would like to also invite members of my colleagues whose areas will also be affected within those areas.

On a different and unrelated topic, in Alberta I understand, I think it was approximately a month ago, they instituted a program for the collection and disposal of technological instruments, computers, computer screens, those types of areas. Can the minister indicate has Manitoba looked at the idea of a collection of technology, essentially?

Mr. Ashton: In fact, we have. We have developed a pilot project with industry that proved to be very successful. We are looking at it in terms of developing an on-going program. Just to give the member an indication of how significant a challenge this is, upward of 2 percent of the waste stream now consists of disposed electronic equipment. It is a real challenge in terms of the environment because there is a very real concern with the heavy metals that

are contained in the circuits and other parts of the electronic commitment. Apart from the volume, there is potential for leaching into the ground, and obviously, heavy metals would be a very significant concern. So we are proceeding in terms of electronic equipment.

I realize this is a slightly different topic. I do not know if he has a question on this, but Alberta with a CropLife Canada had a very successful program in terms of disposal of expired pesticides. I actually was able to announce a \$92,000 contribution from the provincial government towards that just last week when CropLife Canada had its national meeting here in Winnipeg.

So we are also looking at other areas like expired unregistered pesticides, which has been a huge concern out there in terms of agriculture and the agricultural community because many of the containers have been starting to erode, and a lot of farmers and others are storing the chemicals and the pesticides and had nowhere to dispose of them. So we are actually working out a safe disposal process. We are developing some of our own experience in Manitoba where we have other examples such as Alberta on the CropLife program. We are applying that here.

Mr. Goertzen: Understandably, when you are talking about disposal, whether it is of IT technology or anything else, questions arise about the cost of that. I have read reports that suggest to pay for the disposal of a computer, for example, if there was to be a fee levied may be similar to what is done with bottles in the province. The fee on a computer could be \$10 to \$15 for paying in advance of disposal. I wonder if the minister can comment on whether or not the department is looking in the direction of an advance fee that is transparent and shown on the receipt of the purchaser for the disposal of IT equipment.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the question because the whole concept of enviro levies, I think, is one that has a proven track record in Manitoba. The bottle deposit is one example. The tire disposal fee that is attached is another. There are all sorts of examples of that, and I think there are some real opportunities that we are able to look at in terms of using that concept. I think what

experience has shown though is that if we can work through the industry, that is the best way to determine the best mechanism for that industry. Obviously, this pilot project was fairly successful. So we want to look at whether that can be expanded on.

In many cases, too, what is interesting is, quite apart from the enviro levy side, there is also a salvage value. In my own community, it has been a very successful program in terms of building products because there is a salvage value to lumber that in many cases may have a 100-year life span that was salvaged from somebody's basement, and instead of recycled, in this case reused.

It can also indicate we are looking at hazardous wastes because there is a real opportunity there to apply that same process. This is a very significant concern for municipalities in terms of managing the waste stream.

So I appreciate the member's suggestion in the sense, I think, whether it is an up-front fee or if it is something that can be worked out with the industry that involves a somewhat different approach. Perhaps look into some the salvage values that are there. These metals are reusable in many cases. There is a salvage value to them. We are committed to moving ahead with this electronics pilot project and trying new and permanent programs. So, whether specifically what in the line of what the member is talking about, I can indicate I concur, and I welcome the member's suggestions, by the way, in terms of other areas. I think there is a lot more we can do in terms of enviro levies. There are a lot of other challenges out there in the waste stream.

Plastic is a real challenge. I think it is encouraging that the City of Winnipeg, for example, now has, in fact, just as of a week ago, moved to curbside recycling of basic or the vast majority of plastic products. It is very, very significant, I believe. But when you have products like plastic bags that are increasingly becoming a problem in disposal sites and a hazard to wildlife, it is clear we have other areas to look at. I welcome the member's suggestions in any and all of these areas, because I think Manitoba is out ahead of the curve in terms of

recycling in Manitoba. Let us be up front here. We are Canadians. As Canadians, we produce a lot of waste. One of the great advantages of recycling is the waste reduction side, which basically saves most of the local municipalities money and basically saves the taxpayer money. We have a long way to go before we have reached the ultimate level in terms of recycling, including on the electronics side.

* (16:20)

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Acting Chairperson, can the minister indicate whether or not his department has been approached by organizations separate and apart from the industry on bringing forward a proposal for the collection of IT equipment?

Mr. Ashton: We are working with other jurisdictions because one of the focuses here is actually to see if we can work out a co-ordinated national approach. I should indicate that we are dealing with this issue and other issues that are high on everybody's agenda. When you are dealing with some of the emerging challenges there is a fair amount of commitment. I think in terms of time frame, I am always careful to give anything other than an educated guess, but I think there is a sense of moving ahead on this on a national level. I am hoping to see some progress next year on this.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister. I am not sure that I asked specifically about time frames, although I appreciate him offering that. I will ask again.

Can the minister indicate if anybody has approached the department in terms of putting in a plan to collect IT equipment and disposal outside of the industry generally?

Mr. Ashton: I am not aware of anything, but I should mention we have a ministers of Environment meeting in November. There may be some discussions at that point in time. We are quite open. If there are people that are interested, we are open to discussions with anyone. Anytime there is anything in waste stream that can be better utilized, we certainly are open in terms of that. Our discussions with the industry do not preclude that from happening.

If the member is aware of anybody that has any particular interest, we certainly welcome it. I

can indicate, by the way, that at the Government level there has been fairly very significant success over time too in using older computers, rehabilitating older computers. Once again, before you recycle or dispose of a product, you reuse. There has been a fair amount of effort to use surplus computers and put them out into the community.

One of the real concerns with the IT side is, the cycle is speeding up dramatically. We are seeing computers that 18 months to 2 years ago were state of the art. Now they are barely in the range and may not perform most of the programs that are out there. That has to be a very real concern. If the member is aware of anyone in the private sector or anyone outside of the industry that has potential solutions, I am not saying solutions are us, but we try.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate on the issue of enviro levies, does he see a preference of enviro levies either being kind of subsumed into the price of the product or being paid separately on the purchase so that the amount of the enviro levy appears on the receipt of the consumer?

Mr. Ashton: I think the rate of the enviro levy depends on the industry. There are some industries where, for example, the enviro levy for bottles and plastic drink containers, it is possible to collect at the retail level. But there may be other areas that would be looking at enviro levies where in many cases it may be a fraction of a cent or on a volume basis. So I would say probably it really depends on the industry that is involved.

The collection is less important in my mind than being up front with people, that this is a part of it. But I can tell you, I think the experience with enviro levies has been very successful. I also think the experience of working with industries has been very successful, as well, in Manitoba. One of the priorities I have as minister, quite frankly, is to pursue enviro levies and pursue creative approaches to recycling and to the waste stream over the next period of time, starting with some of the hazardous wastes that are out there, the hazardous products.

We really will very soon have an opportunity to move very significantly in that area.

That is an area that is of major concern in municipalities and so it should be.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I have a few questions for the minister. I was just listening to some of the comments that he was making. They were talking about the floodway. It seems to me there is a fine line between drought and flood, so my questions are specific to I guess right now the lack of water.

I mean, right now, we do have enough water in the area. I am talking about the Pembina region, southern Manitoba, Morden, Winkler. As you are aware, we get our water from the Red River, from the Lake Minawasta Dam there and also from an aquifer.

I also know that at this point in time the water levels on the Red River are fairly low. Now, Winkler and Morden and the whole area are very dependent on water for growth, not only for irrigation. They are doing that through the dugouts. However, they are very dependent on the water from the Red, at this point the aquifer and Lake Minawasta.

So my question goes on to the Pembina River. I know that over the years there has been talk about putting up a dam on the Pembina River which would be just, I believe, about a mile north of the U.S. border. Then I know that there was another one—the International Joint Commission talked about putting one downstream from there.

My question would be: As we look at water for the area, but also when you are talking about the flooding within the basin, again according to the International Joint Commission, a study that they have done, the contribution the Pembina River makes towards a flood is about a foot at the north end, of course, where you have your retainer walls and so on, so I would think that a good strategy would be one of water retention.

Is the department doing anything in looking at putting up a dam on the Pembina River and looking at retaining some of that water, rather than just sending it north just as quickly as

possible? I would like to hear your comments on that.

Mr. Ashton: On the general point, the challenge is absolutely that there is either too much or too little water. We are faced with severe drought conditions in a good part of the province, not only in the agricultural area but also northern Manitoba. My own area has very severe drought conditions. That obviously poses a lot of challenges in terms of forest firefighting and an impact on the agricultural community. So I accept that.

By the way, it is important to note that one of the elements of climate change is going to be greater instability of weather. You will see that over the next number of years increasing. What was the standard weather pattern of 10 or 15 years ago will no longer be the case.

By the way, all the projections in terms of, for example, the expanded floodway, indicate that we are still going to have major floods no matter what climate change brings. Quite frankly, that instability of weather may actually compound it. There are various different ways you can look at the scientific evidence but we are certainly not going to see a situation in which it will become redundant in the next five or ten years.

In terms of the short-term situation—or maybe it is short- to medium-term situation—one of the reasons we have been working on the water strategy is to deal exactly the type of proposed approach that you have been talking about, but deal with it on a broader basis, on a watershed basis and on a provincial basis.

* (16:30)

I will be very up front here. If you were to design a drainage system and a damming system and diking system for the province of Manitoba today, you would not design it the way it is. The system we have currently is designed for agriculture that existed 20, 30, and 40 years ago, 50 years ago in some cases, 60 or 70; far less intensive, far different use of water, different crops, more livestock. You would not start from that level.

You also, I think, if you went back, would not have some of the provisions that are in place

currently, because, let us be up front here, years ago, actually, the Province assumed responsibility for the drainage systems as recently as the 1960s in terms of the jurisdictional end of it, but any of the developments that took place before were often done on an immediate needs basis and did not always take into account the impact on the watershed itself.

Quite frankly, I still see it ,as Minister of Conservation, where I will talk to one R.M. and I will talk to the neighbouring R.M. I will not mention specific R.M.s, but the member probably knows of some of the R.M.s I am talking about where you have a huge dispute over what is currently in place and how you solve the perceived problems and how you do not come up with a solution for one R.M. that impacts on somebody else. Dare I say, the individual cases where the department, on a daily basis, and I end up with the letters afterward where you got one neighbour doing something that impacts on another neighbour.

What we are trying to do is take one step back with the water strategy. We will look at water quality issues, but we will also look at water quantity issues. That is where I see specifics such as what the member has put forward as being dealt with appropriately in that sense.

I do not want to underestimate the challenge, by the way, because the other thing that we have come to is a point in our water strategy, and it is a similar challenge when you deal with infrastructure elsewhere, we have a real challenge in terms of infrastructure needs.

The next question you hit is how do you pay for it. I know this is one of the areas the water strategy is really going to have to deal with. We are all in it collectively. There is a lot of commitment at the level of municipalities to deal with this. The paradox now is you do have situations where there are some improvements that could be sustainable in an environmental sense which would benefit farmers in a certain area or other users in a certain area.

There is not just the way to finance it in a way that could accomplish that net gain. That is going to have to be an important part of it is basically what system, not what system do we

want, because that is different from the real question. It is what system do we need and can we afford and how can we finance it.

So, Madam Chair, I realize this is a fairly general answer, but I think you know generally that is where I see specific proposals such as the member has pointed out. The Member for Portage (Mr. Faurschou) and I have had discussions about similar situations in his constituency. I think, last time I went to the AMM meeting, I had 98 requests for meetings from municipalities. If I had any doubt about drainage being a big issue, drainage and water quantity, although I did not, I knew it was going to be an issue, having 98 municipalities sign up for that particular portion—we had to actually book, we had individual meetings but we had the main theatre in the Convention Centre booked for it. That is how important drainage and water control issues are for rural Manitoba.

Mr. Dyck: I will be very specific.

Are there any plans for the Pembina River and for the dam?

Mr. Ashton: There essentially has not been on the table, I think, any specific proposal in terms of that. The reason I mention it in terms of the watershed planning is if the member feels that is a concern or municipalities do, this is how you get it on the agenda.

I can tell you, there are a thousand and one things in various different reports that have been identified over the years by all sorts of people as being positive in terms of that. I do not think there is a constituency in Manitoba where there is not something that has been proposed at some point in time over the last 70, 80 years. This is not on the agenda as an immediate proposal, but I am not suggesting the member not raise it.

That is why I mention it in terms of the water strategy. This is how, I think, we are going to get to look at a lot of these issues that are out there. I am not trying to prejudge it, but I think we need a water strategy to deal with this, rather than sort of on an ad-hoc basis.

But, as I said, there is no ongoing discussion. I think that is one of those many

potential theoretical improvements to the system that could be looked at in the future.

Mr. Dyck: I will just possibly make a final comment, and that is that there is real concern in southern Manitoba in the Morden, Winkler, that area that I represent, the Pembina constituency, regarding the long-term supply of water.

So I want to just raise this to the department's and to the minister's attention, that as the communities meet—I mean, first of all, it is for, of course, potable water which they need in order for those communities to continue to grow as they are, and just, again, for the record those are some of the fastest growing communities in rural Manitoba. So there is a definite need there.

Then, of course, as the minister has alluded to before, it is also the area of livestock and irrigation for which there is a real growing demand as well.

So I will leave it at that, but, again, I just want the department and the minister to be aware that there is real concern out there, and, certainly, through the conservation districts I realize that needs to be addressed. Having talked to the people involved in conservation—I know we have one office up in Manitou that certainly they are aware of it, and, you know, they have been talking about it as well. So I will leave it at that.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the member's comments. I can indicate in terms of potable water, we do have a drinking water strategy, which I think has made some very significant improvements to the system. Primarily, by the way, when you are dealing with river systems—I mean, aquifers are the most significant source of potable water. Generally, rivers, most of our river systems are not a source of potable water. Certainly when you are in southern Manitoba, that tends to be the case.

Potable water is a somewhat different issue. The challenge, again, I want to stress is when you are under a drought, because I just want to let you know I could show you a stack of letters like this where people think that there is water being hidden away somewhere, that we can just open up a tap or lower a dam level. This is a

severe drought. I mean we have lakes in northern Manitoba, my own area, six feet below the normal level. We have beaches where there were rocks before on the shoreline. We have all sorts of challenges this year.

It is ironic, too, because just in the same way that when you have a major flood, when you get a really bad flood, in a lot of cases there is very little you can do. Even as good as the floodway is, it only protects up to certain levels. We are going to a one-in-seven-hundred-year level. So I think sometimes one of the reasons we need this long-term strategy is I have often heard presentations put forward by people where there is not a real connection between what it means for others upstream or downstream and what the cost is relative to the benefit. That is why, quite frankly, we have to get out of the ad-hoc approach and we have to get into watershed planning and we have to get into ways of financing the good projects. I will be the first one to say, and I am not prejudging this one, there are a lot of good projects out there that have not been built.

