

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 9, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Pembina Trails School Division—New High School

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Overcrowded schools throughout Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods, Linden Ridge and Richmond West subdivisions are forcing Pembina Trails School Division to bus students outside of these areas to attend classes in the public school system.

Elementary schools in Pembina Trails School Division have run out of space to accommodate the growing population of students in the aforementioned areas.

Five-year projections for enrolment in the elementary schools in these areas indicate significant continued growth.

Existing high schools that receive students from Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods and Linden Ridge are at capacity and cannot accommodate the growing number of students that will continue to branch out of these subdivisions.

Bussing to outlying areas is not a viable long-term solution to meeting the student population growth in the southwest portion of Winnipeg.

The development of Waverley West will increase the need for a high school in the southwest sector of Winnipeg.

The government is demonstrating a lack of respect for the students and families in Whyte Ridge, Lindenwoods, Linden Ridge and Richmond West by

refusing to provide adequate access to education within the community.

The Fort Whyte constituency is the only constituency in the province that does not have a public high school.

NDP constituencies in Winnipeg continue to receive capital funding for various school projects while critical overcrowding exists in schools in Lindenwoods, Whyte Ridge and Richmond West.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government recognize the need for a public high school in the southwest region of Winnipeg.

To request the provincial government, in conjunction with the Public Schools Finance Board, to consider adequate funding to establish a high school in the southwest sector of Winnipeg.

Signed by Brenda Dunkerley, Kerry Stevenson, Evelyn Armstrong and many others.

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

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency

response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

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

Signed by Sharon Bencharski, Adeline Natyna, Renée Cook and many, many others.

* (13:35)

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Brij Lal Bhutani, Kunti Bhutani and Ravi Bhutani.

Supported Living Program

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This is signed by Darryl Falk, Hubert Brodeur, Robert Brodeur and many, many others.

TABLE OF REPORTS

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I would like to table the following Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, the 2005-2006 Revenue Estimates.

* (13:40)

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 today Karen Dunlop, president of the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba; Lynn Marks, president of the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba; Dawn Bollman, president of the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba; Sandy Gessler of the University of Manitoba Faculty of Nursing and Gisele Lapointe of the Collège Universitaire de Saint Boniface. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Sale).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mental Health Services Early Psychosis Intervention Programs

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to also welcome and acknowledge the hard work that nurses

do in the province of Manitoba. I know this is National Nursing Week and certainly we on this side of the House want to welcome you, congratulate you and celebrate for all that you do for Manitobans. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, in Canada, severe mental disorders account for four of the ten leading causes of disability. Schizophrenia accounts for the use of one in twelve hospital beds in Canada. In fact, about 300 000 Canadians experience schizophrenia. The annual direct and indirect costs of this affliction are estimated at about \$4.3 billion annually.

Concerned citizens came to this Legislature last week to raise awareness about the importance of early identification and treatment of mental illness. I would like to ask the Premier if he will listen to those concerned Manitobans, and No. 1, develop a comprehensive early psychosis intervention strategy, and No. 2, Mr. Speaker, ensure them that Winnipeg's early prevention and intervention program will be expanded to rural and northern areas of Manitoba.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we do have an early psychosis program and we believe that program must be expanded.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is very, very clear that what we have seen with this NDP government is not more programs for mental health, but less. This government should be improving mental health but, in fact, we see reductions in services. It was made very clear when this Premier closed down the mental health safe house in Swan River earlier this year.

Mr. Speaker, in 2002 this NDP government provided funding to a start-up program for mentally ill teenagers and young adults in Winnipeg aimed at early detection of psychosis. At the time they also promised to expand that program to rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba as well. Why, after three years, 36 months, has this well-deserved program in Winnipeg, under their watch, not expanded to rural and northern Manitoba?

Mr. Doer: I was just in Flin Flon this Friday, late Friday, Mr. Speaker, and the primary health care unit was officially opened. That primary health care unit has mental health workers working in the community with other public health professionals and excellent nurses, I might say, in tribute to the Nurses' Week

and the proclamation that was made by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale).

I was in The Pas in January and there was an opening, again, of a primary health care unit that includes public health nurses, dieticians and mental health staff working together with families. So there is progress being made, but as I said in the answer to the first question, there is more work to do.

Mr. Murray: This Premier travels around Manitoba and talks about all these programs. I hope he will go to Swan River and open the mental health safe house that he closed in Swan River. That is what he should be doing.

In March of 2002 when this NDP government's then-Health Minister, the member from Kildonan, made a presentation to the Romanow Commission, he stated, and I quote: "If your child is not getting care for a psychosis episode that is a crisis." It is a crisis yet teens, young adults, rural and northern areas still do not have local access to the early intervention services that this NDP government promised some three years ago. Mr. Speaker, 36 months have lapsed.

In Ontario, the government created a working group of early intervention and psychosis that was made up of mental health professionals, family consumer representatives which have developed a strategy for a comprehensive and early intervention capacity across that province. They have done that in Ontario. I would ask the Premier if he will commit to doing the same made-in-Manitoba solution and ensure that something is in place at the end of this year, Mr. Speaker.

* (13:45)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we have—*[interjection]* Do not be paranoid.

I was continuing on in my answer in rural mental health services. The 7th Street primary health care unit in Brandon also has individuals working in this program. The member opposite made a comment about the former Minister of Health. I seem to recall a few years ago the former Minister of Health received an award, a mental health award, for his investments in mental health. He has put in place a strategy dealing with youth, dealing with early intervention with youth.

In fact, in January 2003, we have implemented the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Services program dealing with adolescents, youth and young people in Winnipeg.

I mentioned Brandon, The Pas, Thompson, Mr. Speaker. We have a new hospital, yes, in Swan River, being built under this Minister of Health and the former Minister of Health. Have we done enough? There is more work to do, but we are a lot further along the road than we were a few years ago.

Mental Health Services Early Psychosis Intervention Programs

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, one in five Manitobans will suffer some form of mental illness in their lifetime, yet this government does not recognize the importance of this issue to the people of Manitoba. This government's lip-service goes back almost three years. At that time they said they would create a province-wide first episode psychosis program. Three years later, we still do not have a program, not a province-wide one, not an integrated program.

Why has this minister broken his promise to Manitobans?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister responsible for Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, as I said the other day when the member asked this question, and, again, I do applaud his interest in mental health services in Manitoba, that our government since 1999 has increased funding to mental health by 38 percent. That is an increase of close to \$20 million.

It is absolutely true, Mr. Speaker, that one of the most important things that we can do is early intervention. That is why our Healthy Schools initiative has as its theme this year mental health. Schools across Manitoba are taking up on this particular initiative and certainly ensuring that not only are we servicing people with mental health issues, but doing what is very important, and that is promoting mental wellness. That is just what we are committed to do.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I will give this government one thing. They certainly are good at making announcements and throwing money around without really addressing the issue.

I remind the minister that the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre's early psychosis prevention intervention program recently closed its doors to new patients for several months. By this NDP government's own definition, we have a crisis in the mental health services in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, I simply ask where is this government's plan for a comprehensive province-wide prevention and treatment of psychosis.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, as the member indicated, we do indeed have an early psychosis prevention and intervention service, and that is very, very important. Along with that particular strategy, we have a comprehensive strategy including the aforementioned Healthy Schools initiative. We also fund nine self-help organizations across Manitoba to assist people in community where the research certainly tells us is the most significant impact that we can have on those with mental illness and indeed with the promotion of mental wellness.

When we talk about young people, we have significant funding that we put forth to the Teen Talk Program because, again, the mountain of research indicates that students will, in fact, have the best mental wellness results when they are in a peer-to-peer environment. Our commitment is broad, our commitment is integrated, Mr. Speaker.

*(13:50)

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we know that other provinces have implemented long-term strategies. We are just not clear if this government really does have a long-term vision.

Manitobans are in desperate need of a comprehensive province-wide psychosis strategy. This government has called lack of access to psychosis treatment intervention a crisis. This government has also promised to expand the program to all Manitobans.

So will the minister today guarantee that no one will be turned away in times of their greatest need?

Ms. Oswald: Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and will reiterate for him that our commitment in real dollars since 1999 is close to \$20 million, an increase of 38 percent. Since 2003, we funded the regional health authorities an additional \$400,000 to add supported housing staff to

their mental health programs. Again, the comprehensive approach is what needs to be taken.

Our Healthy Schools initiative is also expanding with a committee on mental wellness throughout the curriculum helping our young people deal, in particular, with issues like drug addiction and avoiding such addictions, with issues like eating disorders and fostering good self-esteem, with issues such as, heaven forbid, suicide prevention. It is this kind of an integrated committee approach that is going to assist the young people of Manitoba. That is what we are committed to do.

Physician Resources (Brandon) Pediatrician Shortage

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, Brandon has been without the services of two full-time pediatricians for more than six months now. On Friday, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) and I had the opportunity to meet with concerned Westman mothers to discuss the continuing shortage of pediatricians and the lack of action on behalf of this government and the Minister of Health. They informed me at the time that they had requested a meeting with the Minister of Health and had been refused a meeting.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health why, if he is serious about recruiting pediatricians in Brandon, has he refused to meet with the Westman mothers for health care.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Far from refusing to meet with them, Mr. Speaker, I met with them in my office. I met with them in Brandon. I met with a sub-group of them, a woman and her physician husband in my office. So I have actually had three meetings with the mothers in Brandon. Most recently, we wrote to them from the department suggesting that they work with our physician recruitment and retention strategy which has been strengthened and improved.

The appropriate place for them to give their suggestions is to the people who have to actually do the work, which is the provincial recruiting and retention committee, which has our northern and rural office of Health headquartered in Dauphin r. Chris Burnett, who provides us with physician recruitment and retention strategy advice on a part-

time basis. We have invited them to meet with that group. I hope they do so.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health met with these people four months ago. There has been a shortage of two pediatricians, full time, in Brandon for more than six months now. Nothing has taken place. They have requested another meeting from this Minister of Health and he has declined. Shame on him.

In the minutes of the general medical staff annual meeting of the Brandon Regional Health Authority, held March 9 of this year, it was discussed that the RHA currently faced a shortfall of at least \$100,000 in the money required to attract a pediatrician to Brandon, and that the government was not making any attempt to increase the amount of funding to secure a pediatrician in Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, how can this Minister of Health claim to be serious about recruiting pediatricians to Brandon when he will not adequately fund the recruitment effort? Is he simply paying lip-service to this very serious issue in Brandon?

Mr. Sale: We have met with the Brandon Regional Health Authority, their recruitment and retention group, in terms of how we can support their efforts with pediatricians. They have met with and interviewed a number of potential candidates. They are working very hard at this question.

I have to remind the member that physician remuneration is a matter of a collective agreement between the Manitoba Medical Association and the Government of Manitoba. That agreement is in place and it fixes tariffs and fixes remuneration patterns. That is what we live with. We believe in that approach to providing physician services throughout our province. We work with the MMA to do that. If the opposition believes that things need to be amended, we would be glad to hear from them, and I am sure the MMA would be as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: This is indicative of this Minister of Health's refusal to admit that there is a serious medical human resource crisis in Brandon that is taking place right now. Aside from the shortage of pediatricians, Brandon currently has vacancies in orthopedics, internal medicine specialists, dermatologists. The list goes on and on. I will not repeat that again for this House because we have done this

time and time again, yet this minister refuses to take this situation seriously.

Are we to expect the same kind of inaction from this Minister of Health when it comes to recruiting the whole host of other specialists that are needed so desperately in Brandon, Mr. Speaker? Why has this minister turned his back on the people of west Manitoba?

*(13:55)

Mr. Sale: Well, Mr. Speaker, far from turning our backs on the people of Westman, there is a \$58-million new hospital in Brandon that was promised and cancelled five times by the previous administration.

Far from turning our backs on the people of Westman, Mr. Speaker, the first MRI outside of Winnipeg is in Brandon, Manitoba, along with new computerized tomography scanning equipment. Far from turning our backs on the people of western Manitoba, there are 139 more physicians in this province today than there were in 1999, and over 50 of those are in western Manitoba.

We do not turn our backs on any part of Manitoba, whether it is Boundary Trails, Churchill, Thompson, Swan River, Steinbach. We work with all Manitobans to strengthen our health care services. That is why there are 874 more nurses today than there were in 1979.