Then, again, I was Highways Minister for three years and there were a lot of good highways that had not been built either, so.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the minister is understanding of water management that is a challenge at the best of times. I want to ask the question that I have posed to the Minister for Industry and Trade (Ms. Mihychuk). I posed the same question to the Premier (Mr. Doer). I posed the same question to the Agriculture Minister (Ms. Wowchuk), and they have all deferred to you. So the weight is on your shoulders, Mr. Minister. That is in regard to an earlier water-management strategy that was a commitment made in the whole proposal to bring Simplot to Manitoba, and that is to afford the water-management strategy that will essentially add the ability to irrigate an additional 160 000 acres in the province.

I know that within the strategy to attempt to put forward a plan, there was an interdepartmental committee that was to be crafted between Conservation, Agriculture, Industry and Trade, and Intergovernmental Affairs. This committee,

I know, has met. I believe the chair of that committee is Dr. Barry Todd, who is the assistant deputy minister from Agriculture. But I would like to ask is there a progress report in regard to this committee and its significant task ahead of it.

* (16:40)

Mr. Ashton: The quick answer to that is there is enough water, under normal circumstances, for Phase 1, and in terms of further phases, that it is the role of the committee to work on that. That is a very specific question the member has raised.

Mr. Faurschou: Yes, that is true for Phase 1. But as one wants to build into the optimum four-year rotation and currently there is 17 000 to 20 000 acres required for the first production line, Mr. Simplot alluded to, at the opening of the Simplot plant, that they would like to expand the plant within about one year's time to double that capacity, thereby extending to 34 000 to 40 000 acres of needed production annually for that one processing plant. So, with that in mind, it significantly enhances the need for progress under this committee. It all comes back to water-management strategy, which the minister already recognizes, but we have to put that strategy in place, and I know it is a challenge to do province-wide.

So, what I am asking at this point in time is to bring the more focussed approach to areas that afford potato production and high-value crop production, and that, essentially, is in and about the Assiniboine River and areas along the Boine and on into the Winkler-Morden-Pembina Valley. I know this comes on the heels of, already, the Pembina Dam, but such involvement will require some major capital investment, perhaps at the mouth of the Shell River, with the Zelena dam or on the Assiniboine with the Holland No. 3 Dam or on the Pembina River with the Pembina Dam. Those are the types of projects I am referring to.

Would the minister, other than that, bring up a progress report, please?

Mr. Ashton: I want to stress, with the Simplot plant, it is the low production involved is a challenge when you are dealing with potatoes.

The member knows one of the key elements is water. Potatoes require a very significant supply of fresh water to grow. One of the reasons why an increasing part of the potato industry is being located in Manitoba is because of our water supply.

This is why, when I talk about the water strategy, I think we tend to forget just how much of a competitive advantage it is. What I want to stress again is the water supply for phase one has been identified. We believe we can through this process identify the water supply required for the next phase. There may be a period of time, obviously, in which the various different mechanisms are put in place to accomplish that. Once you develop the strategy, obviously, it has to be implemented, but that is why this committee is in place, and I am sure the Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines (Ms. Mihychuk), even when she deferred the question, or when the Premier (Mr. Doer) deferred the question, would have indicated that we are optimistic we can come up with a sustainable solution.

I want to stress, by the way, that this is a pure example where sustainability is critical both for the industry and also from the environmental perspective. We have to look out for the environmental side of this but also for the industry, they need predictability here, they need a predictable supply of water. We are working on this as a very significant priority.

I just want to put on the record, too, and I am sure the member can echo this or I am sure he has said this publicly in his own community, how significant Simplot is for his community, and also, in terms of the province, in terms of the economic side, the number of jobs created both directly and indirectly.

I think it is important to note, too, and I realize this is a general comment but, I often find when it comes to agriculture that there is a fair amount of pressure that is often put on the agricultural sector when it comes to environmental issues. I think people have to recognize, given some of the developments taking place in agriculture the last number of years, with the oil and grain seeds crisis the last couple of years, the last little while with BSE, one of the areas where there has been a real turnaround, and it is

reflected now in the price of land in the Portage area, is in potato production, vegetable production generally. I see one of our most significant competitive edges in agriculture, potatoes and other vegetables. So this has been a real priority for our Government and it is a priority for our department to make sure that we can with the phase two needs of Simplot.

Mr. Faurschou: I just want to emphasize to the minister though, we are running out of tomorrows in this regard. We really have to get onto these projects that are involved in here. The Industry, Trade and Mines Minister is aware that there is yet another major potato processing company looking to Manitoba right now. We have to be shown as leaders in water resource management, and it is absolutely imperative that we see some progress, not just more discussion. It has to have progress.

The bottom line of it is, recently in the American Water Resources Journal an article was published about long-term cyclical drought. They are projecting, in approximately a decade's time, us entering into a drought period of megaproportions. It would make the Dirty Thirties look like a minor small-time drought. So, I think that it is imperative that we get on with this.

Now, I would like to defer back to my honourable colleague from Steinbach, and I thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the member's comments and this is one of the predictions of climate change. This is a predictable consequence of climate change. We are seeing it already and I think we are going to continue to see it. I want to indicate this is a priority for our Government. I would say, of all the environmental issues we are dealing with, water, certainly, is one of the top priorities, if not the top priority, everything from source to tap, including the agricultural side and the irrigation side.

We have done a lot of work working with Simplot. I want to commend our Agriculture Minister and our Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines ((Ms. Mihychuk). We are really proud of the work we have been able to do. I want to stress again, when I say we are working on phase 2, this is not about tomorrow. We are

working on it today. We would not even be at phase 2 if all the work had not gone into getting to phase 1. I want to stress that.

I do not want to underestimate, however, that it is not just a simple matter of turning on a tap somewhere and finding a water source. We have to look at, yes, the trends that the member is talking about, but we also have to make sure that whatever we do is sustainable, both environmentally and is sustainable for other agricultural users, because I am sure the member would not want us to come up with a program that only focused in on one agricultural sector and not on another. There are many other farmers out there who rely on that same water. We have to make sure we are aware of that.

I can tell you that we are optimistic about our ability to come up with a sustainable plan for phase 2. We are doing it on an expedited basis. I will maybe leave it because I know the critic has some further questions, but I will not just say stay tuned. I will say that we are very optimistic that we can come up with a solution. I thank the member for raising the question.

* (16:50)

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate what the vacancy rate for NROs is in the province?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can indicate. I can get that information. It also may be useful to let the member know that we have either filled or are in the process of filling 12 replacement NRO positions, but I will get the specific vacancy rate taking into account the most recent hirings.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that undertaking.

Can the minister indicate, I understand there were some safety audits that were undertaken on the province's beaches in the last year. I think half of the beaches, maybe 40 audits were taken. I wonder if the minister can provide us with copies of the results of those audits.

Mr. Ashton: I can indicate some of it is already in the public domain, but I am certainly more willing to provide that, because there has been a lot of work done by the department, I think a lot

of very useful work. We are, I think, at the point too where we are taking a system that had some safety features built into it, but we have through this audit been able to identify some specific issues, some specific site issues that are important. We will undertake to provide that information to the member.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that undertaking. Still on the issue of parks and the operation of parks, can the minister indicate how many applications there have been for commercial developments in provincial parks over the last fiscal year?

Mr. Ashton: That would have to be compiled, but I can provide the member with that information.

Mr. Goertzen: If the minister could undertake to provide the number and the nature of those applications, that would be appreciated.

I wonder if the minister can indicate whether or not, and this goes to the issue of the operation of the parks again: Is there any consideration within the department to make specific provincial parks non-drinking throughout the year? I know that certainly during May long weekends right now there is a ban, I think province-wide, on alcohol consumption in provincial parks. But, I wonder if there is consideration being given to designation of specific parks to non-drinking parks?

Mr. Ashton: What I want to indicate is that as minister, in terms of parks, we are dealing here, of course, with camping sites. I have asked for an internal review of not just that particular focus, but whether there are not ways in which we can develop a better way for Manitobans to enjoy a camping experience without being impacted by the activities of others.

I want to stress here that 99 percent of our campers never run into any difficulty, are not evicted. If they do drink, they drink in moderation. We are dealing with the 1 percent. I guess it is like anything in society when you are dealing with the 1 percent.

One of the specific things I would like to see, as minister, is if we can look at the

feasibility of looking, particularly in larger campsites, at designated areas. Not to just look at alcohol, by the way, but one of the key issues really is not so much just alcohol, it is noise levels, particularly late at night, dare I say. I think we need to look at that.

What is interesting is someone actually came up with a very useful suggestion. We look at the experience at the Folk Festival that has developed. From its experience over the years there has been the development of a varied approach, working with the staff out there in terms of camping. I am not sure how they are classified so I have to be very careful here, but there are family, very quiet sites and there are less quiet sites. Is that a better way of putting it?

An Honourable Member: That would be accurate.

Mr. Ashton: That would be accurate. The Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) speaking from some experience, I take it. I will not ask the Member for Wolseley which campsite he chose.

I think this is important. I should add another thing too, by the way. I think one of the key elements here is to build in some greater consumer choice as well. That is another thing that we are looking at internally currently is greater flexibility in accessing our park system in terms of camping. Obviously, we are looking at more spots, that is part of our commitment, 1000 additional camping spots, but whether we cannot use the booking system to provide some greater flexibility, greater choice to Manitobans. If you go to see the Bombers, you either buy a season ticket or you can buy packs of tickets, or you can buy individual tickets. I know the issue of alcohol comes up at Bomber games too. I think that is the approach we are looking at.

We will also, by the way, look at whether there should be other designated weekends out there at certain specific parks.

The only thing, quite apart from that we are also looking at supervision in parks and park use generally because it is not just at campsites. If there are difficulties, whether it is alcohol or other related disturbances, we take that very seriously. It is really unfortunate. I know we

have a long, cold winter, but when summer comes some people get out of hand and abuse the privilege of being in a provincial park.

Going into the next season I have asked for a report on some options for ways in which we can improve the experience for people. It may come down to something as basic as having different types of camping experiences available. I am not suggesting that any of them would involve some of the levels of rowdiness or violence that have occurred in isolated cases. That is never going to be acceptable. But, there may be ways in which we can work out where people who want to be able to go to bed early with their family and not have a level of disturbance will be able to do so, and others who want to go out and perhaps enjoy a bit of music and a few beers—coming from Thompson, Manitoba I probably would have been in that category most of the years—can do it but without interfering with other people's experience.

By the way, I would appreciate any advice from the member because this is very much an issue that is under review. We are hoping to have some changes in place for the next park season.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for the response and for the openness to look at different ways of providing park experiences. Certainly, I think everybody here wants to ensure that the reputation of Manitoba parks is preserved, not just preserved but in fact enhanced.

I would think there are those within Manitoba who would like the assurance, families would like the assurance when they are going to campgrounds, that there are certain types of behaviour that they can know that they will not have to encounter. Drinking is just one element of it. You mentioned noise level, and that is, certainly, something that I think needs to be examined as well. Perhaps along that vein, because the minister referenced whether or not people have a level of safety within the parks, but also that their camping is a privilege and not an established right within our province—along that same line of questioning, I wonder if the minister can indicate: If somebody is asked to leave a provincial park, whether it is a noise

complaint or for other reasons, are they prevented for any length of time from coming back and registering on a campsite?

Mr. Ashton: I should stress that it is still statistically very rare. I will actually undertake to ask that question of the department as part of our review because I think I know where the member's question leads. That might be another element we can incorporate, if it is not currently there, to prevent problems in the future. The difficulty, of course, is that with any of this type of situation anybody can get a camping site. So it would not necessarily be a foolproof system, because even if you did have a policy that if you were evicted you could not get back in, it could be put under somebody else's name. So our hope is to stamp out the kind of environment that leads to eviction. I think we can do it.

By the way, the alcohol-free weekends have worked. If you look at the first weekend of the season, that tends to be the worst weekend. We are also working on other park situations, generally, to make sure we can keep rowdiness down. In fact, we have taken a very strong action, I think this year, in a number of areas to make sure that happens.

* (17:00)

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, the minister, I think, does know where I am going on this issue. It seems to me that if there is cause to remove somebody from a provincial park, and I have seen the experience—I have not been on the receiving end of it, thankfully—where someone within a park is removed. It is usually after one, two or three warnings, and it is usually not the first time that the park patrol comes to the campsite. It seems to me that that person's right to reserve a campsite, whether it is in that season or some other extended period of time, should be removed.

The minister clearly indicates, and rightly so, that it is not a foolproof system. It would not prevent somebody from coming into a campsite with somebody else and having a site registered under somebody else's name. But, having said that, it is something that I think would prevent a certain degree of abuse within our system. I am not looking to impose a costly hierarchy system

of checks and balances. But I do not think that it would be a difficult system to maintain a list of those who have violated rules such that they have been asked to leave our provincial parks. I think that the minister should look at including that. Obviously, he is not doing the review himself. It is being undertaken, I understand, privately, but he should look at that as well as part of the recommendations that come forward.

There have been some concerns raised by the public about the patrolling of the parks. The indications seem to be that after a certain hour, after midnight, there are fewer patrols within the provincial parks. Those would seem to be the times. But perhaps there are more patrols. Often these things are our perception more than reality, but maybe the minister can indicate whether or not patrols within parks are reduced after midnight.

Mr. Ashton: It varies from park to park. We look, obviously, at experience in that at any particular park, in terms of the degree of supervision at any time. It is, basically, based on previous experience. So there is no one set of standards by any particular park. If the member would like more detailed information, I could arrange a briefing or even see if we can compile that in terms of on a park-by-park basis. We have a significant number of parks, and, obviously, they vary in supervision. In some cases we do not have the challenge of camping sites and rowdiness because those are not camping sites, or there may be a relatively small number that traditionally have not provided any problems. I can provide whatever detailed information the member wants.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Minister. Certainly, a compilation of statistics on the patrol of the individual parks and times of patrols and things would be helpful to the line of questioning that I have undertaken.

We will turn quickly to questions of water quality, a few specific questions. The minister certainly is aware, I think there was a question referenced maybe specifically to it in the House today regarding the taking action to improve water quality, the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission report. My understanding is that the Government's response to the report was that

they agreed to the report in principle, by recalling the words correctly from the news release. I have noticed in other reports that have come out more recently, the minister has indicated that they accept those reports fully.

I guess, specifically, I would ask the minister: When he indicates that he accepts the report in principle, is that a limited response or is he looking to implement all the recommendations of the report?

Mr. Ashton: First of all, if you read the report, I think it is fairly clear that there are some very significant directions outlined in the CEC report. It is not a blueprint in the sense that the City went in with a 50-year proposal and CEC has come up with its own time range. It was actually a specific reference report. I know the member probably has read the report.

In that sense, it clearly is a report that is a report to be put forward publicly, in this case it is myself as minister, for adoption in principle. What we have done on the provincial side, because there are various aspects of the report that deal with the Province, we have indicated that achieved by the end of this month, because the release took place August 31. Within 30 days we would have our own specific point-by-point implementation plan or response. Some of the things were clearly certainly within provincial jurisdiction. Immediately after we received the report, we have been working with the City. I think we are going to be looking at a situation where it is not a limiting agreement, in principle. What we are trying to move on here is, obviously, both at our level and at the City's level. Also, the further role of the CEC is basically treating this as a foundation for an action plan.