Seven Oaks School Division Land Acquisition and Development

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, last week when asked if he was going to allow the Seven Oaks School Division to continue to use taxpayers' money to illegally develop 20 more lots in Swinford Park, the Minister of Education was vague and indecisive. He could not seem to make a decision about that.

Is the Minister of Education allowing this illegal activity to continue?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Once again, Mr. Speaker, we are engaged in a 30-day process to get to the answers in this issue. It is important that we review all the facts with regard to this development, Mr. Speaker, and it is also important to assure that the

school division complies with the law in such a way that it will not hurt the ratepayers.

Mrs. Driedger: Brian O'Leary, the superintendent of the Seven Oaks School Division, said that the NDP-appointed Public Schools Finance Board approved this illegal land development scheme every step of the way. These officials later sought a legal opinion about this, then withheld that opinion as well as a financial analysis for two to three months. The minister's officials wrote the terms of reference of the review, terms of reference carefully crafted to protect the NDP. The minister is part of the problem, Mr. Speaker, and he needs to be investigated as well.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education today if he will commit to an independent review.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, we have committed to a 30-day review. We have also committed to have that review done on or before June 2, and we will have that review done on or before June 2.

Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, if the system has failed us, then we are going to address this issue and we are going to address it through this 30-day process.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, Brian O'Leary, the superintendent of Seven Oaks School Division, said that money was made from this scheme, but the numbers do not add up. The Minister of Education has refused on numerous occasions to provide financial information even though he is sitting on a financial report. If they made money, why on April 11 did the Seven Oaks School Division suspend its regular business in order to push through a by-law allowing them to borrow money for their current operating purposes? They, then, at that same meeting, after passing a by-law to borrow money, went on to write a whole bunch of cheques for further land development.

Mr. Speaker, maybe we should rename this Swindle Park. It is time for an independent review, and I would like to ask this Minister of Education if he is prepared today to call for one.

* (14:00)

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have acted very quickly on this issue when it was brought to our attention. We have a 30-day review in process. The documents the member is referring to, we have

discussed at length in Estimates about this process. Those documents are part of that review. We have said, and I will say it again, that review will be completed on or before June 2.

Rate/Fee Structure Increases

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has had a record increase in revenues this year courtesy of the federal government, \$525 million more revenues in this budget year. In spite of these revenues, on Friday, the Finance Minister announced another round of tax increases: a 20% increase for gas and oil fitter licence, 100% increase for electrician and gas and oil examinations.

When will this NDP government ever have enough revenue to satisfy its spending habits? How much additional revenue is necessary before this Finance Minister says no further tax increases?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this budget has \$149 million in tax reductions. These fee increases that were—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These fee increases announced Friday by press release are relatively modest. They are, in total, fees that have not been changed since 1997. The total amount of these fees is considerably less than a million dollars. We have had \$150 of tax reductions for every dollar of fee increase, 150 to 1. Who is doing better? Manitobans are doing better.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister approved a 25% increase in fees for the power engineer examinations. He also announced an increase in probate fees, and under the formula, an under-\$150,000 estate will have an increase in probate fees of 18 percent. All of these increases came without budgetary approval, without debate in this House. The Finance Minister is guilty of increasing taxes through the backdoor and sneaky tax increases.

I ask the Minister of Finance when will he stop imposing sneaky tax releases through the backdoor.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, you can tell there is a loose grip on reality when you do something by press

release and it is called "sneaky". This was publicly announced on Friday by—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: Once again, Mr. Speaker, all this information was put on the public record by press release. In addition, the item about the probate fees was mentioned at the budget time. We indicated there was a possibility of a probate fee increase. I reiterate again, \$149 million of tax relief, \$149 million; 151 to the advantage of Manitobans.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, on March 21, the Finance Minister during the Interim Supply debate on the record committed that any increases in fees would go through an appropriate public process for review and public process for disclosure.

I ask the Minister of Finance, instead of increasing taxes through press release, why will he not live up to his commitment to a public process and public review before increasing taxes.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we are having a public debate on this. We have Estimates, we have had a full public debate on the budget. We have an opportunity at concurrence—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: We have a full opportunity in the Legislature and at concurrence to debate all of these matters and I am happy to do so. I have done it by public press release, the fees that were done in the department. The member puffs up with percentages, fees that go to the cost of providing services to ensure that Manitobans are safe when they get these services provided for them. These inspection services ensure that Manitobans have services provided to them so they can live safely. The members opposite would be complaining if these inspections were not done properly. We are simply covering the cost of these services.

Dauphin Legion Property Tax Exemption

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, this weekend saw a number of celebrations throughout the country of V-E Day, and indeed, this province

took its share in celebrations as well. I ask this question because in December of 2003, the Premier (Mr. Doer) of our province promised the veterans of Manitoba that they would, indeed, receive the Dauphin exemption beginning in January of 2005, I believe it was. After making that announcement or committing to that, the Premier did have his picture taken with Mr. Petrinka, the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Conservative Party to indicate this was a move of good will.

I want to ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs whether or not he understood what the Premier's commitment was when it was made in December 2003.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, as we worked with the veterans association over the last period of time, as I recall in the article, there was the Leader of the Liberal Party, there was the Leader of the Conservative Party, the Premier and some others at the announcement. What did not happen in the nineties was not giving the educational support taxes to the Legions and to our veterans out there. We have done that. They do not any longer pay any of the educational support on their Legions in the province of Manitoba.

We have come a long way to support and help Legions in many ways, and we continue to do that with veterans' highways. We continue to do that with our licensing recognitions of veterans in this province. It is something they did not do, but we have done with the educational support tax.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there was any question at the time when the Premier made his commitment here in this House. It was the Dauphin exemption we were asking about, and it was the Dauphin exemption he was talking about. It was the Dauphin exemption that veterans throughout Manitoba understood the Premier was making his commitment for. I want to indicate the kind of feeling there is out there right now when a veterans association says please be advised there will be no happiness until we, Canadian veterans, are all treated equally.

I want to ask the Premier when did he give the instruction to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs that he should not live up to the commitment made by the Premier.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I recall in opposition, the Legions were asking for a reduction on the property tax, particularly on the education tax. There is no question that this government, for the first time ever, has eliminated the education portion of property tax on Legions. There is also no question, Mr. Speaker, that in the Dauphin example, the City Council of Dauphin forgave and forgives the property taxes to the community of Dauphin. So we have made the decision on education taxes, something that was, you know, just like farmers' taxes, all talk, no action from members opposite. We have taken action.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, least of all the Premier should not speak with forked tongue in this House. It is to the veterans of Canada, the veterans of this province that we have a debt.

When we were asking the question in the House along with the Liberal Party in this House, it was clear it was the Dauphin exemption being asked for. In the Dauphin exemption, there is no choice by any local government but to, indeed, fulfil its obligation as is passed by the law of this province. The veterans of this province are asking, we are asking for the Dauphin exemption. They were given assurances they would receive it. The government has broken its faith and promise with veterans. I ask this Premier to do the right thing and fulfil the commitment he made to the veterans of this province as should have been done back in 2003.

*(14:10)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I recall lobbying that was made to us when we were in opposition, when the members opposite did not reduce the education tax on Legions one single cent. We have reduced, and we did so retroactively, the education tax for Legions in Manitoba.

The issue of the Dauphin precedent, Mr. Speaker, is available to any municipality or city in Manitoba. If the City of Winnipeg or the City of Thompson wants to do what the Province did on the education tax, they have the ability to follow the local leadership that was taken in Dauphin. We have followed our commitment on education taxes, we did it retroactively. They got nothing from members opposite and I find them hypocritical to be asking this question today.

Nursing Research Funding

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, nurses make an incredibly important contribution to health care in Manitoba, and at the leading edge of improvement to our health care system is research to improve nursing care. The Manitoba Health Research Council provides the core funding for operating grants for health research in our province, and the Manitoba Nursing Research Institute also has a role.

I ask the Minister of Health to tell us what proportion of health care research dollars provided through the Manitoba Health Research Council goes to nurses and nursing research and why the total provincial support for the MHRC is almost exactly the same as it was in 1992. Why has the Province not been more vigorous in supporting the MHRC and in supporting nursing research through the MHRC and through the Manitoba Nursing Research Institute?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): During our time in government, we have increased support for research from about \$13 million to over \$19 million a year, Mr. Speaker, an increase of about 50 percent. We were able, last year, to match every single project that came forward through the Canada Foundation for Innovation by responding with the Manitoba foundation for innovation's support in the order of 40 percent of each of those projects.

Nurses along with other academicians compete for juried research projects which receive recommendations from councils such as the Canada foundation or the Manitoba foundation and other juried academic research bodies, Mr. Speaker. They compete on the same level footing as all other academics, and they are very successful in what they do.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, research helps to improve nursing care and to enable change to make nursing care more cost-effective as well as of higher quality. This is Nursing Week and one would expect the Minister of Health to be on top of the facts with regard to the provincial support for nurses through the Manitoba Health Research Council and the Manitoba Nursing Research Institute.

These are simple facts. Why can the Minister of Health not give us the facts? Why has the Province not invested more in the Manitoba Health Research Council and the Manitoba Nursing Research Institute, and why is the support of nursing research as a proportion of the total funds through the MHRC so low in comparison to other areas of health care funding and health care research?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, we count on the advice of the Manitoba Health Research Council particularly in their very important program of funding support for young researchers, people who have come to Manitoba to pursue their academic careers, usually on a post-doctoral fellowship. They are able very often to secure their initial grants which put them in a position then to compete for more senior research grants through the larger foundations.

So the Manitoba Health Research Council under the able chairing of Dr. Jane Evans over the past couple of years has been very strategic in the use of those funds in attracting and supporting our brightest and best young researchers, including people who are in the nursing research area, Mr. Speaker. So, we have in fact increased our support to that very important research body, and we continue to count on them for strategic advice on where to use those dollars most effectively.

Seven Oaks School Division Land Acquisition and Development

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning this government was aware that Seven Oaks acquired the property. To the eventual disposal of the property, the government has been kept informed. In fact, the public education finance board gave the green light for Seven Oaks to do the things that it has been doing.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education just does not get it. We do not assign any value to a political internal review of this matter. If the government is true to its words in wanting to get to the bottom of this or to legitimize any sort of investigation, they would recognize the value of having an independent review.

Will this Minister of Education do the right thing and acknowledge that there is a need for an independent review of this matter, not some sort of a cover-up by this Minister of Education because he knew all along?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): It is really curious to hear Liberals talk in that context, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, the process that we are engaged in is going to take place and be complete on or before June 2. We will have all the answers to the questions throughout this process. We have committed to that last Monday and the process is underway. We have developed the terms of reference. We have been collecting the information. We have full co-operation of all parties involved, and we will have that information on or before June 2.

Neighbourhoods Alive! Program Aboriginal-Focussed Projects

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, the inner city of Winnipeg has seen revitalization and growth at unparalleled levels in the last six years. I am seeing Aboriginal and Métis peoples—Perhaps, my friends across the House would listen because I am going to ask a question about Aboriginal and Métis people who evidently they are not concerned about.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, I am seeing Aboriginal and Métis people now more than ever taking their rightful place in our economy. I would ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to inform the House of particular developments and opportunities which are being provided for Manitoba's inner city Aboriginal residents through the Neighbourhoods Alive! program.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to support increased participation in social and economic development of our inner city. Today we had an announcement that it was over \$500,000 to support our inner city and Aboriginal residents in our inner city here in Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, in response to some of the needs and opportunities facing Aboriginals in our inner city neighbourhoods, we had eight announcements. One was the Spence Neighbourhood Association received \$17,000 for Inner-City Aboriginal Neighbours; the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre received over \$30,000 for the Aboriginal Girl Guides of Canada project; the Manitoba Theatre for Young People received \$20,000 for its Aboriginal Youth in Arts training program; SEED Winnipeg, \$25,000 for Aboriginal Business Service project; the Lord Selkirk Aboriginal Women's Group received

\$20,000 in renewed funding for its Aboriginal Youth Alliance project.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite do not want to listen to the question. They might want to step outside if they do not want to hear.