I also want to stress, too, that as you were probably aware, there was an interim report that was issued. We indicated at that time, so did the City, agreement in principle with the CEC report. I think it is very important to put on the record that to a large extent this really should have happened a lot earlier. I raised this in the House. In 1992 it was supposed to go to—it was recognized within six months to be referred back to the Clean Environment Commission, at that particular point in time. One thing that the Clean

Environment Commission process clearly identified was, in addition to overall policy directions, there were clear problems with the system, in fact, the lack of redundancies built into the system with the City of Winnipeg. I think the CEC report is an excellent report in addressing some of the root problems.

When I say we agreed to it in principle immediately, that is not a limiting statement. I think it is that we agree to the basic principles. We will also commit ourselves, the Province, to move ahead on this because this is a key part of our strategy for Lake Winnipeg. I am very pleased that we are actually going to see some very significant progress in this area.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister did a fairly good job of moving around the question. Specifically, I would like to ask him regarding the recommendation that the City of Winnipeg be directed to shorten the time frame to complete the sewer overflow plan from 50 years to 20 to 25. Probably, it is difficult to talk about that without talking about the recommendation that financial resources be provided to the City from the Province, but those are two recommendations of specific interest.

I wonder if the minister can comment whether or not he, either in principle or fully, agrees with the recommendation that the time frame be shortened to 20, to 25 years.

Mr. Ashton: The question referred to the report in general, and then asked whether we agreed to it in principle as a limiting statement or not. I made the point that we did not agree to it. We did not take the report and look for the minimum level of commitment. Our commitment in principle was, I think, to the basic principle of the report. Summed up, it is to move on an expedited basis compared to what was on the books and what was proposed by the City of Winnipeg.

Clearly the proposals from the City of Winnipeg were not considered to be acceptable by the Clean Environment Commission and the time frame, the 20-25-year time frame, I think is the minimum time frame that we need to be looking at.

I hope that in further discussions with the City if there is a way of improving on that time frame that we can do so. I want to stress again that the fact that it has a range of 20 to 25 years I think points to the fact that the Clean Environment Commission recognized the need for a clearer general goal but understood that there are things that have to happen to make that happen.

In terms of the cost that is attached to it, obviously the City of Winnipeg in its documentation to the Clean Environment Commission did put forward some of the estimated costs. It will not be cheap, I have no doubt about that, but in this case we believe obviously that it has to be a significant priority.

It points to a couple of things. I know there is reference in the report to cost sharing. I think our position as the provincial government has been for some time that there should be an ongoing infrastructure program, a renewed infrastructure program. I point out that one of the key focuses of the current infrastructure program has been sewer and water. So clearly that is in place, but again this is where I think the City of Winnipeg will have to also play a key role.

The City of Winnipeg has clear jurisdiction in this area. They do have a revenue stream that is attached to it. I am not going to prejudge any of their financing proposals because obviously that is one of the other aspects here that is the next step in the report.

We have committed to, within 30 days, respond directly to the specifics in the report within provincial jurisdiction. We will do that. That will be out within the 30-day period, but we are not just stopping there, obviously. We are working very closely with the City of Winnipeg currently.

As I said, I think this document, the specifics I think virtually all of them are doable. Some of them may be doable in an expedited way even compared to the report. The general principle, absolutely, we need a far better system for treatment of waste water in the city of Winnipeg as part of our overall efforts to protect the watershed.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question concerns the floodway. Following the flood of '97, there was a series of lawsuits, I know, and problems over compensation issues.

Are there outstanding lawsuits? If so, how many?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there are outstanding lawsuits. I can have the department track down exactly how many, but I know there are a number of outstanding lawsuits, yes.

Mr. Gerrard: When does the minister expect to bring forward the bill outlining the process of compensation?

* (17:10)

Mr. Ashton: This upcoming session. Of course, we are in a period of time where we are dealing with Estimates, but certainly within the next legislative calendar.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister is making cottage lots available. You have changed the policy. Is that because there were problems with other areas, other than, for example, Hecla on the east side of Lake Winnipeg where there was unfair allocation or concerns about allocation of cottage lots?

Mr. Ashton: I think the member is referring to the general issue of sale or lease of Crown lands. What I can indicate is, that was clear and it is, obviously, in the Auditor General's report, also, from some of the information that went into that before, of problems, and I will not get into the details. I know the member has read the report. I know the member has raised questions about this in the House before and in Estimates, I believe, many of which were good questions, quite frankly, and identified some of the gaps that were out there in terms of lack of accountability and lack of transparency.

What we have done from the experience at Hecla is that we are now looking at the situation with other similar types of issues to make sure that what happened at Hecla did not happen elsewhere. We are not prejudging that. It is not based on any specific case having been brought forward. Outside of the area of remote cottage

lots—and I point out that my predecessor here at the committee today, the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) stopped the then-practice of making remote cottage lots available, essentially on request, and that, to my mind, was again problematic. There may not have been issues similar to Hecla in terms of some of the legal issues involved, fraud or other issues, but if only some people know about lots and others do not, it fails the test of transparency and accountability that Hecla failed in a major way.

So the review we are undertaking is not based on necessarily specific cases, but I will be up front here. If there were problems at Hecla, Hecla was somewhat unique, but I want to make sure that (a) we want to identify if there were further problems, and (b) when we move forward that we can come up with a system that does not just deal with Hecla but makes sure we have a much better system for dealing with Crown land sale and lease in the future.

Mr. Gerrard: On the MOU signed with Ontario in terms of the Conawapa, which agrees to a report by November 20, the language in that is to co-operate in this study and facilitate commercial discussions by ensuring all financial options are evaluated and social and economic impacts are considered. It is a little surprising that the language contains the words "social and economic" and does not include "social and economic and environmental" impacts, and I am just concerned whether the minister was not consulted or was not included or whether the environmental impacts, the environmental situation and importance does not rank as high as the other areas.

Mr. Ashton: Obviously, if you look at Wuskwatim—and I know the member said about Conawapa, there is a very current example of where we have in place a joint review process in which the environmental concerns and issues will be paramount, in which we have funded a very significant intervenor program in excess of \$900,000. I am sure the member is aware that many of the intervenors are focussing in on environmental, social and other issues, but very specifically, including the environmental issues. I want to indicate that we take seriously as a provincial government the environmental

considerations. Quite frankly, when you are dealing with the requirement in this case for a process that also satisfies the federal government's environmental requirements, Conawapa will be treated no differently than Wuskwatim, in the sense that there will have to be full and proper consideration of environmental factors and an appropriate process that fundamentally deals with a number of factors, but, absolutely, environmental factors.

Mr. Gerrard: When looking at the management of fisheries, there have been concerns for many years about management of the walleye fishery on Lake Winnipegosis.

I wonder if the minister could give us an update and current situation on what he is doing.

Mr. Ashton: Lake Winnipegosis was the specific?

An Honourable Member: Yes. The walleye.

Mr. Ashton: What I can indicate is we put in place a Lake Winnipegosis advisory board which is very important, bringing together all the stakeholders that are there. This is important because Lake Winnipegosis is a challenge in terms of some of the situations with fish stock that we are dealing with. Also, given the biology of the lake, there are no easy solutions available. Stocking, for example, is often put forward as a proposal, but stocking is not necessarily a solution for any and all lakes or any and all aspects of the lake.

If the member wants more information on the departmental level, I can provide him with a briefing, or if he wants information on a more technical basis. But I think we have recognized on Lake Winnipegosis the need for an approach that parallels Lake Winnipeg. In this case, though, we will particularly focus on some of the major challenges with fish stock in Lake Winnipegosis, because certainly that has been a very significant concern.

One of the advantages, I think, of this approach, and we are looking at expanding it to other lakes, is when you bring all the stakeholders and the communities together, one of the great advantages, then is, I think, you get all of

the interests at the table. You get out of, perhaps, some of the previous ways of doing things which is where everybody lobbies for what is good for their interest, and quite legitimately, but it does not necessarily give us the best global picture.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the minister provide to us the list of members and the terms of reference for the advisory committee?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can provide a list of members. I will provide it to the member in writing. What we are looking at is a round-table approach as I mentioned. I can also provide the terms of reference, but, essentially, it will address some of the critical issues, particularly on the fisheries side because it is a real challenge in Lake Winnipegosis.

The challenge is particularly compounded by the fact that there is a fair amount of local employment that comes from the fishery. I will undertake to get the management board composition and terms of reference to the member.

Mr. Gerrard: On the Protected Areas Initiative, which, I gather, is under Parks and Natural Areas, can the minister tell us who is in charge and what the specific budget allocation is and the people involved?

Mr. Ashton: I can get the specific budget numbers, but Dave Wotton, Assistant Deputy Minister, who is here today, has specific responsibility for that, recognizing that it is a significant area for the department. There are other staff that work on this initiative, but Dave Wotton is directly responsible for it.

Mr. Gerrard: To shorten the time today, if you could provide that to me, that would be very helpful.

There was a commitment made some time ago about having an updated protected areas map. That has not been forthcoming. I wonder when it will be?

* (17:20)

Mr. Ashton: We actually have updated and provided a number of maps. I am not sure which

one the member is talking about, but there are various different maps that have been released.

What I can suggest on that, again in the interests of time, is I can document the maps that have been updated, and if the member would actually like copies of those maps, that can be arranged.

Mr. Gerrard: On the Poplar River and the Chitek Lake areas, protected areas, can you give us the current status of the Lowland National Park, has that got full protected area status covering the park yet?

Mr. Ashton: In the interest of time again, too, some of these issues, I wish we had 240 hours of Estimates time. Well, okay, not on all of them. I am getting this look around the table here, because each one of them, if we had had the time, would have been a 10- or 15-minute answer.

Just briefly, the Lowland National Park the member is referring to, we are committed, we are working very closely on that. There are still some community issues that are under discussion. We have done everything possible to support and expedite the process, but we respect some of the kinds of issues that are still involved in both Chitek Lake and the Poplar River situation, very similar circumstances. I actually met with the Poplar River—some time again there was a change over at the band level; they were very much committed to that, and the bottom line here is we are still committed in all three cases to moving ahead.

Mr. Gerrard: I think that, if you can provide me some extra details in writing, that would be sufficient in large measure, but I think that there is a fair amount of concern with the Lowland National Park and why it has been so slow and so little progress in fact in making sure that the area is covered and protected.

Mr. Ashton: I want to stress again that the key issues that remain to be dealt with are involved with the First Nations, and from the experience in the 1990s, where at the provincial level we moved forward with designations that did not involve First Nations, we are committed. If it takes a bit more time, we think that is

appropriate. We are committed to making sure the First Nations are fully consulted and that First Nations concerns are dealt with. So that is the situation with the Lowland National Park, and it is the same thing at Poplar River and Chitek Lake.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Madam Chairperson, I will be very brief. I want to refer to the water conference that the minister had last spring and the comments that he made, and reflecting the nitrate and phosphate flows off of farmland south of the city of Winnipeg down the Red River Valley.

I just want to say to the minister, if he cares to take the time to come out, I will let him visit some of the farms and show him the huge investments that farmers have made to stop the erosion, to stop the water contamination to ensure that fertility products are incorporated, and the huge investments that farmers have made in equipment in changing the way they do business. I would venture to say that, if all of society had made that kind of contribution to protecting the environment, our water quality in the lakes would be much, much better, including the effluent discharges out of the city of Winnipeg and all the towns and villages that discharge their lagoons every year.

I think the minister needs to apologize to the farm community for the comments that he made at that water conference and indicate to the farm community instead, he needs to say to them: Good job done for the environment practice that you incur today.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I make no apologies for announcing as part of our water strategy our commitment to work with all Manitobans to deal with the challenge in terms of nutrient overload. You know, I made it very clear. I was asked very specifically who was responsible for this, and by my account it is 1.1 million people. It is not just municipalities. It is not just farmers. It is not just industrial users, and it also, by the way, even within the farm sector, is not just one—

An Honourable Member: I just wanted to give one side.

Mr. Ashton: One side—

An Honourable Member: I just wanted to give credit where credit was due.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I appreciate that, but the member comes in and, two minutes, there seems to be kind of a standard script now: come in and attack the minister and ask for an apology. Next thing he will ask me to resign. I am ready. I have seen the script here.

I want to make it very clear that we are working very closely with the agricultural sector. I give the example of our livestock initiative because there is a good example. We have made some real progress. It is not easy for the industry, but the industry itself, the livestock industry itself recognizes that environmental stewardship has to be an important part of what it is doing and it is working with us.

Fortunately, I would say nearly 1.1 million Manitobans are prepared to co-operate and work with us. There may be one, the member who just spoke, who does not want to work co-operatively with us, but I will tell you most of the agricultural sector, I have met with KAP, I have met with livestock producers, I have met with others, they are committed. So I am not apologizing for saying to agriculture, you are working hard on this issue and we see you as part of the solution. I tell you 1.1 million Manitobans are part of the solution so I would suggest the member get with the program and join the rest of us.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,622,100 for Conservation, Conservation Support Services, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$47,924,500 for Conservation, Regional Operations, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$53,597,800 for Conservation, Conservation Programs, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,475,400 for Conservation, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$512,000 for Conservation, Clean Environment Commission, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,145,900 for Conservation, International Institute for Sustainable Development, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,915,300 for Conservation, Infrastructure and Minor Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,329,200 for Conservation, Amortization and Other Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department of Conservation is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary, \$29,000, contained in Resolution 12.1. At this point we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item.

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$6,527,100 for Conservation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2004.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for the Department of Conservation. What is the will of the committee? Committee rise.

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering and dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education and Youth. This department already has commenced consideration in Room 254 and continuing in the Chamber. Will the minister's staff please enter the Chamber now.

These Estimates have been considered with the method of global discussion, although no resolution has yet been passed. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I would just like to say that with respect to amalgamation, I believe we warned this Government of the cost that would arise as a result of their forced amalgamation of school divisions.

We warned them time and time again of the costs that would be associated with their forced amalgamations, but the problem, Mr. Chair, is that the minister and the Government did not listen to us in this regard. Because I believe if they had, if they had taken this very seriously, either they would not have forced the school boards to, or they would have put some sort of a plan in place to deal with the costs as a result of the harmonization of contracts and so on, and so many other costs that we have yet to see as a result of their forced amalgamation.

But this is just the beginning of those costs that the taxpayers of our province are going to see. The minister and this Government, and really it was not this minister at the time, he was not the minister at the time the amalgamation took place but certainly he was around the

Cabinet table—I just think it is unfortunate that they did not listen to the warnings of the incredible costs that would be associated with this forced amalgamation. This is all going to fall back onto the taxpayers of our province. I think it is very unfortunate that there is absolutely no plan in place to deal with the increasing costs, but beyond this, which I believe is the main point here, are the cost increases of amalgamation to the taxpayers of our province.

Beyond this, we have come across an issue here that I believe is very important to the taxpayers of our province to be aware of. Basically, this Government paid \$428,000 of taxpayers' money to end a strike in the Sunrise School Division just two weeks prior to an election. I think, with respect to the Government agreeing to give this money to the school division, it is unbelievable the process that took place, or the lack of process that there was.