The Ma Mawi Chi received \$99,000, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, on a point of order. It is interesting to note that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs certainly does not know much about his department when he has to read word for word his answers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, on the same point of order?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, what I was trying to mention is the work we are doing with the Aboriginal communities in the inner city. I am trying to inform members opposite that do not seem to want to hear about Aboriginal issues in our province. If the members would only be quiet in the House and come to some order they could hear answers on all the work that we are doing for Aboriginal communities, not only in Winnipeg but throughout Manitoba. Obviously, if members would listen, they would be able to get through the Question Period and hear the information that is very relevant.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (14:20)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of orders are to draw the Speaker's attention to a breach of a rule and not be used for debate.

The honourable Member for River Heights, on the same point of order.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to this point of order. I think that the

call by the minister for members on this side to step outside certainly was an inappropriate call, and it could easily have been misunderstood. I think that it is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: The Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs has a record of talking around the subject instead of trying to deliver a clear answer. *[interjection]* Look, this is very relevant.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is turning into a debate. Points of orders are to point out breaches of a rule, not to be used for debate.

Mr. Gerrard: I just will finish up briefly, Mr. Speaker. This is an important issue, given the words the minister used and the context which they are often taken. I give one more example which is relevant here. Last week I had asked the minister about the NDP caucus brief saying that Waverley West was a Transit Smart community and he could not give me a good answer. *[interjection]* Just a minute, this is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for River East, she does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

Affordable Housing Initiative Project Proposal (Winkler)

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, it has been a year and a half since the announcement for the affordable housing project was made in the city of Winkler. Now the federal government has approved funding for this project. The City of Winkler has purchased property for this housing project. Chair, Dave Penner, is frustrated because they were led to believe this project would fit their criteria. Now why does this NDP government continue to deny this application?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, through the Affordable Housing Initiative, we do set out certain criteria that we ask be met by every group that may be bringing in a proposal. We never say no to a proposal. We do try to work with each and

every group to ensure they are meeting the criteria we have set out. We are happy to work with the group the member mentioned, as well as any group throughout the province of Manitoba, as we continue to rehabilitate, renovate and build new housing for the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, this is a very interesting answer because the City of Winkler is getting communications back from the Minister of Family Services, from the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk), and they are all conflicting and, obviously, they are denying each one of them. I am just wondering if this is the same situation that the Minister of Highways says, well, that Mennonite community, the southern part of the province does not need any money. Is that your criteria you are using?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I find that question quite offensive, considering that we have worked—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: —considering that we have made announcements in many departments in every area of this province including bringing housing to the people of Manitoba that members opposite walked away from in '93-94 and did nothing to invest in social housing. We are the province under the former minister who brought Canada and the provinces and territories back to social housing. Two weeks ago, I signed phase two of the Affordable Housing Initiative and we will continue to build houses regardless of members opposite.

* (14:25)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Nursing Week

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): It was my pleasure this morning to attend a special ceremony here in our rotunda where the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), in the company of nurses and nursing faculty from several Manitoba institutions, proclaimed this National Nursing Week. We celebrate National Nursing Week to increase awareness among the public, policymakers and government of many contributions of nursing to the well-being of Canadians.

The theme this year is "Patients first. Safety always." This theme highlights the nursing profession's commitment to delivering safe and ethical care. Mr. Speaker, the profession of nursing is one of the most respected professions as it delivers "SEVA," a Sanskrit word meaning "service with dedication."

There are more than 15 000 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and registered psychiatric nurses in Manitoba. Nurses make up the largest group of health care professionals in our province. Today nurses work in complex environments requiring high levels of skill and knowledge to care for patients and the broader community. The expertise and dedication these nurses bring to work each day ensures Manitobans better health care, sooner.

Our government recognizes the integral role nurses play in Manitoba's health care and community services system. Between 1999 and 2004, we have doubled enrolments of nurse training programs and tripled the number of nursing graduates. We are happy with these results and will build on this success by harnessing the wealth of talent in existing nurses programs in the rural and northern regions of our province.

In July 2004, we established a program through the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund to offer new nursing graduates grants to practice in rural and northern Manitoba. In addition, the Premier recently announced \$1.25 million for further expansion of rural and northern nurses training. This program will include 50 new nurses spaces in 2005—

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I am pleased to rise today in the House in recognition and in celebration of Nursing Week. I just want to take this opportunity, on behalf of everyone on our side of the House, to welcome all of the nurses here today who participated in proclamation of Nursing Week this week, Mr. Speaker.

In 1971, May 12 was designated International Nurses Day in celebration of Florence Nightingale's birthday. This week we celebrate Nursing Week, the nursing profession's annual opportunity to be

recognized for their hard work and dedication to putting patients first in our province. Mr. Speaker, this is also an opportunity for all of us to celebrate the contributions nurses make each and every day to the health care system in our province.

This morning I attended the signing of the Nursing Week proclamation in the rotunda of the Legislature. I was able to speak with a number of nurses representing the three colleges; registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and registered psychiatric nurses, many of whom have joined us in the gallery today.

This year, the theme of Nursing Week is "Nursing: Patients first. Safety always." This theme highlights how fundamental patient safety is to all nurses, regardless of where they work, in our hospitals, public health clinics, home care, community centres or rural and remote settings.

As we celebrate the achievements of the nursing profession, we also recognize the challenges that must be addressed, including escalating shortages, increased workloads and an ageing population.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to ask all members of the House to join me in saluting the dedication, compassion and professionalism of Manitoba's nurses. On behalf of all of us in this Chamber and all Manitobans, thank you for all of your work.

Mother's Day

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was Mother's Day, and I would like to inform the House about a special event that I co-hosted in my constituency of St. Norbert in conjunction with this special day.

* (14:30)

I, along with the India Association of Manitoba, Inc., the Immigrant and Refugee Outreach Facilitator and the community facilitator for Winnipeg South, co-sponsored a Mother's Day get-together yesterday afternoon at Richmond Kings Community Centre. The event honoured the hard work and dedication shown by women to their role of nurturing and guiding children and adolescents in our society.

Mr. Speaker, this event featured the talents of local musicians and dance performers. The indi-

viduals and groups featured included Son Candela, a dance group from Columbia and El Salvador; Daniel Biojo, a Columbian vocalist; the Métis Heritage Dance Group; Masih Shahir, an Afghani musician; the Yellow River Chinese Association; the India School of Music, Theatre and Dance; the Brown Bear Spirit Singers; Sol de Espana, a Spanish dance group; and Shaback Gospel Sound, a Congolese musical group.

In excess of 200 people attended this free event and I heard many extremely complimentary comments about the fabulous cultural performers and the free refreshments and appetizers. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues, the Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) and the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross) for attending this event.

I also want to thank my fellow master of ceremonies, Surkha Joshi of the India Association of Manitoba Incorporated and the sponsors: Canada Safeway Ltd., Richmond Kings Community Centre, the Behavioural Health Foundation, Santa Lucia Pizza, Fort Richmond location and Fort Garry Florists store No. 2 for supporting this community event. I especially want to thank the many volunteers who willingly and generously gave of their time to ensure the success of this event.

Mr. Speaker, Mother's Day gives us an opportunity to express our appreciation to mothers and grandmothers for their tireless dedication to family and community. The hard work that mothers undertake helps us make Manitoba a special-

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Sierra Leone National Association

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, on April 30, I was pleased to attend the Sierra Leone National Association of Manitoba's 44th Independent Anniversary Celebration and Awards Night.

April 27, 1961, marked an important turning point in the history of Sierra Leone when the country gained its independence. Because of internal strife in Sierra Leone, many immigrants came to Canada during the 1990s and continue to make Manitoba their home. The Sierra Leonians have brought their culture, heritage and rich traditions with them and meshed with our multicultural mosaic.

President of the association, Alex Bockarie proudly said in his speech, "People do not sit and wait for a handout." This was reiterated later by the guest speaker, Sierra Leonian and professor at the University of Manitoba, Yatta Kanu, who said, "The Sierra Leonians are resourceful, responsible and self-reliant people." Her message was also that the whole community is responsible for the youth and encouraging them in education and community involvement.

The strength, pride and commitment of the Sierra Leonians, most certainly, adds to the vibrancy and cohesiveness of our multicultural Manitoba. We are fortunate that almost 700 Sierra Leonians now call Manitoba home.

The Sierra Leone National Association of Manitoba, for well over 10 years, has promoted cultural understanding and awareness and community commitment. The event celebrated the many volunteers who actively participated in Folklorama, the past and present executive members and the youth who have excelled in education and community commitment. We were also treated to entertainment by the Sierra Leone Dance Group.

I would like to thank the Sierra Leone National Association for allowing me to share in their celebrations and, once again, congratulate them on their strong association, their commitment to their culture and heritage and their shared vision in making Manitoba a better place to live, work and raise a family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Selkirk Hospital Palliative Care Program

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday night, May 7, over 1000 individuals attended a banquet evening in Selkirk in support of the Palliative Care Program offered at Selkirk General Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the Palliative Care Program relieves the suffering and enhances the quality of life in persons living with acute or chronic life-threatening illnesses. The Selkirk Hospital program addresses the physical, emotional and spiritual concerns of these individuals and their families.

Mr. Speaker, I and the mayor of Selkirk, David Bell co-chaired the event and we were assisted by several honorary co-chairs, including my friend, the

Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), our member of Parliament, James Bezan, local municipal, medical, spiritual and business leaders.

Mr. Speaker, the event was co-ordinated by Selkirk resident, Bonnie Schmidt and was managed by her small but dedicated group of volunteers. The Premier (Mr. Doer) attended the event and participated in recognizing the palliative care volunteers for the valuable contribution they make to this program.

It is our hope that the event will have raised over \$35,000 from this one night, Mr. Speaker. All the money raised will go directly to palliative care services in the Interlake and in Selkirk. I want to congratulate the Selkirk community for supporting the event and to all those involved. Thank you.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Springfield, on a point of order.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): A point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last week during Question Period, during the heat of the issue of the day, I made a comment about the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) that was unparliamentary. Although I disagree with the minister in the way he handles his department, I feel that the minister is both honourable and worthy of respect for the office he holds. Thus, I would like to apologize to the Minister of Education, the Member for Gimli.

Mr. Speaker: That should take care of the matter.

GRIEVANCES

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a grievance. Although I do regret to rise on a grievance, it has, I think, become a situation where it is absolutely necessary for those of us who are concerned about where education is going in this province to put our comments on the record. This afternoon I rise on a grievance because of the circumstances that surround the activities around the Minister of Education and his inability to manage his department and his inability to manage the affairs of the people that he has been put responsible for.

We as legislators have a responsibility to the people who elect us. We have a responsibility to be truthful in the answers we provide; we have a responsibility to ensure what we put on the record is accurate; and we have a responsibility to ensure what we do is indeed up front and legal. When we are put in the responsibility of a portfolio, that even becomes more important because each of us then takes an oath, an oath that is taken very seriously at the time when a minister is announced and when a minister is introduced to the public. The oath is done in a public fashion. The oath is taken in a public forum, and that oath becomes sort of the bond of that individual to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen under this administration some breaks of faith, if you like, with the people of the province, whether it is the veterans or whether it is other individuals, whether it is in the area of health care, whether it is in the area of agriculture, or now as we see it in the field of education. The minister did not seem to be aware of a very important matter in our province. That was that a school division was acting outside of the boundaries, if you like, of The Public Schools Act, which governs what schools can and cannot do. It governs what the divisions can and cannot do.

Mr. Speaker, Seven Oaks School Division, not because of the people that live within it but because of its leadership, has undertaken to act outside of The Public Schools Act. The individual who is the chief executive officer of that school division is an individual who is well known to this government. He was the campaign chair of the government, and he was disgraced and resigned from the campaign chair because of his illegal activities in a classroom where he, as a principal of a school, opened up a standards test by the Province, which was an illegal thing to do. No principal, no superintendent, no teacher is allowed to open a standards test before the time that it is to be written. Mr. O'Leary took it upon himself because he was such a close confidante of the government that he could actually break the law and have no repercussions.

Mr. Speaker, what followed? What followed was that the government decided to do a review of its own on the matter. What was the result of that review? Well, nothing happened. Mr. O'Leary, as a matter of fact, received a promotion out of all of that. He became the superintendent of Seven Oaks School Division.

*(14:40)

Now let us just leave that for a moment and go on to how things have progressed since then with this government. They appointed a Public Schools Finance Board, and who do you think was appointed as chair of that Public Schools Finance Board? It seemed to me that it was a trustee out of Seven Oaks School Division who became the head of the Public Schools Finance Board. Now we have the head of the Public Schools Finance Board, who is going to be dealing directly with a Mr. O'Leary, who is now going to be the superintendent.

Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden we find that the other members of the Public Schools Finance Board are all contributors to the New Democratic Party. Now, you know, I can understand patronage appointments to a body like this, but I have never seen where you load up a particular board with patronage appointments who all contribute to your party.

Mr. Speaker, what kind of a signal does that send to Manitobans? It tells you that this has become a very politicized board, that this board is now in the pockets of the government because they are all contributing to the NDP party.

An Honourable Member: Politics first.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, politics first, so if you contribute to the NDP party, you then are eligible to become a member of the Public Schools Finance Board. Mr. Zaidman, who was the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board, was also a trustee on Seven Oaks School Division. He is now going to be dealing with one Mr. O'Leary.

So what happens, Mr. Speaker? They decide to get into a little business. "Well, we will do this on the side. Education, of course, is our primary responsibility, but our secondary responsibility is going to be to develop some property. We are going to sell lots, we are going to sell houses, as a matter of fact, we are even going to get into the construction business. We are going to build some houses."

Mr. O'Leary tells us on the record that the Public Schools Finance Board knew all about this. Now, Mr. Zaidman, who was the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board, had to have known. He had to rubber-stamp this. I am sure that in his regular

meetings with the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) he must have had the opportunity to raise this issue.

The Minister of Education says, "I see nothing. I hear nothing. I know nothing." Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Mr. Zaidman knew, the minister knew. This was indeed something that was done outside of The Public Schools Act and the players that were involved all knew very well that it was.

Well, nothing was happening except that staff became very aware and very sensitive to the fact that we had an action being taken now by a school division and endorsed by the appointed members of the Public Schools Finance Board that was causing some nervousness among staff. To protect themselves, it was not the minister who asked for legal opinion, but one of the staff individuals who was named by the minister undertook to get a legal opinion as to whether or not this could be done. He got that legal opinion, Mr. Speaker, but what happened? The minister did not act on that legal opinion.

That legal opinion, for some reason, got lost somewhere in the minister's office for several months and it was not until our critic of education, the member from Charleswood, raised the issue with the minister that the minister all of a sudden became aware of it. As a matter of fact, he said that the first time he was aware of Swinford Park and the Lombard group and Seven Oaks School Division being in partnership was when it was raised in this House. Yet, at the same time, we produced documents—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: I will retract that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The particular issue that the honourable member just mentioned, I have it under advisement, and I kindly ask the honourable member to stay off that until I come back with a ruling.

Mr. Derkach: I should have known that when I saw the Clerk stand up from her place at the table, Mr. Chair. I apologize for that, and you are, of course, correct in your ruling with respect to that, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, let us carry on with my grievance. My grievance has to do with the fact that we have a situation happening in our province which

is outside of the school act. Now the school act is the law. It is the law. We have asked the minister to act on that law, to act to ensure that the school division is brought back within the school act.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has chosen to do a review for 30 days. Who is doing the review? First of all, we asked him in Estimates about who wrote the terms of reference. His deputy minister wrote the terms of reference. All right, I can say that is fair, but now who is going to do the review? It is the deputy minister that is going to do the review. All right, so we have the deputy minister writing the terms and reference, and he is going to be writing them for himself. That is a little bit like telling the fox do not eat a chicken when I put you in with the chickens here. This is the most bizarre situation that we have ever seen. The Premier (Mr. Doer) sits in his place and shakes his head affirmatively that this is the way it should be.

Go back to the time when Mr. O'Leary was found guilty of opening a test, a standardized test, what happened out of that review? I think it was swept under the carpet. What do you expect is going to happen under this review? It is going to be swept under the carpet. In that circumstance—*[interjection]* Yes, I have just been reminded that a more tragic thing—recommended—the whistle blower, the teacher who said this is wrong, got fired. That is the way this government works. If you do not comply with what our game plan is, you get fired. The poor teacher ended up being fired, yet that individual was the one who did the right thing. The guy who perpetrated the crime, if you like, got a promotion out of it. He became the superintendent out of one, of Seven Oaks School Division.

That is the way education things are done in this province, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, we go on and on, and sooner or later, the public will wake up and realize what this government is all about. This minister should be ashamed of himself. The Premier should be ashamed of himself. The Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) should be ashamed of herself, in how the affairs of this province are being conducted. How can the Deputy Premier or the Premier stand up in front of Manitobans without embarrassment knowing what is going on in one of their departments, knowing the kind of activity that is being perpetrated?

Mr. Speaker, where is the shame? If you have not got any shame, at least stand up for the kids in

our province to ensure their education is not being compromised. When you have a school division going out and buying property, developing property and borrowing money because they do not have it to run their education programs, there is something wrong with the picture. The minister says he is going to get to the bottom of it. We will see. We will see because you cannot have the fox in with the chickens and expect that everything is going to come out fine.

If the Deputy Premier has any influence on her boss and on the Minister of Education, they would be telling him to get the Auditor in, get that Auditor in and find out what is going on. Of course, they will say no because this has almost become government by Auditor. The Auditor is so busy, so busy reviewing the indiscretions of this government that he has no time to undertake any more responsibility. This government has been involved in questionable activity from day one, whether it is in the field of health care, whether it is in the field of family services, whether it is in the field of education. No matter where you point to, there is poor judgment exercised, first of all by the ministers, and I say there is poor judgment exercised by the Premier and the Deputy Premier who are supposed to be riding herd over that bunch over there.

Mr. Speaker, there is no accountability. There is absolutely no accountability. The Auditor has said that. The Auditor has said that on a number of occasions whether it was in education, whether it was in family services, whether it was in health. The Auditor General of our province has made some very damning comments about the conduct of this government. Yet it does not change. Yet it goes shamelessly out to the public and thinks the public can be hoodwinked into believing that they in fact are doing the right thing. I say to the government opposite and to the Minister of Education that you had better get your act together because the public of Manitoba will not tolerate that for much longer.

* (14:50)

When you look at what is happening in Education and what happened with the Crocus Fund, this government should be embarrassed. The only other government in this land that can be parallel to this bunch is the federal government who are now engaged in a situation that the Canadian public is finding intolerable. That is exactly where this group is going to be in very short order.

If you look at the shenanigans that have gone on with the Crocus Fund, the shenanigans that have gone on with education, with what is happening in the whole area of Hydra House, this government needs to be embarrassed at how it conducts its affairs. It needs to apologize to Manitobans, but, more importantly, it is getting to the point where the public will not tolerate this kind of activity much longer. That time will come when the public of Manitoba will say enough is enough; we do not need your kind leading this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) thought it was a cute trick when he was asked a question about what was going on in Seven Oaks School Division. At first he kind of scoffed it off, and all he could point to was how well his program was going compared to what happened—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River East, on a grievance.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to stand and take this opportunity to grieve. I would have liked to have heard my colleague the Member for Russell continue, because I know that he was only just getting started. But I will attempt my best to continue or maybe I will start over and go back a bit, because we look at the history of this government, and we have seen a government in power for a little over five years, and what have we seen? We have seen them going through their third Minister of Education in five short years.

Now what does that say to Manitobans and to the decision-making powers or incompetence of the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province of Manitoba, when we have seen time after time after time the issues in the Department of Education in a chaotic state? The first Minister of Education, the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), was the architect—or we are not really sure whether he was the architect—of the redrawing of school boundaries in the province of Manitoba which forced amalgamation in a very uneven and incomprehensible way, when we saw the second largest school division in the city of Winnipeg, the

school division that I represent, River East School Division, amalgamated with the Transcona part of the Transcona-Springfield School Division.

I am not sure that the Minister of Education, the Member for Brandon East, really understood or comprehended what was going on in the city of Winnipeg under forced amalgamation. I believe that probably he was the puppet. His strings were being pulled out of the Premier's office, and behind closed doors they redrew the boundaries and guess what. Seven Oaks School Division was not touched through forced amalgamation, one of the smaller school divisions in the city of Winnipeg, and for some reason or other they were given preferential treatment by this government. One only can be led to the conclusion that there was a special relationship between this government, this Premier and the Seven Oaks School Division.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we go on and know that that Minister of Education was replaced by another member of the New Democratic Party, the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux), and he became the Minister of Education and ended up in a conflict of interest situation that had to be reviewed. He was moved from the Department of Education, and we now have the Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) who sits in that seat around the Cabinet table. It is not just passing strange that we now find ourselves in a situation where Seven Oaks School Division again has been given preferential treatment by this government. Let us just look at the history of Seven Oaks School Division. We now have the superintendent, one Mr. Brian O'Leary, who was very definitely the Premier's right-hand, backroom boy because he was appointed the campaign manager during the last election for this New Democratic Party.

Well, Mr. Speaker, he was disgraced and had to resign as the campaign chair because he broke the law by opening an exam, a standards test. He did resign as the campaign chair, but he was disgraced. What did he get for that disgrace? He got rewarded and he got a new position. He became the superintendent of Seven Oaks School Division as a result, and the poor teacher that blew the whistle and reported Mr. O'Leary for opening that exam got fired. That tells you something about what goes on behind closed doors, not only in the Seven Oaks School Division, but I would believe, behind closed doors with those in power in the Seven Oaks School Division and the Premier and his party.

Mr. Speaker, we also know when this government came into power in the year 2000, they appointed one Mr. Ben Zaidman as the Chair of the Public Schools Finance Board. Where did Ben Zaidman come from? Not only was he a financial contributor, we would have expected that appointments to boards would probably be supporters of the government party and that is not an unusual thing to do. Where did he come from? He came from Seven Oaks School Division. He was a former school trustee in that division, and he was appointed to the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board.

Who else was appointed to the Public Schools Finance Board, Mr. Speaker? None other than Glenn Nicholls. Glenn Nicholls was the former superintendent of Seven Oaks School Division, also a contributor to the NDP party.

So we have now a disgraced campaign manager, we have two former individuals from Seven Oaks School Division, Mr. Speaker, appointed to the Public Schools Finance Board that oversees school construction. Well, let us just go through another little history lesson, too, because at the time they were on the Public Schools Finance Board and after this minister was appointed, there had been a decision that West Kildonan Collegiate would be renovated. Tenders had been let and the minister, as late as May of last year, not even a year ago, in correspondence indicated that he expected or anticipated construction would start in the very near future on the renovations of West Kildonan Collegiate.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what do we see today? We see this Minister of Education not move ahead with the renovation of West Kildonan Collegiate, but announce he is going to build a new school in Seven Oaks School Division, a school they did not ask for, that was not in their five-year capital program, but, nonetheless, two individuals in the Public Schools Finance Board, who were former employees or school trustees in the Seven Oaks School Division, decided to approve a new school that the division did not even ask for.

* (15:00)

Well, Mr. Speaker, how did this decision come about? Again, we have to go back to the backroom, behind closed-door dealings that have been going on from day one with this NDP government and their friends, the backroom boys, at the Seven Oaks

School Division. That speaks a lot to what kind of Premier (Mr. Doer) and what kind of decision making he is making.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe for a minute that any of the decisions that have happened at Seven Oaks School Division were ultimately the decision that was made by the ministers, the successive ministers that were responsible.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that someone from higher up was pulling the strings. We have a Premier whose right-hand or left-hand man, Mr. Brian O'Leary, very good friend of the Premier's, and a donor, a significant donor, to the New Democratic Party getting special favours from this government. So I cannot for a minute sit back and believe that it would be only the ministers of Education that would have made those decisions. I believe that someone higher up in the government directed the ministers to do what they did and they have become the fall guys for the Premier.

They have, Mr. Speaker, all of the ministers of Education to date, the three in five years, and that is pretty unprecedented, what does that say for our education system when this Premier cannot make a decision to appoint a Minister of Education for any period of time to try to ensure that there is some continuity and that there is some ability to serve the children in the province of Manitoba through the Department of Education?

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Premier has set these ministers up and that they have fallen and taken the fall for the Premier because of special political favours to his friends, the Seven Oaks School Division. Now, when you look at appointments to the Public Schools Finance Board, surely the NDP government could have found broad representation from right across the province of Manitoba to sit on the Public Schools Finance Board. Surely to goodness they did not have to find two people from the Seven Oaks School Division to appoint the Public Schools Finance Board. Would it not have been nice to have had broader representation so that people from right across the province might be represented on the Public Schools Finance Board rather than having two individuals from one school division that has received special treatment, favouritism from this government?