They have set an unbelievable precedent that I believe is unheard of and very unparliamentary when it comes to dealing with taxpayers' money, and I think it is rather unfortunate that things have transpired the way they have.

Basically, what we heard today, when asked the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) in Question Period today why did he direct his employee, Mr. Lloyd Schreyer, to intervene in the collective bargaining process in the Sunrise School Division, the Minister of Finance did not deny the fact that he directed his employee to intervene in this collective bargaining process in Sunrise School Division to help end this dispute, this strike, just two weeks prior to the election

I would suggest that the Minister of Education (Mr. Lemieux) is perhaps somewhat off the hook here. I have been asking him repeatedly in Question Period as well as in Estimates whether or not he directed Mr. Schreyer to intervene on behalf of the Government in this collective bargaining process in Sunrise School Division, and on Friday the minister did not deny that he felt it was inappropriate for the Treasury Board employee to be involved in the labour dispute in Sunrise School Division.

I agree with that. I believe it is inappropriate for a Treasury Board employee to be involved in

settling labour disputes, and I have questioned that, and I have asked that in Estimates time and time again. I gather today we finally know that perhaps it was the Finance Minister who directed his employee to intervene in this process. But I just do not believe that the proper process has taken place when it comes to this issue, and I believe the Government has a lot of questions to answer.

They have refused in the Estimates process and Question Period to answer some of the questions that I believe the taxpayers of Manitoba have a right to hear and have a right to, and I believe it is time that the Minister of Education (Mr. Lemieux), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the Premier (Mr. Doer) come clean on what really took place here. Basically, this was hush money prior to an election in a target riding, and I think the sooner they come clean, the sooner we can, with some of our questioning surrounding this issue, get to the bottom of this issue.

But I guess my question for the minister at this point, we are going to continue along this line of questioning until we do receive some answers, and again I believe it is extremely important for the taxpayers of Manitoba to be able to have access to these answers.

So I would like to ask the minister: Who asked the minister to approve the \$428,000 from his budget?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Education and Youth): Mr. Chairperson, I just wanted to reiterate once again that certainly the Opposition is entitled to ask any question they wish within, of course, parliamentary rules, and the answers that they get may be not always the answers they want, and so their line of questioning—they can pursue whatever line of questioning they want. The fact of the matter is we have answered their questions as to exactly what took place with regard to a school division, sent a letter to the Province—March 24, I believe the date was—expressing their views about how anxious they were to meet because of the labour challenges that they had with regard to salary harmonization, a gap of 15 percent to 60 percent. They felt that they would be hard pressed to address this challenge.

* (15:10)

There are two points that the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), my Education critic, raises. One, about dealing with amalgamation: she stated about the benefits of amalgamation and the cost of amalgamation, which I would like to touch on. Also, with regard to the financing of or assisting the Sunrise School Division with regard to their challenge, they had to close the gap between 15 percent and 60 percent.

With regard to amalgamation, first of all, we, as a government, took a look at amalgamation the way the previous government did about looking at the benefits with regard to amalgamated divisions. If this existed what would this look like? Would there be a benefit? By benefit, I mean is programming to children, also because we have stated repeatedly that this would not happen overnight, there would be short-term and long-term benefits as a result. We did not say that this would happen, as I said before, overnight. We said that whether it be administration, where you have to close three division offices and you get back to having only one school division office for, let us say, three divisions who are getting together—those kinds of benefits do not just happen overnight. It takes some time, either through retirement or through people going into different positions. That is just one point on amalgamation.

The previous government had the Norrie report. The Norrie report was going to reduce school divisions down to, I believe, 22 divisions or around 20 divisions, from the 57 or so divisions that existed. Our Government made a reduction in school divisions through consultation down to 38 divisions. What we did in that process, there was consultation with those school divisions prior to amalgamation. We stated that some of those school divisions were amalgamated by virtue of a voluntary way, where they felt it was in their best interests to do so. Other school divisions were not sure what they wanted to do. For whatever reason, they felt it would be more palatable if the Province were to ask them to amalgamate.

You had a number of divisions that did so. In that we knew that there would be some challenges prior to amalgamation. Certainly there

were a number of them. One example might be salaries to be looked at or harmonizing of salaries. Different salaries between non-teaching employees, for example, could be a challenge. We, as a government, looked at that and felt that having looked at the pros and cons of amalgamation that amalgamation was very, very important to take place.

The previous government looked at Norrie and felt massive changes to boundaries, specific areas of efficiencies could be found. Fine, that was their prerogative. They left the report on the shelf to collect dust. They did not do anything with it. Inviting and receiving comments from divisions is something that we did. We tried to do amalgamation by using a more balanced approach and not making such drastic changes.

After lengthy discussions we arrived at a compromise and a balanced plan, not as extensive as Norrie, not as hard hitting as Norrie, we felt. Certainly there was a voluntary and a non-voluntary component to that. We identified areas of efficiencies and developed administrative caps where there was 4 percent in urban areas, 4.5 in rural, 5 percent in the North. We felt as a result we could assist by having the caps in place. That hopefully would effect efficiencies throughout the province.

I know that we have also provided financial assistance for transition costs to amalgamation. The reason I make these points is because, Mr. Chairperson, the questions raised by my critic, the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), was twofold; one, taking a shot at amalgamation itself and also making comments with regard to a labour dispute that took place in Sunrise School Division. So I will try to address both.

With regard to amalgamation, and I might conclude on a couple of points just by saying that we have seen some savings in divisions already and the admin caps are in the process of—I mean, that to me is an important piece or component of amalgamation. But also we have seen what has happened so far in amalgamation, where we have had a lot of anecdotal comments, comments from superintendents and other people from the school division side, and they have made comments to us about how you have a number of school divisions that, for example,

would have never had computerization of their schools take place at the rapid pace it has without the amalgamation process taking place.

Mr. Chair, River East Transcona, for example, have used that one particular item showing how important it was. Transcona was not up to speed, at least at the same place where River East was. So what we have found is that the school division as a whole has made a concerted effort to try to bring their schools into line and have them all very, very similar.

We talked about a number of different areas—and they may come out further this afternoon—but just skimming Hansard, I certainly took a look at a number of different areas that I have repeated over the last number of days with regard to the benefits of amalgamation, but, again, I just want to reiterate that they can ask whatever questions they like. They may not get the answers they want, but the answers are the truth, and the answers are the way it happened. We have been very forthright.

You also have Prairie Rose School Division that is in a strike currently. They had conciliation just similar to Sunrise, but they have not entered into mediation at all yet. That is open to them. I asked the members last week whether or not they felt it was a good idea for them to get into mediation. I was prepared to approach and still am prepared to approach the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) and have their officials talk to Prairie Rose to see whether—if they cannot get through this logjam, maybe the way to do it is to have someone, a third party, assist them to try to resolve their differences.

All along, we did not say that the Province of Manitoba would not be assisting school divisions. We said we were prepared to assist divisions through amalgamation, and we are prepared to do that. But when you take a look at Sunrise, such a huge gap in salaries between teaching and non-teaching employees, that particular gap is certainly one that sticks out far and above any other school division in the province. So it is a division that had, for example, people from MAST, when we talked about amalgamation, raised harmonization as one challenge that they have had. They have also raised all the positive things about amalgamation. But that is

something that they raised and it just so happens that Sunrise was one of the first school divisions, I understand—at least that is what I have been advised—that would be dealing with this particular challenge.

So you have had people who were on the management negotiating team, a representative of MAST and the superintendent and others, basically telling government that there was a shortfall. They could not make it up. They could provide within what they had financially to cover two thirds of the cost of what a collective agreement would be, I understand. So they asked the Province of Manitoba to participate and to cover the other third.

This is where they passed on that information to government representation, so, as a government, we had a decision to make on whether or not those dollars, that \$112,000 for this year, could be looked at. That was the challenge for the division. The division felt they could come part way, two thirds of the way, and that they wanted the Province of Manitoba to assist them.

Here is the dilemma. We have Sunrise School Division who asked the Province. They are in for assistance. You also have Prairie Rose School Division and you also have Louis Riel School Division. Louis Riel School Division felt they could get a contract, they could get a collective agreement done without the assistance of the Province of Manitoba. That is fine. They felt I guess that three quarters of a million dollars that we gave them at \$50 per student would help them and assist them in their collective bargaining and in their salary differences with their employees.

* (15:20)

As far as the Province of Manitoba is concerned with regard to amalgamation, we are there to assist them in any way, shape or form we can. We will work with them. To the best of my knowledge, I have been advised no differently, Prairie Rose School Division has not contacted us yet asking for financial assistance or any other assistance.

As I mentioned to the members last week, I am certainly prepared to ask the Minister of

Labour (Mr. Ashton) to work with the parties and to have a mediator brought in to try to resolve their differences, because they are at loggerheads and it does not appear that it is going to change. The Province of Manitoba all along has said we are there to assist school divisions in any way, shape or form. We will work with them and try to help them over many of the challenges they might have, whether they are amalgamated divisions or not. That is the way we will proceed.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think there are a number of things here that are very unfortunate. First of all, actually the minister was answering questions at the very beginning of this Estimates process. Then we saw some sort of a note come in and then all of a sudden he is talking around issues and not dealing with the matter that is raised. Maybe he was not aware of this. Maybe it was the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), as came out in Question Period today, who did this.

I feel somewhat sorry for this minister that he was put in a very difficult position. I will say, Mr. Chair, maybe perhaps he was hung out to dry by some of his colleagues. I think that is rather unfortunate.

Normal practice in this circumstance would be that a request would come or certainly the bureaucrats in the Department of Education would be very involved when it comes to giving money—and more money—to a school division. I think it is unfortunate, again, that the minister chose to circumvent his own department in this whole process, chose to take a political route. Perhaps he was forced to do so. Again, that is rather unfortunate because I believe that maybe he was not even aware of this \$428,000 until very recently.

Certainly, when I asked the question at the beginning of Estimates he was unable to answer, even after consulting with his department, as to where the \$428,000 came from in the Estimates books. Then all of a sudden a few days later he was able to come and point to some major line in the book that it came to. I just think it is rather unfortunate. He has been put in a very difficult position. He has also put his staff in a very difficult position. I feel sorry for them in this whole issue.

I will say, Mr. Chair, just to go back to what the minister was just saying, he keeps coming back to now, the Sunrise School Division came forward and requested funding of this Government. It is just not the case. I will remind this minister again, in an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* dated Thursday, April 17, Sunrise school board chairwoman Eleanor Zieske said that Sunrise School Division had not made a formal request for government help. That was the same day the workers voted on the strike, and obviously the government money was already at the table. So Sunrise School Division did not come forward and ask for this help.

I would like to know from this minister who in that collective bargaining process came forward and asked this Government for money, and who did they ask? Did they ask the Minister of Education? Did they ask Mr. Lloyd Schreyer, who this minister says was sort of the point person, the political person put in charge of negotiating on behalf of the Government? Did they go to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)? Did they ask the Premier? Who did they ask? Because we know that there was no formal request.

Again, the Sunrise School Division, I go back and I will quote this again from Eleanor Zieske that Sunrise had not made a formal request for government help. So I would like to know who in this collective bargaining process came forward and requested funding of the Government or was it in fact Mr. Lloyd Schreyer who went perhaps to the union and said to them: What will it take in order for this to end this dispute because this would be rather embarrassing to be in the middle of a strike in the middle of an election campaign, and you know we are going to be calling an election in two weeks? Who came forward here? What happened? I say that the taxpayers of Manitoba deserve an answer to this question.

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Chairperson, the taxpayers of Manitoba have had the answer for the past week. Members opposite certainly do not care to or choose not to listen to the answer. The fact of the matter is the board chair of the school division and the superintendent when they wrote the letter to me March 24 said, we would like to enter into discussion relating to the disparity in wages between the two former parts of the

division and the impact for future Sunrise budgets and said this will place an extraordinary pressure on our budgets over the next number of years. I mean, there it is. There is a request, and you know they do not want to listen to the order, they just seem to—

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, so I just want to say that there is a letter, there is the invitation to—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order being raised by the honourable Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: Please state the point of order.

Mr. Derkach: The point of order is that, Mr. Chair, the minister has been repeatedly asked who specifically requested the money to settle the strike. I think the question is very clear. I think it is understandable that the minister wanted to put some explanation around that, but I do not think there is any misinterpretation as to what the question is. The question is who asked for the money. I think that question is fairly direct, and we simply ask for a direct answer.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order?

An Honourable Member: On the same point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order.

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): The answer has been as specific as the question. The question was who asked for the assistance. And the honourable minister has been very direct in his answer, and he has given the honourable member the answer. The letter went from the school division to request assistance because of this huge 56% wage disparity. What we have done is we have provided the answer. The honourable minister is answering the question, so therefore, it is not a point of order. I would suggest that it is just a dispute over the facts.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Thanks very much, Mr. Chairperson—

Mr. Chairperson: Is it on the same point of order?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes—

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, but I would beg to differ with the honourable member from Assiniboia in his comments on this point of order. It is very clear that the letter that came from the school division in March requested a meeting with the minister to discuss the issue of the inequities in the school division, and I might say inequities that were a direct result of this Government's political manipulation of school amalgamation. Did this Government not do their homework and not know what the implications to school divisions would be before they forced school divisions to amalgamate? They created the problem. They created the inequity. Then after the fact they are saying, well, we are trying to fix it. What is wrong with this minister and his Government?

* (15:30)

Secondly, they asked for a meeting with the minister. This was their second request for a meeting with the minister. They requested in February and he did not even have the courtesy to respond to them. They requested a meeting again in March. He indicated to us the other day, the minister indicated that he did not meet with the school division until July, long after the fact and long after political interference provided money to the school division. He did not have the courtesy to meet with the division. He did not meet with the board of trustees. Yet he says it was at their request that he fixed the problem. Well, if he did not meet with them, if he did not talk to them, how was the decision made?

Obviously, either the Minister of Education (Mr. Lemieux) was left out of the loop, and I know that his bureaucrats that are sitting at the table today, people in the financial side of his department, were left out of the loop. They were not consulted. They were not asked. The minister obviously took the political route rather

than dealing with the financial experts within his department.

Mr. Chair, the financial experts that have been in the Department of Education for years were there when we were in government and they remain there today because they do their job. They understand the finances in the Department of Education. Yet they were bypassed. They were not involved in the process of dealing with Sunrise School Division.

This minister obviously went to his colleagues, who, and whether it was the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) or the Premier (Mr. Doer) or whoever, got involved and politically manipulated the process. Someone from his Government sent Lloyd Schreyer, who is a direct political appointment to the bureaucracy by this Government, to deal with the school division.

I say shame on the minister for answering around in circles and not giving full and factual information to the taxpayers of Manitoba. Half a million dollars of taxpayers' money and he will not stand up and be held accountable for that money and for that decision. He has not answered questions for three days, and I say shame on him.

I say it is too bad for those that work hard in his department that they were bypassed and after the fact, after the election had to come back and were told then that the money was to flow and they were to make it happen. They were not involved in the process. They were not involved in the analysis. But they were told and they were directed by either this minister or this minister was used by some of his colleagues to direct the department after the fact to be involved. I think it is shameful. I do agree with my colleague when she says—

Mr. Chairperson: Our rules of the House state generally speaking it is the task of the Opposition to ask questions. It is the duty of the Government to give answers. The Opposition cannot dictate what answer the Government gives. What is a violation of the rule is to use the vehicle of point of order in order to debate the issue, which apparently is being done now. That is the violation of the rule. The rules of order are for pointing out what the departure from the

rules are, not use it as a vehicle for debating the issue, which is question and answer between opposition and government.

An Honourable Member: But a darned good point was raised.

Mr. Chairperson: A darned good point, but that is the wrong way to do it.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, to continue answering the question if he wishes to.

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. I think your ruling is a very important one. The Opposition can raise whatever question they want under the sun, but the answer they get may not be an answer they want to hear because it does not fit their scenario, or whatever case or point they are trying to make.

So, Mr. Chairperson, I just want to state that we have been very, very clear that you have had representatives, the negotiating team from Sunrise School Division, speaking to a representative of the Government telling the representative of the Government exactly what the facts are with regard to the shortfall. They could provide for two thirds of that harmonization of salaries. They certainly wanted the Government to participate as a partner in making up that shortfall of the other third.

We have been very frank and honest and forthright with regard to that and we are telling them. Then the invitation came prior, a letter, to all of this, to me, asking that and stating how serious it was, this discrepancy in salary, as was pointed out by my colleague from Assiniboia, about how they want to enter into discussions relating to the disparity of wages between their employees, from 15% to 60% gaps in salaries in places. So it was a very serious issue with regard to the discrepancy in that area. I just want to state that this is a school division that—as the Province of Manitoba has worked closely with the previous Minister of Education as well as myself, has provided major projects and assistance to the school division: a new school and child care facility in Gillis, Manitoba; in Beausejour, a replacement school in that community; also, the Springfield Middle School, there is an

addition in renovations. So our Government has continually provided support to that school division in that area over the last four years.

So, Mr. Chairperson, as a government, we are certainly prepared to assist the school divisions in the province. As we see it, it is not only our duty and obligation, but it is something that we feel, because education is a huge priority for our Government, whether it be dealing with the economic development activities in the province of Manitoba, not only on the post-secondary side with the new Red River Community College expansion, but also with the funds we have provided to the University of Manitoba, U of W, Brandon, and so on. So our Government has been very, very supportive. If you take a look just at Sunrise School Division alone, we have already provided support for the amalgamation cost of this school division of about \$50 per student, which is a total of about approximately \$250,000 to Sunrise School Division, payable over three years, depending on student population. If the student population increases, they will get more financial support. If it decreases, the dollars will come accordingly. But Sunrise School Division is a combination of rural-urban and, therefore, had a wider gap in wages that have repeatedly been mentioned.

Even on Friday in Hansard, on page 825, I talked about when amalgamation legislation passed. We assured the school divisions that we would work with them through the process of wage disparity and other issues. Then I made mention of the letter we had received wanting to receive assistance. Then you have a strike that happened, and when the government official from the department went to work with them—then, you had a person from MAST, the superintendent, and, really, the negotiating team from Sunrise making their case to the government official about how they could only make up two thirds; they could cover two thirds of it and the other third they could not cover. So here are the reasons for it, and it is salary, and so on. They made a case for why they are unable to do so and why they are unable to cover that gap. So here you have a request.

The Government certainly has a responsibility to, in the public interest, I might say, as

we are, look at Prairie Rose School Division, look to see what is happening there. Again, I ask the members opposite. They are concerned about the children in Prairie Rose as they are with Sunrise, and I asked them, I said do you think that it would be a good idea for mediation to take place in Prairie Rose right now. The conciliation broke off. They are at a strike. They have been in a strike for a week now. I was asking the Opposition whether or not they thought that was a good idea. We never heard a peep from them about whether or not they should go through that process.

That school division has different circumstances than Sunrise. Sunrise went through conciliation. They went into mediation. They asked for assistance of the Province and, so, there you have it, Mr. Chairperson. When they are asking the Province to make up one third of the financial burden that they have with regard to harmonization.

Prairie Rose is far different than Sunrise School Division. Maybe this is why. I mean, the area is somewhat complex because you have Louis Riel School Division, who is able to have a difference in salaries. They have their differences between their employees and the employer. Yet they were able to agree to terms. They were also able to come up with a new collective agreement. It shows you, you have Pembina Trails School Division, I understand, that is very similar to Louis Riel. Because you have both of those divisions where Pembina Trails was almost supplied at \$50 per student in that school division of Pembina Trails, you were able to provide almost \$700,000 in funds to assist them in amalgamation and could be used for harmonization of salaries or other ways. In Louis Riel you had three quarters of a million dollars, \$740,000, to assist them in the same manner at \$50 per student.

* (15:40)

You have rural divisions that have declining enrolment, so they may be facing more of a challenge than the urban divisions. We, as a Province, said we would stand up and support these school divisions and work with them to ensure that the education would not be impacted negatively. So Prairie Rose, I plead, and I ask

them to get back to the table to resolve their labour differences, and I am prepared, as I mentioned to the member, to go and see the Minister of Labour and ask the Minister of Labour to appoint a mediator to resolve their dispute.

What we will do, we will be prepared to work with any school division in the province, and we have proven that over the past four years and will continue to work in the future. As I mentioned, you got new schools and the member from Tuxedo, my Education critic, raised about governments and making commitments before the election. I have a personal care home in my own constituency, the Villa Youville in Ste. Anne, Manitoba, where the previous government committed three times in a row, prior to elections, how they were going to build this personal care home. It never got done. Governments certainly have a process. Governments make commitments before formalized approval processes are completed on occasion. I understand that. But the formalized approval was completed before any expenditure was made.

We, as a government, as I mentioned previously, we will look at assisting amalgamated divisions in any way, shape or form we can. We have to sit down and take a look at the issues, and the issue with regard to Sunrise was up to a 60% gap in salaries, such a huge gap. It was so different than any other school division in the province. That was passed on by the negotiation team to a representative of the province, and there lies the challenge. Thank you.

Mrs. Stefanson: I have to say this is absolutely embarrassing, the supposed answers that we are getting to our questions. This is absolutely deplorable. I will say, the minister keeps referring to a March 24th letter, and that this is the request for \$428,000. Well, I would like to know, this letter, actually, is a second request for a meeting. That is the only request that this letter is for.

The letter says: We are writing as a follow-up to the division's letter of February 10, which the minister never responded to and never bothered to meet with the school division. The minister, actually, has already admitted that he never responded and never met with the school

division until July. He is using this letter as a request for \$428,000. I would like to ask this minister: Where in this letter does the school division say that they are requesting \$428,000 to end the dispute in the Sunrise School Division?

Mr. Lemieux: The members opposite, they do not like to—I mean, we have gone through this point I think probably 50 times to say the least. We have explained quite clearly that the negotiating team spoke to a representative of the Government, informing the Government where the gap was, that the Sunrise School Division could only cover two thirds of the wages because of such a huge gap, that 60% gap, that to the best of my knowledge—and I have been advised that no other school division faces that huge discrepancy in salaries, and there was no way, the way it was put by the negotiating team to a representative of the Government, that they would be able to do it. There was no way they were able to do this.

Now, I know that members opposite, and your ruling prior saying that they can ask whatever question they want, but even though they do not receive the answer they want, now as to whatever scenario they are trying to paint, I have no idea. They like to refer to the taxpayers of Manitoba. I have made reference to three different schools that we worked with in Sunrise School Division, assisting them in either building a new school or renovations, and it is a real shame that they are begrudging those dollars and those finances going to the Sunrise School Division.

It is regrettable. I hope that the taxpayers there will contact their representative and tell them that they appreciate the schools and the renovations that they are getting and the assistance that the Province is supplying them. We will continue to try to work with these divisions into the future, but, you know, through the whole one week that the members opposite have been showing their great concern about education, not once have they raised anything about how do you improve the success rates in all of our programs and institutions.

What are they doing with regard to education or special needs in our schools, and not only that, they raised not a question, not an

issue about any item related to capital structures or capital projects throughout the province. You know, Mr. Chairperson, if the taxpayers of Manitoba take a look at the members of the Opposition, even though they are entitled to ask whatever questions they want, they would want to say, you know, the questions that they are asking are not even related to education in any way, shape or form for the children. Yet they hide behind this kind of disguise, this umbrella somehow of how they care about the children who are going to school in Manitoba.

So, you know, Mr. Chairperson, I mean, the Province of Manitoba has an Aboriginal education director. You have the school programs this year. You have French in school. You have school tax credits, which they raised but, you know, regrettably, when they raised it during the election, the electorate took a look at that and thought this is unbelievable. There is no way that you cannot tax a property in Manitoba and not have an alternative for it.

There is a working group, thanks to the previous Minister of Education, that is going to be bringing back a report later this fall, and I might say that there is a member of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities who is chairing that. They are going to be bringing back a document with regard to financing education. I look forward to seeing that because there is a huge challenge there. People were throwing numbers around during the election, but it varies anywhere from \$300 million to \$500 million about the gap on property tax.

So the question will be, if people do not want to tax property at all, where are they prepared to find the money? People want music, want phys ed, want art in their schools. They do not want to see schools close. So it raises an interesting point of debate on how that will be replaced. But we have not heard boo, not a word from the members opposite about all of these important areas and important issues in education.

Even our agenda for kindergarten to Senior 4 agenda focussed on six priorities in education. The document has been out for a while, yet we have not heard much discussion about improving outcomes for less successful learners or

strengthening links among schools and parents and communities or strengthening school planning and reporting.

So what we are doing is we are looking at a lot of educational issues these days, even though we fare pretty well when you take a look at us internationally. Yet we want to not rest on our laurels. We feel we can do better, whether it be in math, in language arts and science. We know we are going to improve because we are committed to improving the system.

A lot of credit has to go, not only to the school trustees that work very, very hard, but all the administration who work in schools as well, school principals, superintendents and other leadership in the school divisions, and of course the backbone of the public education system, our school teachers. The teachers themselves in classrooms deserve a lot of credit with regard to education. It is something we, as a Province, have been willing to work in a consultative and a collaborative way with all the stakeholders in education.

* (15:50)

Prior to Sunrise School Division having their labour dispute, I met on numerous occasions with the Manitoba Association of School Trustees who discussed harmonization as just one issue which would be a real challenge in days to come and in months to come, but also talked about the real pluses and the benefits of amalgamation. We know, as a government, we are certainly prepared to work with the divisions in all those areas.

Mrs. Stefanson: There are lots of extremely important issues when it comes to education and educating our children in our province. I think it is very unfortunate that this minister chooses to downplay the issue that we are questioning right now. It is a very extremely important issue that affects our children's education in the school. That is why I am asking these questions.

Perhaps if the minister would endeavour to answer some of the questions that we are asking, we could move on and go into a whole host of other questions I have concerning and surrounding our education system and our province.

Perhaps we could move on to those. I think it is unfortunate, again, that this minister chooses to downplay the issue we are bringing forward on behalf of the taxpayers and the students in our province.

Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister again if the Sunrise School Division did not request the \$428,000, I would like to ask who requested the specific sum of \$428,000. How did the Government arrive at this \$428,000 sum?

Mr. Lemieux: Once again, it talks about your point that you made with regard to the previous point of order that members opposite are asking a question, we have answered the questions.

We have informed the members opposite that the representatives from the Sunrise negotiating team comprising of a member of MAST, they are the ones who were requesting that they could only make up two thirds of the amount they were working on. They passed that on. The fact of the matter is, in other words, they could make up two thirds of the amount and yet one third was the gap. They felt because the gap was so huge, it was close to 60 percent, depending on what the employee was, because you had mechanical people, bus drivers, you also had teachers' assistants and you had secretarial people in a strike position and the employees went on strike, you have this negotiating team talking to a representative of government and they are the ones who came forward with regard to an amount, \$112,000 this year and I believe it was \$158,000 and \$158,000 the following two years.

We have been very open with the Opposition. I have been very open with my critic, the Member for Tuxedo, about the amount of money requested from the school division to a government representative. Yes, the challenge of course for them was the gap, such a huge gap in salaries for them because you had what I described previously, in previous Hansards repeatedly, that you had the Agassiz School Division, which was what I would describe as the rural part compared to the Springfield part which was the city wages, if I can use that difference, so you had two different divisions and one had city-equivalent wages and the other one had rural wages. So it was a huge gap, and the letter certainly

expressed that and expressed the challenge that they would have to meet that. Thank you.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I am going to take a bit of a different slant on the questions here because today in Question Period we heard from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) who contradicts the Minister of Education. The Minister of Finance in his responses today said, and I do not believe I am misquoting him, that it was a Treasury Board member who contacted the MAST organization about assisting in the negotiations. That is what the Minister of Finance said today in Question Period.

If the Minister of Finance is truthful in his responses, and we have to believe that he is, in the Chamber here, then it is a contradiction to what the Minister of Education is saying, because the Minister of Education is saying that it was Mr. Bell from the Sunrise School Division and the negotiating team who contacted the department about a shortage of or perhaps assistance in settling the dispute.

The Minister of Finance said that it was a member of his Treasury Board who contacted MAST as to whether or not they could help in the resolution of the dispute. So we have two different stories here, and we have to establish who is telling the truth. You cannot be saying on one hand that it is Sunrise asking for help when in fact the chair of Sunrise said neither formally nor informally did we request assistance, financial assistance from the Province.

The minister keeps saying it was Mr. Bell, the superintendent, and some negotiating people and MAST. The Minister of Finance says, no, it was a member of Treasury Board who contacted MAST to see if they could help to settle the dispute.

Now my question would be, who directed Mr. Schreyer to contact MAST to offer a settlement in this dispute? Who was it who directed Mr. Schreyer? Was it the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)? Was it the Minister of Education (Mr. Lemieux)? Was it the Premier (Mr. Doer)? Was it Eugene Kostyra? Who directed Mr. Schreyer to contact MAST to get involved in a settlement of a dispute between CUPE and Sunrise School Division?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Chairperson, there are a couple of different or two or three different questions in there. I said before that the person representing Mr. Wallis, a person from MAST, as well as the superintendent and people off their negotiating team are the ones who said they were able to address two thirds of their salary, two thirds of their negotiations, so, in other words, that government assistance would be needed for one third, no different than what the Minister of Finance stated today in Question Period.

So I just want to make sure that is absolutely clear that the Minister of Finance stated that there was a gap because the school division could cover two thirds of it, the Minister of Finance stated today that the negotiating team asked the government representative that they would need assistance with the other third, and that is absolutely consistent. What the Minister of Finance has said during Question Period is consistent with what we have been saying for the past week in Estimates.

Mr. Derkach: The Government keeps hanging itself because what we had is a negotiation process in place. The gap in the negotiation process was 60 percent. That is true, but that is why you have negotiations, so that you can bring that gap down to something that is more reasonable than that 60 percent.

Now, you had a mediator involved in the process whose obligation it was to arrive at a settlement that was somewhere between zero and 60 percent. It does not mean that they have to settle at the 60 percent.