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to the lack of answers from the present-day Minister of Education

(Mr. Bjornson). I do not know who is giving him the advice, who is pulling his strings, but in some ways I feel a bit sorry for the Minister of Education because I think that he has been directed to make certain announcements and to make certain decisions. I believe that those decisions have been as a result of backroom deals that have been made between the Premier and his disgraced campaign manager, Mr. Brian O'Leary, Mr. Ben Zaidman, Mr. Glenn Nicholls. All of those individuals have been responsible for the decision-making and now they are going to investigate themselves.

This minister is taking on a 30-day investigation. Could he not, Mr. Speaker, just have gone to the Public Schools Finance Board and asked the very direct questions and gotten the answers? Why is it taking 30 days to get a straight answer from this minister? Surely the officials in his department, if he had gone to them and asked the direct question, could have given him the direct answers, but I believe that either he has not asked the questions because he does not want the direct answers or he has gotten the direct answers and he chooses to delay providing them to this Legislature and to the public, for some unknown reason.

Now I can only venture to guess that reason or those reasons might be reasons that he wants to cover up or he needs a little more time to try to figure out how to do the political damage control, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the communicators have not quite got the right spin on this issue because it has been quite commonplace for this government to blame everyone else except themselves when something goes wrong. It never seems to be their fault. They never seem to want to stand up, take control, accept accountability for their actions and move on, Mr. Speaker.

So I am quite dismayed at what we are seeing here in this Legislature today and, Mr. Speaker, I do not think we need 30 days to get to the truth of this issue. This minister should come clean, he should stand up, he should be accountable today for the actions. This is not complicated. There should be some very direct answers to some very simple questions.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the minister show some courage, and I would ask that the Premier (Mr. Doer) show some leadership—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****House Business**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to change the Estimates sequence so that in the Chamber the departments listed are Aboriginal and Northern; Transportation and Government Services; Legislative Assembly; the Civil Service Commission; Employee Pensions and Other Costs; Enabling and Other Appropriations; and Capital Investment?

In 255, Conservation is to be listed, and in 254, the sequence is to be Education, Citizenship and Youth followed by Sport.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to change the Estimates sequence so that in the Chamber the departments listed are Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; Transportation and Government Services; Legislative Assembly; Civil Service Commission; Employee Pensions and Other Costs; Enabling and Other Appropriations; and Capital Investment?

In Room 255, Conservation is to be listed, while in Room 254 the sequence is to be Education, Citizenship and Youth followed by Sport. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Mackintosh: Please call Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair, and the other committee Chairs, please take the respective rooms that you chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will now resume consideration of the Estimates in the Department of Education,

Citizenship and Youth. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will follow in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Can the minister indicate whether or not the terms of reference for his 30-day review have been completed, and, if so, if he would table them?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): We will provide the terms of reference for the member from Charleswood tomorrow.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us why it is taking so long?

Mr. Bjornson: Given the complexity of this issue, we would like to make sure that the terms of reference are comprehensive.

Mrs. Driedger: The issues certainly are complex and they are very multifaceted. I did ask the other day if acquisition of land is going to be addressed through this review. Can the minister indicate today whether it will or will not be?

Mr. Bjornson: That is part of the purpose that we have outlined. I believe we addressed that on Thursday as well, but indeed, acquisition is included in our statement of purpose for the review.

Mrs. Driedger: Will the investigation also look into the minister's handling of this issue?

Mr. Bjornson: This review is going to look at the independently elected school board and their role, as well as the arm's-length organization of the Public Schools Finance Board.

Mrs. Driedger: What about the minister's role in this because he certainly has been part and parcel of the whole issue. In fact, it was because of his mishandling of this situation that it has unravelled the way it has. Had he taken control of the issue a year ago when he got the letter, the allegations, it certainly could have been addressed much quicker. I think some of the questions that arise out of all of this are the functioning of his department and how a minister can be so in the dark about his own department, considering he said that he understood

The Public Schools Act, how he could have mishandled this issue so poorly. I am asking the minister whether or not his role in the mishandling of this will also be addressed.

Mr. Bjornson: Through this review we will be looking at the communications with the board, with the school board, with the Public Schools Finance Board. That is the intent of the review to look at that process.

Mrs. Driedger: So, obviously, the minister then can have some appreciation why I would like to see the Auditor General brought into an issue like this considering the extent of the issue. The minister himself has said it is very complex. The extent of it is rather broad as well. It goes across many levels, and the minister's level is one of them. He and his staff certainly need to be investigated in this process as well. Also, besides that, it is becoming more and more clear through Estimates that the minister really does not have a good handle on this. So it begs the question who is pulling the strings and that part needs to be investigated. As long as we are going to have an internal review, we are not going to get to the bottom of all of this. It is quite likely it could end up being a whitewash. I would ask the minister again whether he would not think it more prudent to call in the Auditor and have an independent third-party review of it.

*(15:20)

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, we are committed to a 30-day review. We have, as I said, developed the terms of reference. We do have staff in place to conduct this review. The review will look at all aspects of the situation including, as I said, the independent board of the Public Schools Finance Board, the duly elected trustees and the role of Seven Oaks School Division. These are all issues that we are going to explore, as well as communication between said bodies and the department.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell me, seeing as this all came to a head last Monday, which is eight days ago, how they are actually able to conduct the review? Are they just out there grabbing at whatever without following any specific terms of reference?

Mr. Bjornson: We have a work plan and we have staff assigned to conduct the review.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister not think that review can be all over the map if he is not following a strategy that is outlined through terms of reference?

Mr. Bjornson: The work plan will be based on what staff had been instructed to do around the development of the terms of reference.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has been asked the question before, and it is certainly one that is continuing to bother me. That is around the comments made by Mr. O'Leary that money has been made through this land scheme. I think he is out there being quoted as having made \$700,000, and I believe he has said that publicly.

Can the minister indicate, and I know we have been over this ground once before, but, again, I would like to just get back into it a little bit, because the minister has said no public money was lost, but he does not go on to say how much public money this actually cost through increased taxes.

Now it appears that, with some borrowing of monies for current operating costs in the mix, there are going to be borrowing costs on top of all this. So, for the minister to be out there saying that no public money was lost, I would like to ask him again, this \$700,000 figure that Mr. O'Leary said has been money that has been made through this land scheme, would the minister be prepared to table those financial statements? Obviously, in order for that figure to come up, there must perhaps be a one- or two-page financial document that outlines all of this. Would the minister be prepared to table that today?

Mr. Bjornson: As part of the review, we are doing an analysis of the financial statements. That is part of what has been identified within the terms of reference, that in order to review this complicated issue we would do an analysis of the financial statements. So that is what we are engaged in at this time.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, we know, and the minister has confirmed, that his officials have this land management review, which is a forensic financial analysis of the spending that occurred in all of this. Why can the minister not provide for us the information to verify this \$700,000? I mean, Mr. O'Leary gets to run around out there saying they made \$700,000. I think it is only prudent on the

minister's part to be able to table that kind of information in the Estimates process.

Mr. Bjornson: That is why we are doing the analysis of the financial statements, and that will be part of the review.

Mrs. Driedger: Then let us put on record that the minister is refusing to provide that information to this House. Mr. O'Leary can run around saying they made \$700,000. The longer that information stays out there, the more information like that sticks. How do we know it is true? Why should we take Mr. O'Leary's word that \$700,000 has been made through this project? Why is the minister accepting that?

Mr. Bjornson: We are doing the analysis for that reason, to get all the answers that we need to get in this situation, so we are committed to that analysis as part of the review. That is very clearly identified in the terms of reference, that we would be looking at the finances of this situation.

13

Mrs. Driedger: I believe the number that is thrown out there is \$2.7 million, is one figure; \$1.9 million is the figure for infrastructure for development; \$350,000 is what the land costs. If one looks at the total costs, we are looking at \$2.25 million. How can Mr. O'Leary be running around saying they made \$700,000 when, you know, if he is saying they sold the land for \$2.7 million, but everything costs somewhere in the vicinity of \$2.25 million, that does not come out with a net gain of \$700,000? So where does the \$700,000 come from and why is the minister accepting that?

Mr. Bjornson: The member's question speaks to the need to do the analysis and find out the information that we have committed to find out in this process. Certainly there is, as I said repeatedly, it is a very complicated issue on a couple of levels, both financial and legal, and the member's very own question speaks to the need to do a complete and thorough analysis.

Mrs. Driedger: The minutes of the Seven Oaks School Division on Monday, April 11, indicated that they suspended their regular order of business in order to push through a by-law allowing the Seven Oaks School Division to borrow money for current operating purposes. How much money did they borrow?

Mr. Bjornson: I would have to take that as notice at this time.

Mrs. Driedger: Has the minister contacted the Seven Oaks School Division, because I am sure by now he must have had a look at their minutes. It does not take a long time to have a look at all of their minutes over the last few years, especially if he has staff to just highlight the Swinford Park Development monies that are being spent in that area.

How could he not, and today is what, Monday, May 9, this happened on April 11, did something in these minutes not red-flag for him that there is a problem here? We have a school division that has been in an illegal land scheme. They have been developing land. They have been using taxpayers' money to develop this land because the money does not come back to them until they have sold the land. It appears from Land Titles that not all land is sold, so there is obviously some money still tied up in land. Again, the minister will not tell us how much land is still tied up, how much money is still tied up.

Then they have the superintendent running around saying they made over \$700,000 in a net gain in this. Then, on April 11, we find out they are borrowing money for current operating purposes because, I mean, and this is just April, why do they need money for and why are they short of money right now for operating purposes? How much of this land development scheme has compromised their ability to fund their own operations?

*(15:30)

Mr. Bjornson: Well, there are many questions asked in that question, but I can assure the member, when she referenced the school board minutes, that was part of what we are going to be looking at in the review process. So we have requested and have received all the school board minutes that are pertinent to the review.

Again, the specifics that the member is referring to in terms of finances, I can only say again that it is a very complex financial and legal issue and that all of these very specific questions are questions that the review is intended to address and, I am confident, will address the specifics of this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: What is the interest rate that is going to be charged on this borrowing of money?

Mr. Bjornson: I will take that as notice.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell me who will end up bearing the cost of those interest payments?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, at the end of the review we will know what the financial implications are of all the transactions, and that is what we are committed to address over the 30-day process.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister not see where taxpayer dollars are affected by this land scheme?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, through the review we will look at all financial aspects, and we will determine at that point, once the review is complete, what the financial situation would be.

Mrs. Driedger: How common is it for school divisions to pass by-laws to borrow money for current operating purposes?

Mr. Bjornson: It is not an uncommon practice for school divisions to borrow for operating. One of the other things that we have done as a government as well, with the property tax credit and the accountability audit around the property tax credit, we, rather than providing that directly to municipalities, who then, in turn, would provide that to the school divisions, there is better cash flow for school divisions as such because the property tax credit now goes directly to the school divisions.

Mrs. Driedger: Was the minister notified at all by the Seven Oaks School Division that they were going to be in the position of having to borrow money for current operating purposes at this particular time of year?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I was not. As I said, that is quite a common practice of school divisions.

Mrs. Driedger: Is it common practice in the minutes to fast-track a bill through an evening of meetings where they suspend their regular order of business in order to push through a by-law that would allow them to borrow money for current operating purposes, and then to immediately turn around and write a whole bunch of cheques that night for land development?

Mr. Bjornson: As I said, it is common practice for school divisions, at various times of year, to borrow

funds for operating purposes. So that is quite a common practice.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister is being very evasive in answering the question. The last question was around suspending regular order of business in order to push through, fast-track a by-law in one evening. Then they turn around later in the evening and they write a couple of cheques for thousands of dollars for land development. Does the minister not find this strange?

Mr. Bjornson: My understanding with respect to the first part of the question, as far as the fast-tracking of the borrowing by-law, certainly, there is, as I said, a common practice to borrow funds for operational purposes. As far as the second part of the questions is concerned, that is why we are engaged in this review process, and we are committed to find out all the financial implications and we are committed to address that. It has been clearly defined in our terms of reference that this is part of the discussion and we are going to address that.

Mrs. Driedger: Why would they feel they need to suspend regular order of business, push through a by-law allowing them to borrow money for operating costs, when they have got a reserve of \$2.7 million?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, these are issues that will all come out when we do the review. We are looking at all pertinent information and how it relates to the finances of this particular situation. As I have said before, and I will say it again, it is certainly a very complex issue, and all those questions will be answered once we go through the review process.

Mrs. Driedger: How many homes are there in the Swinford Park Development? The minister has refused to answer this question a number of times. I would think by now he has probably had some people run over to Land Titles and pick up a lot of land titles and look at it. How many homes are there in the Swinford Park Development, or how many properties?

Mr. Bjornson: I understand that there are approximately 74 lots, but also in that land parcel there are 10 acres that remain dedicated for the purpose of a future school.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister explain why, when you look at the Seven Oaks School Division

Swinford Park Development marketing document, and if you count out all of the properties in Swinford Park, there are 106? How can he only account for 74?

Mr. Bjornson: There are other individuals who had title to those lots. The school division did not own all of them, and in any case this is going to be part of the due diligence in the review to determine all the specifics around this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: When we gathered all of the land titles and looked at all of it and put it all together, there were nine parcels of land and we were led to believe that that whole Swinford Park Development through the consolidation of these nine parcels of land was all owned by the Seven Oaks School Division. Is the minister saying that is not true?

Mr. Bjornson: What I am saying is, that is why we are reviewing this situation.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister just did say 74 lots, but certainly the information we have with Land Titles is contrary to that. The Swinford Park Development, as it is being developed by Lombard North Group, shows a picture of 106 properties that he is marketing for the Seven Oaks School Division. Yet the minister is only willing to acknowledge 74 lots. It still begs the question, although we seem to be up 4 more lots from last week, it used to be 70 last week, now it is 74, is the minister trying to tell me now that there are over 30 lots that are now owned by individuals, 32?

Mr. Bjornson: What I am telling the member is that all the specifics that have been raised are issues that are all going to be part of the review, and it has been very clearly identified in our terms of reference that we are going to be looking at all pertinent information to address this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: How many properties does Seven Oaks School Division still own?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, that is part of the review. We are going to answer all these questions as we go through this review process.

Mrs. Driedger: Pretty important question this week in terms of how many properties Seven Oaks School

Division still owns. Is the minister not prepared to provide that information?

Mr. Bjornson: We will be providing that information once we have conducted a very thorough review.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the Minister of Education still allowing illegal activity to continue in the continuing development of Grady Bend, those 20 lots in the cul-de-sac? What is he doing about that?

Mr. Bjornson: What we need to do is make sure the school division complies with the law in a way that does not hurt the ratepayers.

Mrs. Driedger: I was hoping today was not going to come to this, but this whole exercise of Estimates with this minister who has staff here, who could answer these questions that are being asked directly of him related to this illegal land scheme has been extremely frustrating, sitting here for hour after hour for day after day with the minister not being forthcoming, open and accountable about a serious mishandling of a situation under his watch. This minister dropped the ball on this a year ago, and he really does not seem to have a good handle on it at all.

Mr. Chairman, I move

THAT the Legislative Assembly condemn the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth for his contemptuous treatment of the Estimates process with his refusal to be forthright and accountable in answering questions about the Seven Oaks School Division illegal scheme to develop land.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Charleswood

THAT the Legislative Assembly condemn the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth for his contemptuous treatment of the Estimates process with his refusal to be forthright and accountable in answering questions about the Seven Oaks School Division illegal scheme to develop land.

The motion is in order, and debate may proceed.

Mr. Bjornson: I guess, as Minister of Education, it had been a tremendous honour to be appointed, and I was very humbled and honoured by the Premier

when he assigned this task to me. As a former schoolteacher, having spent 13 years in the system, many of those years were under the previous Conservative government. I know our government has made a tremendous difference in the lives of our students, our teachers and for parents.

I just need to think back to my time as a classroom teacher when I honestly thought I would be a classroom teacher until such a time that I was prepared to hang up the chalk and retire. Having said that, it was the actions of the previous Conservative government that compelled me to get involved in politics.

I think back to some of the legislation, absolutely harsh and punitive legislation that the Conservative government had passed at the time, one piece of legislation that gave school boards the opportunity to lock teachers out. Bill 22, I believe, was the bill. In the early 1990s, when that legislation was passed, it gave school boards the opportunity to lock teachers out. They lost professional development; they lost administration days. I, for one, lost 15 days over two years when neighbouring school divisions did not lose any, but several teachers throughout the province of Manitoba had two years without professional development, without administration days. At the same time, coincidentally, there was a push from teachers in Manitoba to have the government of the day look at school safety issues, but that was ignored. It was ignored repeatedly year after year until we took office as a government.

Drawing parallels here, Bill 22 locked us out of PD. We have been increasing funds for professional development; we were asking for government to do something about safe schools. The whole time I was a teacher, the members opposite did nothing. We have had a number of initiatives under way to address the issue of school safety. Punitive legislation would strip teachers of all the collective bargaining rights they had acquired over the course of over 45 years, which we repealed when we got in office. Teachers lobbying about pensions, we have opened the act three times and made significant changes to pensions.

Let us talk about funding, capital funding announcements by the Conservative government of \$18.3 million. Our lowest announcement was \$35 million, and we have had years where we have

invested over \$75 million, an unprecedented three-year commitment at \$45 million a year. Just the funding of schools, in general, while property taxes went up over 60 percent on average throughout the nineties, it made teachers an easy target because it was the school boards making those tough decisions. When the provincial government was starving the education system, school boards had to make the tough decisions to raise taxes. The only thing that, really, perhaps was the most galling as a professional was when the government, under the Conservative government, actually launched a commission to determine if teachers were appropriately compensated. They were not talking about increasing salaries. They were looking at entry-level teachers possibly having their salaries reduced by as much as one third. So what does a teacher make? They talked about it purely in terms of dollars.

I would like to tell you that teachers make a difference. Teachers make a difference every day with their children in those classrooms. Whether they make that difference in getting those children to think about the greater world around them, making children do their math tables, making children edit their essays, making children engage in a variety of different programs, these are all things that teachers do. They make a difference. We, as a government, over the last six years, have made a tremendous difference in the education system.

Let us also talk about the former Minister of Education, who during the election campaign promised, oh, yeah, we will get rid of all the school taxes. There is a panacea. Get rid of all the school taxes. How are you going to pay for it? Well, let us cut extraneous things like art and phys ed and music. Rest assured, we have been doing a lot to address the issue of art, phys ed and music. In fact, I have piles of letters here that I could read into the record, but we will not take time to do that. I know members have a little bit more that they would like to talk about, I am sure, as far as the Estimates process is concerned.

We are a government that has made a tremendous difference to education since we took office. We have made a tremendous difference for our students; we have made a tremendous difference for the teachers. I was at the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils meeting on Friday when we launched a document that said we need to engage our

parents more with the schools, we need to engage our community more with the schools.

So, as I said, when I took my oath of office, it is a tremendous honour and privilege to be in the position of Minister of Education, to serve the students and the teachers and the parents in Manitoba the way my predecessors have done, to modernize our schools, to fund our schools appropriately, to repair our schools, to work on issues of curriculum, to provide more reasons for our students to celebrate because they did not have reason to celebrate in the 1990s.

* (15:50)

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I will keep my comments brief in regard to the motion in front of us.

The minister chooses to go into a lengthy debate, a historical debate, and that certainly is his prerogative. I think what is before this committee is the fact that the answers, in a truthful way, have not been forthcoming. The Estimates process is a process whereby the opposition has an opportunity to keep ministers accountable within their departments and to ensure there is an open and transparent process, none of which has taken place under this minister. Thus, it is important this committee censure the minister and pass this resolution. I think it is important that the minister deal with the questions and answer them in a proper and forthright manner. I, as one individual, will be supporting this motion.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

An Honourable Member: Yeas and Nays.

Mr. Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested by two members. This section of committee will now recess to allow members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

The committee recessed at 3:51 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:37 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Will the committee please come to order. The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Driedger: There is certainly a lot of consternation about the minister's vagueness and indecisiveness in addressing the issue of illegal activity being allowed to continue. I am hoping the minister can put some more thought into what he might want to answer for this question because, if illegal activity is going to be allowed to continue for a total of 30 days, that is sending a very, very disturbing message out to the public and everybody involved in this around the issue of law and order and good government.

I wonder if the minister can tell us what he is actually doing about the issue of the continuing construction that is going on in the cul-de-sac at Swinford Park, but also if he could explain why there was not any activity going on there on Friday, why things had come to a halt.

* (16:40)

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, I have said a few times, and I will say it again, that the issue is certainly a very complex one on a couple of levels, one being in terms of the finances and one being in terms of the legal issues. As such, the 30-day process will address all of the very specific questions that the member asks. We are involved in a process that is taking a lot of information from both parties. I have also talked about the fact that some of the information that we

are receiving is resulting in more questions, so we are going to continue to try and address those questions as part of this review process.

Mr. Schuler: We have obviously just seen a motion brought forward where the opposition is expressing a considerable amount of frustration where the standard line that the minister is using is that now, after a year of mismanagement of the issue, the minister is going to look into it. What is even more troubling is that it is going to be an internal review, and we already have an internal review which whitewashed it almost a year ago. Again, it is an internal review that is going to have problems.

Over the weekend I have had the opportunity to have many discussions with a lot of individuals. There is a concern out there that very quickly the knowledge was there that this project made money when no other details were known amazingly. No details on if legal contracts had been written up or what was being done, but they knew it made money. That is the No. 1 issue. More importantly, the concern that is being discussed, and I know the minister is hearing this too from friends and associates within education, is how could everybody who was involved or semi-knowledgeable about this have been part of the collusion.

I ask for the committee Chair's patience on this. I want to be very careful and very clear how I lay this out. As a former chair of a school division and having had discussions with school board officials throughout the province over the weekend, having had discussions with numerous individuals, it is amazing, whether it be staff at the school board level, trustees, Public Schools Finance Board, individuals with intimate knowledge of the way a school board is run and department officials, that nowhere did anybody say, "Is that the right thing to do?"

Certainly, somebody must have said somewhere, "school board." That on its own should have been a dead giveaway. I ask the minister, and laying aside the 30-day thing, how come it takes almost a year before somebody points out and says, "This is wrong." How is that possible, to the minister?

Mr. Bjornson: As we have discussed in Estimates previously, the requests by the Public Schools Finance Board for legal opinion and other documents to explore this issue have been asked for previously. As we go through this review process, we are going

to have all the answers around that communication issue as well.

Mr. Schuler: Who was the chair of the board at the time when this development was initially proposed?

Mr. Bjornson: That would be Ben Zaidman.

Mr. Schuler: Minister, surely you must just be appalled, and I appreciate the fact you gave me the answer straightforwardly. I mean, that would not be the same Ben Zaidman who was chair of the Public Schools Finance Board who submitted a report to you saying that there was no problem, that it was a local development issue? I know the answer. Of course it was.

How could there have been such a gap in error of judgment? I mean, from an individual who had been a school trustee, I think there was one, he either quit or he lost one election, but he had been there for an incredible amount of time. How is it possible that such an error of judgment could have taken place?

Mr. Bjornson: That, of course, is one of the issues that we are going to be trying to address through this process, that we will address, through this process of review, including the communication around this issue. That is definitely what we will be addressing through this process.

Mr. Schuler: The vice-chair of Public Schools Finance Board, Mr. Nicholls, what was his role at the Seven Oaks School Division previous to that?

Mr. Bjornson: As has been stated previously, he had been the chair of the Seven Oaks School Division at one time. I am sorry, he had been superintendent. Superintendent.

Mr. Schuler: Can I, then, ask the minister, can he tell this House who was secretary-treasurer for the school division at the time this deal was proposed?

Mr. Bjornson: The gentleman's name is Ed Johns.

Mr. Schuler: At the time when this was brought to the minister's attention, did Mr. Johns at any point in time attempt to have or have a conversation with the minister explaining to the minister his concern about this land development?

Mr. Bjornson: No, he did not.

Mr. Schuler: Not verbally, not in writing, never expressed a concern through the department to the minister?

Mr. Bjornson: No, he did not.

Mr. Schuler: That is one of the questions that was asked of me over the weekend. How could the secretary-treasurer, amongst all the other players, not have thrown up a red flag and said, "Whoa, wait a minute. Let's be careful here. We are a school board, not a property developer"?