Now, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) said today in his response to a question from the member from Ste. Rose that it was a staff member from his department who contacted MAST to see how they could assist in the settlement of this strike.

That is offensive in itself. But it shows that there was political interference in the process. Mr. Schreyer did not do that on his own. Mr. Schreyer did not pick up the phone without being directed to do that.

My question is: Who directed Mr. Schreyer to contact MAST or the Sunrise School Division?

* (16:00)

Mr. Lemieux: We have talked repeatedly about assistance to school divisions and we have talked about the difference between many other school divisions. You have the Prairie Rose School Division. You have the Louis Riel School Division. You have the Pembina Trails School Division. Also we have been talking about the Sunrise School Division.

So you have many, many school divisions who have their own unique challenges. There are other school divisions that, just listening to some of the comments that one of the stakeholder groups from MAST had mentioned to us, that there are a number of different collective agreements that are taking place or collective agreements that are going to expire.

So when you take a look at those collective agreements that are going to be expiring, at least I have been advised, the gap is not so great as it was in Sunrise School Division. The Sunrise School Division is a very unique situation. It was certainly an area where they wanted to harmonize their salaries over a number of years and that was for them something that they were willing to look at.

You have other school divisions like Prairie Rose School Division who are currently in collective bargaining and are looking at a strike situation, which we are certainly prepared to talk to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) and ask the Minister of Labour if he would appoint a mediator, because if they are at loggerheads and they can not resolve their differences, then in the best interests of the children and the school division they maybe go to mediation services and have a mediator involved to address their challenges or their differences.

Because right now they are just sitting on opposite sides of the fence. They are not talking to each other. You have approximately 900 children who are regularly bused and who are not receiving busing currently.

So it creates a challenge for the parents to try to get the children to school. Also for the children themselves it is somewhat disruptive. So I ask members opposite if they felt it would

be a good idea to have a mediator involved, and I would ask the Minister of Labour to do so, to talk to the parties and see if they would be interested in having a mediator involved to address their differences.

With regard to Prairie Rose, there is a collective bargaining process taking place and they are working it out. There are issues that they are currently negotiating, whether it is maybe salary, it may not be salary, it might be pension. There are other issues certainly I am not privy to.

But I know that the collective bargaining process has taken place, as it is in Sunrise, but the big difference right now is that you had conciliation breaking down in Sunrise and you had a mediator in place. Here in Prairie Rose you had conciliation breaking down. You have a strike, but there is no mediator in place.

So right now they are sitting there with their differences and not addressing them. What we are talking about here is Prairie Rose wanting to, I am sure that the trustees there, the negotiating team there want to resolve their dispute. We are hoping that that happens for the benefit of the children and benefit of harmonious working relationships, because they have to work. Especially in small towns and small communities, a lot of these people probably, whether they are a school trustee or an employee of the school division driving a bus, in the school division they probably have children on the same hockey team or the same ringette team.

Here you have a difference in the sense of rural Manitoba, a smaller community that is faced with a strike. What we are looking for and what we certainly want, as I think most Manitobans and I know the members opposite would like to see the same, is that the strike be resolved in an amicable way. It may not be able to be done without a mediator. I am certainly prepared to talk to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) and have his department talk to the parties involved and see if there is something that a mediator can resolve. I know in the best interests of certainly the children and education in Prairie Rose this would be very important. It is something that is still outstanding. I believe they have been in a strike now for a week.

It is something that we, as a government, are certainly concerned with. Again, anything in the public sector, I would say particularly with my department dealing with schools, government has a role to play to monitor any labour disputes and disputes that are in the public education system.

In Manitoba, 80 percent of collective agreements are settled amicably and do not need an arbitrator. Sometimes they do. That is the process, where you have 20 percent of the employees in Manitoba who are left to go to strike or resolve their concerns in a way, either by using conciliation at that step, or mediation.

We have talked about how the parties in school divisions are able to, some go on strike, some are able to resolve them in an amicable way and are able to get a collective agreement, like Pembina Trails I understand, as well as I am advised that Louis Riel is the same way. There is a difference between one division to another throughout the province of Manitoba. We are certainly finding that out, whether they be amalgamated or not.

I know that with regard to Sunrise School Division and talking about just the benefits, not only to Sunrise School Division as far as amalgamation goes, but I think overall when you take a look at these divisions there are some very positive things that have happened as a result of amalgamation.

I know that when you take a look at the divisions like Sunrise, Sunrise's budget had an increase of about 7.4 percent, 7.5 percent. I know when you take a look at the dollars provided in the '03-04 funding increase to Sunrise, it is a substantial sum. The \$50 per pupil, as I mentioned before, is about \$246,000 overall to them. The Province of Manitoba has stood beside them and are wanting to continue to do that.

There are many other school divisions in Manitoba that are going to be having their collective agreements expiring. As a government, certainly I think it is in the public's best interests that we be monitoring that. I think most Manitobans would look at that in wanting to ensure that government is doing that.

Mr. Chairperson, I know over the last few days, certainly the last week, the members opposite have consistently received the same answer from us to the questions about funding. We have told them that two thirds of the gap, whatever that gap is, was covered by the Sunrise School Division, could cover that gap through their finances. They felt the other third could not be. That is something they passed on from their negotiating body to a government representative. That is how the \$112,000 the first year was made aware to us and then also the 158 and 158 the following two years.

We have repeatedly said that to members opposite. We have told them in a straight way that is exactly where the dollars came from. They oo'd and ah'd in great surprise wondering where this figure came from. The figure came from the management. In other words, you had the superintendent and you had the person from MAST, the negotiating team who mentioned this to the representative of the Province.

Again, Mr. Chairperson, the Opposition certainly are entitled to ask whatever questions they wish. If they want to spend their time talking about Sunrise and all the benefits that amalgamation has for Sunrise, we are certainly open to that. If they wish to discuss any other items in Education, we are also open to that.

*(16:10)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, it is wonderful thing that the minister is so open. The minister has to be embarrassed at himself, at how he has responded to the questions that have been posed. He is in trouble. He knows it and all he is doing is going round and round in circles. This does not do him any credit as a minister of the Crown, and neither does it do any credit to him as a leader of his Department of Education in doing the bafflegab that he has done in the last week and especially today. He is burning up hours on the clock, but, on the other hand, he is saying nothing. He is simply going around in circles.

Mr. Chair, today the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) put on the record that it was his staffer Mr. Lloyd Schreyer who contacted MAST to see whether or not they could assist in the settlement of the strike. Now, this was at a

time when a mediator was appointed to mediate a salary dispute between two parties not directly associated with government, CUPE and Sunrise School Division. The Minister of Finance said his staffperson contacted MAST to see whether or not he could assist in settling the strike, and, of course, when you get a call from Treasury Board, Mr. Chair, what does that say? That says, we are coming with money; how can we settle this?

This is days before the election call, Mr. Chair. This is days before the people of Manitoba are to go to the polls. Here is a school division that is in strike mode. Now, does the Government want to see a strike on their hands in the middle of an election campaign? Anybody who has got any political smarts knows that that would not be a desirable thing to have during an election campaign. So someone has directed Mr. Lloyd Schreyer, a staffer of Treasury Board, to contact the parties involved to see how they could resolve the issue.

Today, Mr. Chair, we have Prairie Rose School Division that is in a strike mode. Now, the minister says that the difference between Prairie Rose and Sunrise is that Sunrise had a mediator in place. Well, that makes this thing even more bizarre because Sunrise had a mediator in place, an independent body who was supposed to mediate the dispute between the two parties, and the Government then decided to interfere through Lloyd Schreyer to get a settlement. A mediator then was compromised because all of a sudden he has a pot of money to settle the dispute. Now, that does not take much mediation in my books. Now we have Prairie Rose School Division who are in a strike mode. They have gone through conciliation. They are in strike. The minister says, well, now they should put a mediator in place. So the minister must be saying, as soon as they put a mediator in place, I will come with money.

Now, Mr. Chairperson, I want to know from the Minister of Education whether Mr. Lloyd Schreyer has contacted Prairie Rose School Division or any other school division that might be having a dispute at the current time with regard to the harmonization of salaries. Has Mr. Lloyd Schreyer now contacted or had any contact with Prairie Rose School Division in terms of settling the dispute?

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for the question. There are a number of different points I wish to make with regard to amalgamation and this particular situation dealing with the challenge of harmonization of salaries.

You have a number of different school divisions who have different characteristics, being declining enrolment. You have some who have increased enrolment. You have many divisions who have a different ability to increase their taxes or not, so you have within the province of Manitoba, I believe—I am going by memory—that there are about eight collective agreements that are either going to expire shortly in education or thereabouts. I stand to be corrected on that, but there are a number of different collective agreements that are going to expire.

I mentioned before that the province of Manitoba, certainly as a Province, I would expect that taxpayers of the province of Manitoba would want us to ensure that we are on top of issues, that we are certainly looking at, I mean, that it is in the public's best interests is what I am trying to say, that the Government of the province be aware of what is happening not only in the public sector but outside the public sector. You have a department in government that is—well, certainly one department anyway is responsible for mediation and conciliation. When I made the comment to the member opposite in a response to one of his questions, it was that it is important to note that this area in the Department of Labour is part of the process, an important part of the process.

You have conciliation that broke down in Sunrise, and then a mediator was appointed. Both parties agreed to go to mediation. Then you have Prairie Rose School Division that has gone through conciliation, but conciliation broke down. I do not pretend to know the ins and outs of collective bargaining, but I know that where you had one division going to conciliation and then mediation, and certainly that step is available to Prairie Rose School Division to be able to go to that, to take that step. I mentioned previously in the Legislature as well as in Estimates that I would be prepared certainly to talk to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) and get the Minister of Labour to look at getting the

two parties together and getting a mediator involved.

I am not sure how that process works. I do not pretend to know that, but I know that is an important step for Prairie Rose, to ensure that, if they are at such loggerheads and they cannot get past whatever issues are keeping them apart, they do look at the area of conciliation and mediation. That is what I meant to the member from Russell when he asked his question about the difference between Sunrise and Prairie Rose; it is that you have Prairie Rose who had conciliation break down. They have a strike, but they have not gone to mediation. There is another avenue for them to pursue should they feel that they want to get this dispute resolved early.

Again, as the Province of Manitoba, we are going to support our amalgamated divisions and divisions that are not amalgamated. We have shown over the last four years that as a Province, our provincial government, we are willing to work with all the parties. That means increasing funding with the rate of economic growth, which we have done so. I think it was 3 percent one year, 1 point—it was always over 2 percent. I know last year it was 2.8 percent, which was about \$23.5 million. Every year that we have been government, we have been able to fund and provide dollars to the school divisions, whether they be amalgamated or not, which has been a general increase certainly over 2 percent every year.

I think that certainly proves as a government that we are prepared, and we have over four years—the previous minister did, as well as the current minister—and what we are looking at is, I guess, a fundamental, maybe difference between our Government and the previous government. The circumstances may be slightly different; they had some tough times in the 1990s. But I think overall, even comparing to the last five years, we have been able to provide positive funding every year and they were not able to do so. They chose to spend money in a different way. That is fine. That is their prerogative. We made a decision that we are going to provide funding at a rate of economic growth. Fine, you make those decisions as a government and you are prepared to put that to the taxpayers or to the people of Manitoba.

Now, I know, as I mentioned, they had some tough times in the early nineties financially. They had some difficult choices to make. I know they froze funding in the middle nineties, two years in a row. They froze it at 2 percent, I believe it was. So by freezing funding in the nineties, I believe it was '95-96, '96-97, or it could be '96-97, '97-98, but there were two years in the middle nineties when they had to freeze funding to the school divisions.

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Again, I raised this whole issue in the newspaper when I was asked a question about here you have school divisions raising their taxes even when they get a generous increase from the Province, and they are continuing to raise their taxes; for example, Transcona, the River East Transcona part, also St. James School Division. The question I was asked was what are you prepared to do about it? The previous government froze the increases in the middle nineties. Are you prepared to do that, and I said, well, maybe that is something we should look at.

* (16:20)

This is just to say that governments make decisions and have their choices. As a government, we made a choice that health and education were going to be the two important areas that we are going to be focusing on, and part of education would be economic development as a result of it. We will continue to do so. That has not changed for us as a government. Health care and education are a priority, and we will continue to assist the parties involved in those two areas.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate to me how long Sunrise School Division was on strike before they got a mediator involved in the process?

Mr. Lemieux: What I have been told is that on April 8 the strike happened. I believe on April 10 mediation commenced, far different when you have a difference like Prairie Rose School Division that had been on strike for one week. Conciliation broke down, they went on strike, and they had been on strike for a week.

I cannot remember the exact number of the employees who are involved in this. I believe it was over 200 in Sunrise. In Prairie Rose, I cannot recall the exact number but I can get the exact number of the employees who are affected, but here you have the strike. It is a concern to me. It is a concern to government that they have been on strike for I believe seven days or this could be day six of their strike in Prairie Rose. Conciliation has broken down and the parties are not talking. That is why I mentioned that mediation was certainly open to them, because after about three days in Sunrise you had mediation that was looked upon as something favourable, that could look at bringing the two parties together, talking and trying to resolve a lot of issues.

My understanding is that it is very similar to a lot of other school divisions. It is not just harmonization of salary. It could be pension. There are a lot of other benefits that it is important that a mediator deal with, because everything is on the table. People may not deal with a harmonization question, but they might deal with a pension question. They might deal with other issues that their negotiating team, whether it be on the side of the worker or management, wants to deal with.

So when I make mention about the difference between Prairie Rose and Sunrise, that you have these two differences, where now, going into day six or seven of a strike in Prairie Rose, they are still on strike. Conciliation did not work. That is why, as I mentioned before, that I am prepared to, and I asked the members opposite whether or not they felt that was a good idea, whether or not we should, whether I should ask the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) to talk to the parties and have the parties resolve their differences with mediation, because that is what happened after a few days in Sunrise School Division, and it certainly worked out in a successful way.

In Prairie Rose School Division, there are 32 people, individuals that are affected in this strike. In Sunrise, there were 235 people, individuals, men and women involved in their strike action.

There are a number of differences that you can see between the two. One was certainly a

larger strike in Sunrise compared to the Prairie Rose strike. Nevertheless, it is still very important, because you have a number of those children who are being bused by a bus driver in Prairie Rose and there are a number of children who are being affected by this strike. I would implore the parties to talk to Conciliation and Mediation Services and have a mediator look at to be brought in to resolve their concerns between the parties, whether they be financial or pension issues and/or benefits issues, and so on.

That is currently where it lies. You have got two very differing circumstances where also you had Pembina Trails and you had Louis Riel, who I have been advised were able to reach agreement on a number of different areas without needing the Government's assistance either for mediation or for financial assistance or otherwise.

You have a number of different scenarios in Manitoba that are different. All of these divisions are different in character for a lot of reasons. I mentioned before repeatedly about declining enrolment, increased enrolment, depopulation, ability to tax, and so on. So you have all of these that are evident throughout the province of Manitoba and things that have to be considered by those regions. I thank the member for the question and I am certainly available for any others.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I thank the minister for that answer. Did the minister recommend to Sunrise School Division or recommend mediation to them when they were on strike? I know the minister has indicated that it was a significant concern. Was it something that Sunrise School Division did? Did the two parties in the dispute come together and ask for mediation or did the minister get involved in recommending to them that mediation might be a good course of action for them to take?