So there was no red flag thrown up by the secretary-treasurer?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, every pertinent issue will be addressed through the review process and that is what we are committed to do.

Mr. Schuler: Is the minister aware, did the secretary-treasurer indicate to the board that there might be some difficulty with the school board getting into the realm of being a developer?

Mr. Bjornson: Not that I am aware of.

Mr. Schuler: Did the superintendent indicate to the board when this started that there could potentially be difficulties with a school board entering the realm of being a developer? Is the minister aware at all of any such advice begin given to the board?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, not that I am aware of, and again, this speaks to all the questions that we will be raising when we go through this process and review this process.

Mr. Schuler: So, within this superintendent's department, as far as the minister knows, no one indicated to the board of trustees that there was a problem with a school board entering into, basically, the purview of developers and getting into land development. There was no such warning from the superintendent's department.

* (16:50)

Mr. Bjornson: Again, these are very specific questions that are going to be addressed through the review process, and that is what we are engaged in. As far as that communication is concerned, what communication did or did not occur, we are going to explore that through the review process.

Mr. Schuler: So the review process will take place, and by the minister's own words now, superintendent's department, the role of the superintendent's department, the role of the secretary-treasurer in that department, the board of trustees, Public Schools Finance Board and the interaction with the minister's office. That entire relationship is what this 30-day commission is going to look at?

Mr. Bjornson: The review will address all pertinent information related to the incident. That is what we committed to do.

Mr. Schuler: Unfortunately, I was involved in another committee in the other end of this Legislature, but my colleague from Charleswood says that the minister has indicated very clearly that in all the areas that I mentioned, being superintendent's department, secretary-treasurer's department, board office, Public Schools Finance Board, department, all of those will be looked at, but not the minister's office and the interaction between all of those and the minister's office. If I understand correctly from previous discussion, the minister's office will not be part of that, will not be investigated, is that correct?

Mr. Bjornson: The review will look at the duly elected trustees and the role of the board, and the review will look at the arm's-length organization that is the Public Schools Finance Board.

Mr. Schuler: So would it not be prudent also, then, to look at the relationship between Public Schools Finance Board and the relationship between that board and the Department of Education?

Mr. Bjornson: As I have said, we will review all the pertinent information in this matter.

Mr. Schuler: So would it be pertinent information to look at the relationship between the Public Schools Finance Board and how they interact with the department? Again, I say that for the minister's benefit because, clearly, in discussions I had with individuals over the weekend, the fact that a legal opinion was asked for and a note, from what the minister says, a note about that never was placed on the minister's desk or in his inbox, and even far, far more serious is that a legal opinion was given and the results of that legal opinion, or the fact that a legal opinion was received, did not make it into the minister's briefing book or into his inbox, or

however he gets his information. That is very serious. Would that also not come into the scope of the investigation?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, this is a complex issue, and it is complex on a number of different fronts, particularly the financial, particularly the legal. Because of the multidimensional nature of this issue, a lot of the specific questions are going to be addressed through this review process, and that is what we are committed to do.

Mr. Schuler: Just getting back to that, I am sure the minister is horrified that, No. 1, a legal opinion was asked for without ever advising the minister, and then received without ever informing the minister. I know the minister is not going to give us anything more than the answer he gave us, but certainly we would like to see, as part of that investigation, that relationship must be looked into. There is clearly a glaring gap between what is taking place and what is coming to the minister's attention. I would recommend to the minister that that is a facet that has to be looked into.

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, a review of the process will result in a stronger process, and we are committed to having this review completed by June 2. Again, a lot of specific questions will be a part of the dialogue in terms of, as I said, the participation of all involved in addressing this issue.

Mr. Schuler: Will this investigation be empowered to recommend that, if there are serious breaches or serious areas of wrongdoing, some of these issues would be sent to a police force?

Or to have a criminal investigation, or go to the Department of Justice and get an opinion? Is that also going to be a part of or a scope of the committee, or the investigation?

Mr. Bjornson: Once the review is completed, that is when we will take a look at what the recommendations are by the committee, or by the staff that is engaged in the review.

Mr. Schuler: Will the minister send the report to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) and see if there are areas where a legal investigation should take place?

Mr. Bjornson: We will deal with the recommendations that are brought forward appropriately.

Mr. Schuler: This is not a recommendation from the report. This is will the minister endeavour to send this to the Department of Justice to get their opinion.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, we will send the review recommendations to the appropriate personnel, and I certainly cannot speculate on a report I have not seen. We are committed to having it completed by June 2. It will be completed on or before June 2, and at that point, we will have those recommendations brought forward.

Mr. Schuler: Besides the minister having speculated that it made money and no public money was put at risk, there is a certain degree of speculation that has taken place. But I do not think there is anything untoward of the minister saying that he is going to send this to the Department of Justice to get an opinion. I do not think that is over the top.

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, when the review is complete, when the recommendations are brought forward, then we will act appropriately.

Mr. Schuler: I do not know if the minister has had an opportunity to ask this question, but I think it warrants asking it again: Is the project still moving forward?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, as we go through this review process, we have to ensure that no decisions are made that going to adversely affect the ratepayers, and we will be acting on the recommendations when they are brought forward at the conclusion of the review process.

Mr. Schuler: Is it fair to say that the minister is going to allow status quo until such time as the report comes forward on June 2?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, no actions will be taken that will adversely affect the ratepayers, and the report is going to look at all facets of this multidimensional and complex issue.

Mr. Schuler: So the contracts that have been let to date will proceed?

* (17:00)

Mr. Bjornson: Again, no actions will be taken that will adversely affect the ratepayers. That is a concern, obviously, and we are going to commit to

the review process and have all the questions answered upon the completion of the review.

Mr. Schuler: So, if a contract was awarded and the minister was to stop the project, would he deem that as being adversely affecting the taxpayers?

Mr. Bjornson: We are engaged in the review process to address all issues, and we are not going to take any actions that could adversely affect the ratepayers.

Mr. Schuler: I think the committee has great understanding that this minister is caught between a rock and a hard place. I know he has given us two answers: one is that he does not want to adversely affect the taxpayer, and, on the other hand, he has an ongoing investigation. Although we on the opposition side have great concern because he already received one internal investigation which we know the \$7,000 club provided for him, clearly we think that this should have been taken out of the department and it should have been outside, an independent investigation. I just want to be very clear.

So the minister indicated some seven, eight days ago that he had sent a letter out to school boards indicating this was behaviour not to be tolerated. I take it that letter would have went to Seven Oaks, correct?

Mr. Bjornson: It was sent to all school divisions.

Mr. Schuler: However, did that exempt any projects ongoing?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, the letter was sent to all school divisions clarifying the regulations around this position, but we are not going to take any actions that would jeopardize taxpayers' money.

Mr. Schuler: Was the letter clear to Seven Oaks School Division that it exempted the current project?

Mr. Bjornson: The letter went to all school divisions and it was not specific to Seven Oaks.

Mr. Schuler: I am sorry, I could not hear that answer, and it is probably me.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. We have a difficult time hearing the speaker, so I will ask the minister to repeat his comments.

Mr. Bjornson: The letter was addressed to all school divisions. It was not specific to Seven Oaks.

Mr. Schuler: So what exactly has been commuted to Seven Oaks School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: Though I had tabled the letter, I could read it into the record, if the member would so choose. This is coming from Bob Goluch, executive director of the PSFB, directed to superintendents, secretary-treasurers. "I am writing to remind all school divisions The Public Schools Act provides a defined list of powers to school boards. Please note that the development and sale of fully serviced residential building lots does not qualify as an eligible activity. School divisions are prohibited from acting as property developers under the power granted them in The Public Schools Act. The disposition of school property must be undertaken in compliance with the policy statement governing the disposition of surplus school properties. Thank you for your co-operation in this important matter."

Mr. Schuler: I am asking the minister very clearly, is this the only communication that was sent to the Seven Oaks School Division in regard to the development of property?

Mr. Bjornson: I have also forwarded a letter to the board chair in expressing concerns over this issue, and again, we are not going to take actions that would jeopardize the ratepayers, any taxpayers' money in this process.

Mr. Schuler: Clearly, the board knows they have a problem, and it has to have some very clear direction.

Has the minister made it very clear to them that the project may proceed until June 2? Again, we live in a world of inabsolutes, and particularly with the board caught in the headlights, they are going to very clearly look at the minister for some kind of direction. Has that direction been given?

Mr. Bjornson: I have made it very clear that I have concerns over the issue. I have made it very clear that we will be taking appropriate action through the review process in determining the multidimensions that this situation has presented to us, and I have also made it clear that we are not going to take any action that will jeopardize ratepayers' money.

Mr. Schuler: In the spirit of openness, would the minister table the letter that he sent to the Seven Oaks School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: We will not be tabling the letter. The communication is ongoing, and I said we will not be tabling the letter. The communication is ongoing. It is part of the review process, and we will certainly have all the information once the review is complete.

Mr. Schuler: Minister, have you met with the chair of the board of the Seven Oaks School Division since this issue broke?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I have not.

* (17:10)

Mr. Schuler: Have you had any discussion over phone, cell phone with the chair of the Seven Oaks School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I have not. We have been engaged in a process with the staff. The staff have developed the terms of references, as I said, as far as the review is concerned, and the staff are engaged in that process.

Mr. Schuler: Has the minister had the opportunity to either meet face to face or have a conversation on the phone with the current chair of the Public Schools Finance Board, Mr. Nicholls?

Mr. Bjornson: I did have a brief conversation with the chair, yes.

Mr. Schuler: Has the minister had the opportunity since this issue broke to either personally or by telephone call have a discussion with the former chair, Mr. Ben Zaidman?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I have not.

Mr. Schuler: Has the minister had the opportunity to either have a face to face conversation or over the cell phone of the superintendent of Seven Oaks School Division, Mr. Brian O'Leary, since this issue broke?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I have not.

Mr. Schuler: Back to the letter that the minister sent to the board chair, just in the spirit of openness, is

there a particular reason why he will not table that letter?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, it is just part of the ongoing dialogue we are engaged in with the school board and part of the review process that we are engaged in, at this point, as well.

Mr. Schuler: Has the school board corresponded in any form, either by letter or by e-mail, back to the minister indicating their response to his letter, or anything else the minister has so far come up with?

Mr. Bjornson: I have not received any correspondence.

Mr. Schuler: When I mean the minister, I mean whether it is he or his department.

Mr. Bjornson: Again, my department staff have been having a lot of dialogue with the school division on this issue.

Mr. Schuler: Have they been ordered to present all documents and all information requested of the individual who is investigating this issue with the Seven Oaks School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: We have requested from the school division all the pertinent information.

Mr. Schuler: So this investigation is quasi-judicial?

Mr. Bjornson: We have been assured the school division will be completely forthcoming on this issue.

Mr. Schuler: Has a lawyer been attached to this investigation?

Mr. Bjornson: No, but the internal audit through the Finance Department has been engaged, and they have extensive expertise.

Mr. Schuler: So under what authority does this investigation ask for documents from the school board if it is not quasi-judicial?

Mr. Bjornson: The authority would be The Public Schools Act.

Mr. Schuler: That is just a cover. Where in The Public Schools Act does it say that an official asking

for information from a school board must present that information?

Mr. Bjornson: Section 173.1(1), Reports, etc., from school divisions, it reads—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I would like to take a moment and remind all honourable members to please provide the courtesy of your attention to the member who has the floor.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I will use my Grade 9 classroom teaching voice. The section is section 173.1(1), Reports, etc. from school divisions, and it reads: "The minister may require a school division to prepare and submit to the minister such reports and returns as the minister deems advisable, and to submit to the minister for inspection any contracts or documents relative to the affairs of the school division, and the minister may make copies of such contracts or documents."

Mr. Schuler: So the letter that the minister sent to Seven Oaks School Division which he will not table, that lays it out very clearly in the letter, does that lay it out very clearly that they are to provide all information and all documents to the individual investigating this issue? Is that very clearly laid out in that letter?

Mr. Bjornson: The letter that was sent is an expression of my concern over this issue. The direction that was given to my deputy was a very clear expression of the process that we would engage in to address this issue.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I am not getting a clear understanding, and maybe it is because I have this cold that I am not hearing everything, and I apologize to the minister, I am probably speaking louder than I should because I have this cold, but I just do not understand it. Under what authority does the department have to go into the school division and ask for all kinds of information if the minister has not indicated—like, how was it indicated to them that whatever was asked for is supposed to be forthcoming, again, keeping in mind that this is a school division that right now is in contravention of the act, is engaged in illegal activity as we speak, is coming from that same division?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, under the authority of the act, section 173.1(1), that is the portion of the act that requires them to submit reports as requested.