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for the question. As I mentioned, it would be something that I am certainly prepared to do with regard to Prairie Rose when you see what happened in Prairie Rose or what is happening in Prairie Rose. It is not a huge amount of employees, but it certainly impacts, I believe, on I think it is 400 children, I stand to be corrected, but I believe it

is 400 children are impacted by this particular strike. These children have to, of course, make their way to school and/or the parents have to get them there. It is something that I mentioned to members opposite. I am certainly prepared to talk to my colleague, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton), and have them talk to the division and to, I guess, the employees to determine whether or not mediation is certainly an area or an avenue they wish to pursue.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I know that the issues that they are discussing may not just resolve, I would presume that they are just not around salary, but I am sure they are around all kinds of issues, whether it is pensions or other issues, which is important. The reason I mention that is because the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, whom I have met on a number of occasions over the past year, and also a number of different stakeholders, whether it is the superintendents' or the teachers' association, have mentioned a number of different areas of concern that not only salaries could be a challenge and could be one area. They have also mentioned a number of different other areas. On the meetings that we have had with the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, this is something that, and I do not believe it is any surprise to anyone, they feel that, depending on where the division is and what the geography is or their geographic location in the province, these issues affect them differently.

* (16:30)

I know that, with regard to Louis Riel and Pembina Trails, those two particular divisions are both city divisions and are both in an urban centre. They are fairly large divisions, and they were able to resolve their contractual differences in a way that did not have, I understand, conciliation or mediation involved and did not have the Department of Labour involved in any way. It is something that you really have to look at. Even though you are monitoring it closely, what is going on in the public education system or the public sector, why are those differences there?

I do not have all the particulars with regard to their negotiations. I certainly would not have

that. Really, it would not be necessary. It is certainly interesting to know how different those two Winnipeg school divisions are compared to the two rural school divisions and what you have seen thus far.

Education for us and the financing of education has been extremely important. We talk about it often. We are also proud of the fact that we have funded education in a way that really is quite unprecedented. As a government, when you make that commitment, people are certainly happy to see that you are putting your money where your mouth is and that you are backing it up at the rate of economic growth. The stakeholders know that if the rate of economic growth goes down, the funding will be less. Also, if it goes up, that that will create more of a challenge for government, but that is a commitment we made. We are certainly planning on sticking to it.

The strike in Prairie Rose is something that is certainly a real concern, because it has gone on for a week now. The parties are not looking at mediation that is available to them. It is very difficult to say what will happen there. Yet it is open to them, and they are able to accept mediation and go through the Department of Labour and look at mediation as a solution for them. That has not happened after one week. Yet, after a few days, it happened in Sunrise. They know that the strike was escalating, and there were more employees going out. I believe that you had the mechanics and bus drivers and also teachers' assistants and secretarial people who were going out. In Prairie Rose you have just the mechanics, I think, and bus drivers, 32 drivers that we know of. I am not sure if part of those 32 are mechanics. So you have a difference.

I have been trying to let my honourable colleagues from the Opposition know about this, the differences that we face as a government between the different divisions. Not only is it geography but also the different circumstances with regard to the amount of individuals who are involved in the strike, and so on.

I will not go through the funding we have provided for those divisions. I can if the member opposite would want me to, but the funding to

those particular school divisions has been right in line with what we provided as an overall increase to these divisions.

On that, Mr. Chairperson, I thank the member for the question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: My direct question, which I did not get an answer to, was did the minister in any way recommend to Sunrise School Division a mediator.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, the members opposite know that last week on numerous occasions we answered this question and said that we received a letter on March 24, I believe it was. In that letter it is quite specific about the urgency that the school division was facing and asking government to be involved, to be a partner in their challenge. I know in their letters they stated: We would like to enter into a discussion relating to the disparity in the wages between the two former parts of the division and the impact of this for future Sunrise budgets. This will place an extraordinary pressure on our budgets over the next number of years.

So they are inviting government to be involved because they feel the pressure is so great for them. Yes, this is something that, as a government, we knew that some of those efficiencies they were going to be finding in amalgamation, even though that was laid out in Norrie as well, Norrie laid out specific areas for savings and efficiencies, that as a government we certainly knew there would be some challenges, even though our amalgamation was not as massive as what the changes in boundaries was recommended in the Norrie report.

I hope my mentioning Mr. Norrie, this is not a reflection on his recommendations or on Mr. Norrie as a person or individual. He is recognized as someone who is certainly very worthy of the title of someone who is a true gentleman and a scholar. He is someone who has Manitoba's best interests at heart. What I am saying is that the recommendations he made I am trying to point out that the massive changes in boundaries, one, down to 22 from our 38, would have been, having seen those changes and having seen the changes we have made and some of the challenges that we face, not only looking at the

benefits of amalgamation, would have been—I will try to choose my words carefully in this because I am not sure what would have happened to the public education system had it gone down to 22 divisions.

I am sure that is probably what the previous government was faced with when they saw the massive changes they were looking at, that the efficiencies would have been there. Obviously when you go from 57 divisions down to 22, all the division offices closed, and so on, I am sure they realized as a government, yes, the efficiencies were there but it was too drastic a change or too massive a change for Manitoba and the Manitoba education system to take all in one fell swoop. Now, we went to 37 or 38 school divisions when we had amalgamation. Some were ones that were voluntary and some were not. Those that were voluntary have shown, for all the best reasons, all the efficiencies and all the benefits of amalgamation.

Now, just on this point, is that I want to say that in the future I believe that there will be amalgamation, but it will be voluntary. It will be the divisions wanting to get together because of the very similar reasons why the divisions in Manitoba who have amalgamated on a voluntary basis, the same reasons why they did and why they are showing benefits. In my travels throughout the province of Manitoba, we have received a lot of anecdotal comments from those divisions that are not amalgamated and some that are, that there will amalgamation down the road, but it will be voluntary. The reason that it will be voluntary is because of whether it is economies of scale as a result for benefits for them or not. I feel they are going to take place.

* (16:40)

I guess time will prove me right or wrong, but I believe that when you take a look at education down the road, you are going to find that with depopulation or the decreasing enrolment in many of the divisions, a lot of the high schools are not going to be able to offer the courses that those students need in order to get a Senior 4 or a Grade 12 diploma. Also, by that they would be a few steps behind other students in other school divisions. So I believe we are going to see that down the road. I do not know if it is in 5 years or

10 years, but I believe that it is going to happen. I know that for those school divisions that are looking at that, certainly, we are open to discussion, or if they see that we can play a role in any way, shape or form to assist them, I think it is government's responsibility to not only listen, but also to be there to assist them if they need that. But, again, that is certainly up to them. That lies within their decision-making process.

The number of school divisions, currently, that we have worked with as far as amalgamation goes, I have been able to speak to a number of them in person. We feel that this was the right way to go. Again, it does not mean that these benefits will occur overnight. We are expecting them to happen. There is no finite point to amalgamation; we just believe that it will continue. All these efficiencies will continue to be found throughout this evolution, or this evolving process that is called amalgamation. So, with that point, I just want to thank the member for the question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, the minister indicated at the beginning of that answer that the letter on March 24 that was sent to him requesting a meeting was the letter that triggered involvement by government, but, obviously, government did nothing because on April 8, Sunrise School Division went on strike. Nothing was done between the 24th of March until April 8.

So a strike occurred. I asked a very simple question of the minister and he has answered everything but that question, so it leads me to believe that either he cannot give a simple yes or no, or he is hiding something. My very direct question, yes or no? Did, in fact, the minister—and I do not think it is that strange a question to be asking. Did the minister in Sunrise School Division suggest mediation, yes or no? If it is yes, that is fine. If it is no, that is fine. But if the minister cannot answer that question, obviously, he is afraid to answer it because he is hiding something. He does not want to give Manitobans, Manitoba taxpayers the full, factual information. It is a very basic question, yes or no. Did the minister recommend mediation in the Sunrise dispute?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Chairperson, the member is correct from River East about the letter on the

24th asking that we would like to enter into discussions related to the disparity in wages between the two former parts of the division and the impact on the future of the division and also how it put extraordinary pressure on the budgets, the 15 to 16 percent.

I had mentioned before, last week I talked about how prior to the April 8 strike, very similar to Prairie Rose, that the parties were in conciliation. They were involved in conciliation up to that point. We have mentioned this repeatedly, that the parties were involved in conciliation. When conciliation broke down they went on strike. I think we have repeated that on a number of occasions. So certainly the Government, I mean, there is nothing to hide whichever way. I am not sure what the members are talking about or referring to, but we have been quite straightforward.

The Minister of Finance today told the House that the negotiating team told representatives of the Government that they only could cover two thirds, that the Province of Manitoba would only cover one third. So we have repeated that. We have repeated that mediation would be an option. We said that to Prairie Rose. We want Prairie Rose to be involved in mediation if possible.

We have been very forthright and again we have answered every question. The answers they get they may not like, but the fact of the matter is the answer is the answer, and we have laid that out. We have talked about the negotiating team from Sunrise School Division imploring and telling the government representative what their challenge was and they could not meet it.

And so here you have two different scenarios compared to Sunrise, compared to Prairie Rose, where Sunrise went to conciliation and then to mediation. Here you have Prairie Rose has not, I mean, they went to conciliation. Conciliation broke down. Now they have just stayed on strike. They have not pursued mediation. Mediation is an area that is an important step. We are going to do everything we can.

I have mentioned repeatedly that I am asking members opposite whether they think I should speak to the Minister of Labour to talk to

the parties to see if mediation would be an important part or have officials within government to ensure that that would be an important part, an important step that they would be able to pursue if they cannot reach an agreement or if the disputes are too far apart or whatever the issues are, if they are salary or non-salary.

I am not going to refer to Hansard, but, again, I just want to repeat myself that we are supportive of the school divisions. The school divisions are very, very important to us. We have to make sure that these school divisions are supported. They were not supported in the nineties and we are prepared to support them as a government. We made a commitment to fund at the rate of economic growth.

We are committed to work with them and work with them in any way, shape or form that we can. They know we do have an open door and we are willing to work with them in any fashion.

Once again, we have answered every single question they have asked. Thank you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chair, but there is one question the minister has not answered. Yes or no. Did he recommend to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton) that mediation would be a good process for Sunrise School Division to follow? Yes or no? Simple. Very simple. It does not require a five-minute answer.

* (16:50)

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for a number of different questions. The one I would like to refer back to is the one with regard to employees. I made a comment on the employees affected in Prairie Rose School Division. I just wanted to clarify that the effect on the children there, you have 1400 children bused, out of 2400 children totally in the Prairie Rose School Division. So 1400 children are bused out of the 2400 and the strike affects 900 of those children, 900 out of the 1400 students that are bused. I just wanted to make sure I clarified that to be accurate so I was not putting something on the record with the members opposite that was not accurate.

The number of students in Sunrise School Division certainly varied from this, as well as the

number of employees. There were quite a few employees in the Sunrise School Division that were affected, much larger numbers. You had 32 employees affected in the Prairie Rose School Division, where you had about 222 or so, over 220 employees affected in the Sunrise School Division, a strike that was certainly going to have an effect. The children would still be going there, but you would not have custodians, you would not have teacher's aides, you would not have bus drivers. Again, these strikes, even though it is only 20 percent of the workforce that is affected by conciliation or mediation or strike, it still plays a very, very important part; 80 percent of the employees are affected by arbitration and that is a very important part of our system.

In Ontario, Alberta, other provinces, I understand, certainly teachers are allowed to go on strike. They have that right. It has created a huge impact on children and parents and the taxpayers of those provinces when they have gone out on strike.

Many years down the road, what will happen in Manitoba with regard to this collective bargaining process remains to be seen. What the Opposition were proposing in the last election may have resulted in many of the school trustees or school divisions and school boards not being existent after a period of time, because they were taking practically all the spending away from them, limiting them to such a small amount that this may not have served them well. All the school boards may have been taken away throughout a period of time, had they gone ahead with what they were planning on doing.

We mentioned that within the province of Manitoba currently we have a particular system that appears to be working well. We have facts to show that we fund approximately I believe it is around 71 percent of total education funding. If you are talking about pension, you are talking about property tax credit, you are talking about the funding to school divisions, it breaks down to about 71 percent of funding. Many individuals would argue that more is necessary. Yet we have tried to balance that off with other needs in the province of Manitoba. We continue to do so.

We have reduced ESL by \$10 million a year ago. This year we have reduced it by \$17

million. So \$27 million we have reduced the ESL, out of that \$100-million amount. We will continue to work on that.

Also the funding to public schools is going to be certainly at the rate of economic growth, and what we are trying to do is to provide stable funding for all of the divisions. I know that the member opposite from Ste. Rose, certainly, feels very passionately about BSE and the impact that it is having on not only his constituency but rural Manitoba. As a rural Manitoban I certainly feel likewise. I have had the opportunity to meet with dairy people who have a real concern on culling and where you have beef producers as well really concerned with their return. So the member from Ste. Rose knows the impact very well. Not only do you have BSE, but you also have the drought, which has impacted rural Manitoba, and, of course, on the bigger picture you have the triple whammo where you have also had forest fires. So you have had the drought, BSE and forest fires that have really hit the province hard.

With regard to rural Manitoba we have had a municipal—I do not believe it was a reeve, but it may have been, who made a comment that was regrettable. I know how hard the Reeves and rural councillors work and take their positions very seriously, and the gentleman made a comment. It might have been in the heat of the moment through frustration or whatever. I cannot impugn any kind of motive why he would have stated it, but the fact that they already collected taxes and he was going to spend it on improving a grader or tractors or equipment for the municipality instead of turning it over to the school board because of tough times. It is not helpful to the—

An Honourable Member: Do not misquote him.

Mr. Lemieux: The member from Ste. Rose is correct. I do not misquote the gentleman. I will look for the exact quote, and I will ask my staff if they can find it. I just want to say that, when we are talking about BSE and talking about the impacts it has, arguably we could sit here and discuss BSE and whether or not what we are doing with the loan and whether or not what we are doing with regard to all the other areas—we are trying to provide about \$180 million in

funding, at least that is on the table. We can have a large discussion about that. But what is important to note here is that the impact that the BSE has on rural Manitoba and their ability to fund education is really important.

I just want to quote the gentleman directly. The gentleman stated it to I believe it was a Mr. Campbell that there were dire financial woes brought on by drought and the closing of the U.S. border. At the Rural Municipality of Albert office, he asked Reeve Tom Campbell not to collect school taxes, and it has worked so far. "I said that our cows are only worth \$100 and we aren't going to be able to pay" his annual school property tax bill of about \$2,000, Mr. Sterling said. Brian Sterling is the gentleman's name.

At yesterday's municipal council meeting, Campbell and his four councillors unanimously decided not to hand over almost \$400,000 in educational levy he collects this year and not to collect it all next year. Campbell said the R.M. would collect the school levy this year but use it on municipal needs such as replacing an old tractor and rusty utility trucks or to subsidize ratepayers' municipal tax bills.

Now this was regrettable, and I mention that this could have been—I mean, municipal councillors are under a great deal of pressure. I understand that, but they understand what their legal responsibility is with regard to collection of taxes and also their school divisions.

I know Mr. Draper, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees President Garry Draper said, they are required by law to turn it over to the school division. He comes from the Fort la Bosse area and that is right, they share the R.M. of Albert in the Southwestern Horizon School Division. So Mr. Draper who farms near Virden said that there may be some difficulties, but municipal councils have no legal right to refuse to collect school taxes on behalf of the school divisions.

This does have an impact. When we are talking about amalgamated divisions and the challenges on funding amalgamated divisions, this is really important because we know the pressure that municipal governments are under. We are talking to municipal governments on an

ongoing basis, and if these municipal governments, like the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, who wanted the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to sign the APF, whether it was good nor not, they felt that she does not have a choice. She has to sign the APF, they said. Yes, she made some changes, granted, but you have to sign it because the impact on rural school divisions and rural Manitoba, which Sunrise is part of and Prairie Rose is part of, is extremely important.

I just want to reiterate that I know the member from Ste. Rose is from rural Manitoba and shares the concern about the financial well-being of rural Manitoba and the impacts that BSE has had on it. I would argue that what the Minister of Agriculture has done and the Premier (Mr. Doer) in attempting to get the border open, which is the ultimate and that is really what this is all about, is that they have done a tremendous amount for rural Manitobans. With regard to funding of rural school divisions, we trust that there will not be an impact on those school divisions.

* (17:00)

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): That was an interesting dissertation. It ran from Tom Campbell to BSE to education policy discussions in the last election. I think the minister maybe over-shot his mark a little bit when he talked about wanting to maintain the credibility of school divisions in the management of school divisions. Why would he not have involved the school board directly in any financial offers or discussions? And why would there not be some record of that discussion? We were left to assume that his emissary went directly to the negotiation process. Why did he not respect the input and the management responsibility of the school division?

Mr. Lemieux: I believe that when people enter mediation they do it mutually and wanting to do so with a view of resolving their differences, hoping that this third party would be able to do that. That is why I mentioned about Prairie Rose, that I am asking members opposite whether or not they feel that, because Prairie Rose has been on strike now for a week, it would be a good idea to ask the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton)

or certainly have the parties look at mediation as a way to resolve their issues? It is something that the parties would enter into mediation. At least my understanding is that there would have to be a mutual agreement. I mean, they have to be willing to dance. They have to be willing to talk to each other even though it is through a third party.

Now, my understanding thus far is that Prairie Rose is not at that stage, but that is something I certainly would want them to do. It is through, I believe, general agreement that, when people enter into mediation, that is the process, that they would have to agree to enter into mediation. I have mentioned this challenge before, Mr. Chairperson. You have Pembina Trails and you have Louis Riel school divisions, two urban school divisions, fairly large school divisions, and they were able to resolve, at least I have been advised, they were able to resolve their differences without having certainly a mediator involved. I am not even sure if they had a conciliator involved. I can check on that, but they certainly resolved their disputes in an amicable way.

We provided three quarters of a million dollars to Louis Riel at \$50 per student, that, I am sure, played an important part in assisting what they are doing with regard to amalgamation and also their financial challenges that they may have. Also, I understand it is just a little bit less to Pembina Trails, but again it is that \$50-per-student assistance fund to assist them in any challenges that they have as well.

So, when you have a letter stating to the Province of Manitoba about how we want to enter into discussions related to the disparity in wages between the two former parts of the division and the impact this has for the future of Sunrise, it is very, very important. Certainly, it states that, as a school division—especially, the following sentence is very important where it says that, in the case of the unions, they have a salary differential from like jobs to like jobs that shows a variance of 50 percent to 60 percent, such a huge gap depending on the workforce position, and that this will place an extraordinary pressure on our budgets—just that letter stating and stipulating how Sunrise was going to be impacted by such a huge differential in wages.

Really, the amount of money that was involved, we mentioned it previously to many of the different members who have asked the question, whether or not that has come from an MLA from Winnipeg, from the Opposition benches, or from rural Manitoba, we have told them that we were not involved at the table negotiating, no. But the person from MAST, a representative from MAST, a representative from the school division, an employee of the school division, the superintendent and I believe that there were others stated quite emphatically to a representative of government how imperative it was, because of this huge gap, which was such a difference compared to other school divisions, the amounts of money that they were talking about for harmonization, that the Province of Manitoba participate.

Now, we have told the Opposition that it was \$112,000 the first year, \$158,000 the second year, \$158,000 the third year. We continued to repeat this, to be open and forthright about it, telling them there is nothing to hide about this. We have laid it out. We have told them that it was essentially a negotiating team talking to the representative of government about the challenges that they faced with regard to that, and so, once again, the members can ask questions all they want. Just because they are not getting the answer they want, that is fine. They are going to continue to get the answers that they are getting because they are the right answers. So they may not be the answers they want, but those are the answers. That is exactly what has happened.

So I can refer back to Hansard the last week or so, the questions have been answered the same way repeatedly. I certainly do not want to make light of their questions. They can ask whatever they want, but it is really regrettable in many ways when you think about taxpayers' time being used here, and yet they are not asking any questions at all about the department whatsoever, nothing. Yet we have laid out exactly what took place with regard to the whole issue of a strike that took place in Sunrise School Division, and we have told members opposite repeatedly about what happened with regard to the process.

Governments do make, on occasion, commitments before formalized approval process is

completed. They should know it because, when we came into government in 1999, there was, I cannot remember how many millions of dollars were, a couple of hundred, \$200,000 million, I believe, on the table with the Manitoba Medical Association and a number of other organizations that they had made agreements with prior to this Government, but there was not one cent in the budget to address it. Yet, we have. Within the Education budget, it absolutely is there. The money was there. The process took place as we have laid out, and so we have not shied away from that one bit because we have laid out the proper steps for it. Now, the challenge, as I see it down the road, we have got other school divisions that are going to be in a strike position or are in a strike position now. They are not on strike. We have one division that is. As a Province of Manitoba, for us this is extremely important, because the differences in salaries and so on are going to have to be taken into consideration as well as their ability to pay, as well as many other things, depopulation, declining student enrolment, and so on.

* (17:20)

So for us it is going to be a challenge, and we are going to have to work closely with our partners in education to determine whether or not we can address this in a way that we can also look at our budget, live within our budget and also provide support to these divisions.

I just want to comment that there are many different errors of course that we could be touching on, but that is the choice of members opposite. I am prepared to answer any question that they have for me, as we have in the past week or so laid out exactly what has happened with regard to funding and what has transpired with regard to Sunrise. Thank you.

Mrs. Stefanson: The Minister of Education has stated that Mr. Wallis of MAST contacted Lloyd Schreyer for funding with respect to the Sunrise School Division dispute. Yet today in Question Period the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) said that Lloyd Schreyer contacted MAST to see if there is anything that the Government can do. I suppose he went holding his bags of money too. Obviously, we have some conflicting opinions here as to what took place with respect to

this dispute in Sunrise School Division and the Government's involvement.

Let us say, for example, if the Minister of Education is right in this regard, that MAST contacted Lloyd Schreyer for funding, how would MAST know to contact Lloyd Schreyer, who is an employee for the Treasury Board, an employee in the Department of Finance? Why would a MAST representative contact someone in the Treasury Board as opposed to someone in the Department of Education when it comes to this issue? How would they know to go to Lloyd Schreyer, who is in the Treasury Board, as opposed to someone in Education if they had not prior to that had Mr. Schreyer contact either MAST or someone else in the dispute?

Mr. Lemieux: I know that Mr. Schreyer is certainly a very well-respected individual. Certainly the Opposition is not making any disparaging remarks about Mr. Schreyer in any way, shape or form. In the public interest we always monitor the public sector as a government and what is going on in the public sector contracts, especially if it is likely that there will be a strike. In this particular case they were in conciliation and then they were looking at a strike and they did go on a strike.

Mr. Schreyer has worked with many, many different areas, not only in health care, but he has worked in different areas with regard to compensation. It is very important to note that he has worked with and for government on these organizations over the past while. It is something that he certainly is well known to many individuals and many people with regard to his role or his capacity with regard to compensation, whether it be health care or others.

Now, as a government, we, as far as the public interest goes, it is very, very important that we are on top of what is going on throughout Manitoba in the workplaces in Manitoba.

Mr. Schreyer's responsibility would be, whether it is in the health care area or other areas, it is imperative that we stay on top of it. It is in the public interest that government know what is going on with regard to not only what is happening in school divisions but also imperative that we know what is going on in the public

sector in general. As we mentioned before, Mr. Schreyer was in contact with the negotiating team. The negotiating team was in contact with him. They told him exactly what the shortfall was with regard to a financial shortfall in the Sunrise School Division. They are the ones, I understand, at least I have been advised, they informed Mr. Schreyer of the financial challenge they had with regard to getting a new collective agreement with their workers. Then they ended up going to mediation and they were able to resolve their concerns and the strike ended, then people went back to work.

Mr. Schreyer's expertise or role appears to be very important here because the school division was able to talk to a person that was aware of labour issues, aware of collective agreements, aware of public sector contracts. It is something, as far as Prairie Rose School Division is concerned, we would ask that Prairie Rose—this is something I have mentioned previously and I believe bears repeating, is that conciliation broke down, they have been on strike for a week and there has been no request, to the best of my knowledge, at least. I can ask staff, but I believe, to date, there have not been any letters come from the school division to my office about Prairie Rose and the strike they are on.

It is something I am prepared to talk to the Minister of Labour about to have them look at mediation. It is important because mediation and this process is a step that has not been taken upon or reached by the two parties in Prairie Rose. When you take a look at Prairie Rose they went to conciliation, it broke down, they went on strike and then they have not pursued mediation at all. What we are saying is there is another step here involved to bring the two parties together and try to iron out your differences. The Province of Manitoba has been very supportive of amalgamated divisions and other divisions as well. What we are saying is that it is important to note that on the record. We have been there and are continuing to be very supportive of amalgamated divisions.

Mrs. Stefanson: For the record, I have never made any disparaging remarks about Mr. Schreyer. I have never even met Mr. Schreyer. *[interjection]* I believe you did. I have never said anything. I do not even know Mr. Schreyer. All I

know is that he is an employee of the Treasury Board. Just for the record.

This is not about Mr. Schreyer. It is about who directed Mr. Schreyer to intervene in this dispute on behalf of the Government. Was it the Minister of Education? Was it the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)? Was it the Minister of Labour (Mr. Ashton)? Was it the Premier (Mr. Doer)? Who directed Mr. Schreyer to enter into conversations with MAST or with anyone in the negotiating team on behalf of the Government?

Mr. Lemieux: I did not say that the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), or the Education critic was making disparaging remarks about Mr. Schreyer. I said I trust and I hope that in their comments and their questions they are not making disparaging remarks directed at him personally. *[interjection]* I agree.

I want to acknowledge that, from the member from Tuxedo, I do not attribute any of those comments in a negative way towards Mr. Schreyer, because he is really well respected in Manitoba. He does a very good job and he works extremely hard.

We, as a government, continue to be very supportive. I do not want to add to the member from Tuxedo, my Education critic's level of frustration, but we have continually said that the negotiating team from Sunrise School Division expressed their views with regard to what the challenge was for them to Mr. Schreyer, who is the representative of government. They told Mr. Schreyer that they are at an impasse, I gather, and that the school division itself was able to cover two thirds of the gap, which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) stated today, I believe, on two different occasions, and that they were asking the Province of Manitoba because of this huge gap which was stated in their March 24th letter, talking about a 15%-60% gap. They had no way of being able to close that gap without government's assistance. That is the truth of the matter. That was reiterated by the Minister of Finance today in Question Period, and stated that.

It was their negotiating team that came to the representative of the Government and stated that quite clearly, that this is what we are faced

with. It is something that certainly had to be considered. What happened was, they ended up going to mediation and, then, of course, they were able to strike a deal and then the strike was concluded. The point I was trying to make earlier, as well as that with regard to any other school division, is if they are faced with similar circumstances, should look at mediation, should look at—

I am not asking every school division in the province to write me a letter, but, on the other hand, our door is open, and if they wish to discuss their challenges that they have on the financial end, it is imperative that we know about this. We want to know about it. We want to know if circumstances have changed, if their student enrolment has dropped. We will know about student enrolment more in about, roughly, two or three weeks. We will know whether or not their student enrolment has dropped and their ability to receive that money, that \$50 per student, whether or not that will be at the level that has been laid out for them.

I know that the member from Tuxedo has heard this before, but with regard to the amount of financing that we have provided and the amount of funding we have provided to, not only the amalgamated divisions, but all school divisions in the province, it really is unprecedented.

I realize the previous government had to make the decisions they made but, to be fair, the funding we have provided in the last four years is really unprecedented. I do not know what happened in the Sterling Lyon years or before Sterling Lyon, Walter Weir days or Duff Roblin days. I have no idea what the level was then, but I just know that in more recent times, if we can compare over the last, just say, 20 years, let us say even within the last 10 years or so, you can see that the funding that we have provided has been at the level where it is truly unprecedented, in a way. Funding at the rate of economic growth is really important. I know that members opposite—I raise this with the member from Springfield. I do not think that he begrudges Sunrise getting the money and so the strike ended and the children were able to go back to school in a way that they had busing and had the staff back at work.

I know the member from Ste. Rose probably feels that the BSE or drought has an impact on those municipalities that are going to be facing some tough decisions, and how that is going to impact on school funding. I know that as a government, as a minister for the Department of Education the fact of the matter is that, no matter who takes a look at what we have done as a government, myself or the previous minister in Education, we have provided not only funding at the rate of economic growth but many other areas where we have put money into capital projects.

We have funded new schools and renovations of new schools at a much higher rate than the previous government did. I know that we will continue to certainly look at that. Who knows what is going to happen economically in the province. Certainly, right now we are looking at the funding at the rate of economic growth as very, very important. We will continue to look at that. We have a commitment made by the Premier (Mr. Doer) and our Government that that would remain. That is certainly not going to change. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass?

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, this is unprecedented all right. The minister likes to refer to the Norrie report and then branch off into BSE. What has happened is he is responsible in an area where they have wandered into some difficult situations without a plan. When some-

thing like this negotiation comes up, they appear to have decided that they could probably quietly settle this and maybe nobody would notice what was really going on.

Everybody was warning the Government that there was going to be great difficulty in avoiding \$10-million worth of additional cost, let alone \$10-million worth of savings. I cannot for a moment believe that this minister has allowed himself to be put in this position, probably by the Finance Minister (Mr. Selinger), probably by the political gurus attached to the Premier's office who wanted, on the eve of an election, to settle a problem that was getting to be a little messy.

You cannot call something like this occurring, without a plan two weeks before an election, anything but what it is. It was a plan to try and bring in a fixer and solve a problem. There is no plan for the other divisions. The minister just said that he was prepared to go on, and if another division found itself in mediation, then maybe they could call him. *[interjection]* Does this mean I got the floor when we—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5:30 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 22, 2003

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