* (17:20)

Mr. Schuler: So the minister's department has the right to go in and indicate to the board office that they must assign staff to compile all this information whether or not the board agrees, because somebody has to compile all this stuff, pull it together, copy it, send it to the minister. Somebody has to be allocated within the board office to do all this.

Does the minister then supersede the board of trustees, and can he just come in, ask for it and they must assign staff hours and just deal with it posthaste?

Mr. Bjornson: The school division has advised us they will be completely forthcoming and provide us with all the necessary and pertinent information that we request in accordance with the PSA, the authority which I do have to request that information. They are prepared to meet with us as needed, or meet with the staff conducting the review as needed to address this issue.

Mr. Schuler: They indicated that in writing to the minister or his department?

Mr. Bjornson: This has been indicated through conversation.

Mr. Schuler: Between whom and whom?

Mr. Bjornson: Between the superintendent, the deputy minister and, again, myself having sent a letter expressing my concerns to the elected chair.

Mr. Schuler: So the school board has indicated very clearly that they will be forthcoming and they will comply with any request that the department makes, obviously through the authority of the minister.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, an additional section of the PSA, Part III, Powers and Duties of School Boards and Employees of School Divisions and School Districts, section 41, Duties of School Boards, "(w) provide the minister, at the times and in the form and manner he or she determines, such information as the minister may require."

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if school division books are audited annually?

Mr. Bjornson: The financial statement is audited annually.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us who does the audit?

Mr. Bjornson: It is an external auditor and I can take that as notice.

Mrs. Driedger: Do school divisions pay taxes on surplus land they own?

Mr. Bjornson: The Municipal Assessment Act requires that school divisions pay taxes on land they own that are not used for school purposes.

Mrs. Driedger: Why would they own any land not for school purposes?

Mr. Bjornson: The school divisions will purchase land on speculation, as I said, and the acquisition thereof for the purpose of building schools is not the same as actually having land designated as such for school uses. So they purchase land on speculation and the land would be taxed appropriately.

Mrs. Driedger: If a school division acquires a lot of land in anticipation, perhaps, of something like what Seven Oaks did where they acquired 22 acres of land, over the past period of time, would they have had to pay taxes then on that land. Obviously, not all of it is meant for a school.

Mr. Bjornson: Any school division that acquires land would be paying taxes on any school land that does not have a school on it, that is not used for school purposes.

Mr. Schuler: When a deal is done with a developer and land is transferred to the school division in anticipation of putting up a school, they still have to pay municipal taxes and would that then be municipal taxes on vacant land, I take it?

Mr. Bjornson: That question deals with The Municipal Assessment Act. We can get back to you with the specifics on The Municipal Assessment Act.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I find that strange that a school board sets aside land to build a school and they pay municipal taxes on it. Is that what the minister is saying, that set-aside land, until a school has been built on it, is charged a municipal tax at whatever rate, or are they charged taxes on what they paid for the land? For instance, if it is a development deal, often it is just set aside and the school division gets

the land as part of the development agreement, in which case, they would have paid a buck for it, or something. How do you assign value to potentially school property and then assess property tax on it?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, that is covered under The Municipal Assessment Act. We can get back to the member tomorrow with regard to that act.

Mrs. Driedger: As Seven Oaks School Division was acquiring all these 22, 23 acres, and as they do not have a school there, and it does not sound like they have approval now for a school at all, is the minister saying then that over the past, well, since 2002 when they started acquiring land, they have acquired all of this land, far more than what they needed, and they have been—the taxpayers in the area are having to dish out money to pay for municipal taxes on that land?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, with respect to the quantity of land that was acquired, the speculation for the purchase of land, as I said, the size of the lots can often exceed the amount required for the construction of schools. That is just part of that negotiation for the acquisition of land. You often have school divisions that would acquire excess amounts of land. That is why we do have the disposition process.

Specific to the questions around taxes, that is something that is covered under The Municipal Assessment Act, and we can deal with those specifics tomorrow. I would be happy to provide the member with the details around The Municipal Assessment Act and how it applies to land purchased in acquisition or land acquired by schools and how it relates to the development of school properties for the purpose of schools.

Mrs. Driedger: Will the review process that the minister has—I cannot even say he instigated it because he probably did not. Somebody else probably did. Will that review process be looking at how much money the residents of the Seven Oaks School Division will have paid, in that particular area, how much more money they would have had to pay on municipal taxes because of having all of this land, far more than what they need for a parcel for school?

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

CONSERVATION

* (15:10)

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

Does the honourable Minister of Conservation have an opening statement?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Yes, thank you very much. I want to welcome everyone here. I think this is a very important department in the provincial government, and I am very pleased to present the Estimates of this department for the consideration of all.

This is my first complete year as a minister, and I think I have learned a few things along the way in this last year, year and a half, beginning with the amount of work that people in Conservation do. I have a department that is very hardworking. Front-line staff have thousands and thousands of interactions with Manitobans on very important issues on a day-to-day basis, usually no regard for whether it is a Sunday afternoon or a Wednesday evening or a Monday morning. People on the front lines, people throughout the department, people within my office work very hard to keep this minister on the straight and narrow, I want to make sure that—

An Honourable Member: That is difficult.

Mr. Struthers: It is a difficult job, I understand, but there are hardworking people who have done a very good job of guiding me along the way. I want to make it clear I appreciate that work, and I want to make it clear that I believe members of the Legislature from all political stripes appreciate the work that the people in my department do. Their hard work and their commitment, I think, does well for the government as a whole, and they do this out of their commitment to the people of Manitoba. So I want to make sure that was stated clearly on the record, and I want them to hear my thanks and appreciation for the work they do.

I think it is important we highlight a number of things that this department has been diligently working at. I want to start with the East Side

Planning Initiative, I think, an historic step forward that our government undertook a number of years ago. Over the last year, since we last met here in Estimates, a considerable amount of progress has been made in terms of this particular file. This, I think, underscores this government's commitment to people who have been left out of the loop, out of the decision-making loop, in this case, those who live in communities situated along the east side of our province between Lake Winnipeg and the Ontario border, 16 First Nations communities, a number of Métis communities, a number of people who have not had much say in the decisions that have been made in their backyards.

We have been moving forward with ministerial visits, with memoranda of understanding. We have been negotiating protocols. We have received the report of the East Side Planning Initiative with a whole number of recommendations that we have been, as a department and other departments in government, working very hard to implement. We intend to fulfil those obligations.

Another area that I think we have really shown good progress is in terms of the Protected Areas Initiative. I think it is very important that provincial and other governments as well, but in our case, the provincial government, show leadership in terms of setting land aside, whether they be ecological reserves such as the Jennifer and Tom Shay reserve or Little George Island. That is the highest level of protection that we afford in this province as an ecological reserve, and we are moving forward with that work.

We have set aside the bell in Steep Rock Canyons, up in the area of my friend, the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) who is fortunate enough to have some very beautiful parts of our province, in this case, the Porcupine Mountains, reside in her constituency.

We worked out an agreement with a Mr. Taillieu to make an addition to the Beaudry Park. We extended the boundaries of the Rivers Provincial Park. I was very pleased to be out at the Criddle/Vane park last year to open that along with the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) in that case.

I was very pleased to sign on with Jim Richardson and Mike Moore and the people at the

Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Manitoba division, to incorporate Nature Conservancy lands into our protected area.

* (15:20)

I was very pleased we extended and designated the Manigotagan River as a new provincial park as well. That also lined up perfectly with what we have already done in terms of the Poplar River and Chitek Lake extensions to park reserves.

I think maybe the last protected area that I want to key in on a little bit is the UNESCO World Heritage site that we have been working on in conjunction with a number of First Nations in the area, in conjunction with Pikangikum from across the Ontario border and also in conjunction with the federal government. It is an example of what governments can do when they get together, take an issue seriously and really be guided by elders in communities, by chiefs and councils in communities that want and need to have a say in many of these issues.

The last issue that I just want to briefly talk on before we open up for questioning is what I think is a very exciting, very progressive program that we have been moving forward on for the last year and a half, and that is our cottaging initiative. We are in the process of offering up our third draw, making sure that Manitobans who want to have and enjoy a cottage in our great summers here in Manitoba have every opportunity to do so.

We had two draws last spring and fall in '04. We are going to have two draws again in 2005. It is, I think, a very good undertaking to get as many Manitobans as we can, as many Manitoba families as we can into cottages to have that kind of opportunity. I am very pleased that we have been able to be aggressively moving forward with this program. I am very pleased that so many of my friends in the opposition have come forward with many ideas that we have taken to heart in terms of sites, in terms of lakes, in terms of areas that we should be researching and doing our homework on. I appreciate that kind of support coming from members opposite.

So, with those few words, I want to say that I am very pleased to offer to the Legislature the Estimates for the Department of Conservation.

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

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, have any opening comments?

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): No, Madam Chair, I do not. I would just encourage the minister to call forward staff, and we can get right into the process of Estimates.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic.

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for the Estimates of a department. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of this item and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 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. Struthers: I am pleased to be joined by my Deputy Minister, Mr. Don Potter; Mr. Serge Scrafield, Assistant Deputy Minister; Don Cook, acting Assistant Deputy Minister and Dave Wotton, Assistant Deputy Minister.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister. We will now proceed to the remaining items contained in Resolution 12.1 on page 44 of the main Estimates book. Shall the resolutions pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Faurshou: My understanding, as has been past practice, we have opportunity to provide for global discussion inclusive of all aspects and areas of the Estimates. Is this practice going to be carried forward to this year as well?

Madam Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to carry forward on a global basis?

An Honourable Member: I am fine with that.

Madam Chairperson: It is agreed.

Mr. Faurshou: I would like to ask the minister if we can just get right into the area of his responsibility, that being Conservation. I wonder if he can explain the significant change in expected revenues garnered out of his department this year, not to say that he intends to be fleecing the general

public that is going to be attending to the parks this year, but \$12 million added to the revenue bottom line of Conservation this year, perhaps, maybe, the minister can explain where the bulk of that revenue is going to be garnered.

Mr. Struthers: In my opening comments, the last issue I dealt with was the cottaging initiative. I know some members opposite have kind of bad-mouthed the program. I know that some of the members opposite were naysayers when we got into it, but the fact is, Madam Chairperson, Manitobans do not agree with them.

The fact is Manitobans have been stepping forward, taking advantage of the opportunities we have presented in our cottage lot program and have actually—those who have been fortunate enough to get drawn have been stepping forward with money in hand and are out there working at their cottage sites, looking forward to enjoying winters and summers here in Manitoba out at the lake or at a cottage that has a great view of a lake. The number my friend from Portage references is explained in terms of the update in the cottage initiative that we have been undertaking for the last year and a half and represents the revenues that he is referencing in his question.

Mr. Faurchou: In the line, then, Land Information Sales and Fees, the \$10-million additional expected revenues are directly derived from the sale of Crown properties. This is, in fact, an outright sale; it is not a 99-year lease. You are effectively disposing of Crown lands or cottages.

Mr. Struthers: The rule is if we are dealing with Crown land, it is sold to the person who is interested in that lot. If we are dealing with a lot in a provincial park, it is leased. That represents the land that is sold.

What we decided we would do is concentrate on Crown land, concentrate on lands that we can sell to people. The feedback we have received is that Manitobans would prefer to do it that way. We have also received information back from rural municipalities that that suits their purposes much better as well. I think what we have tried to do is tailor our program first of all so that it offers something that is affordable for Manitobans and that works well with the local authorities as well. What we have found is the feedback we have had on that is very positive.

Mr. Faurchou: The minister is selectively thinking of positive commentary. I do know, though, that there are a number of individuals that probably aired to the contrary their concerns about the site selection process. I am going to ask the minister directly why has the minister chosen a lottery on a division-wide basis rather than an actual identified cottage lot so that persons could—they can survey the lot; they know what they are putting their name in for. It is highly evident to the minister as to the undesirable lots that potentially need work or are not interested. Many persons do want to be located in a specific division, but within that division there is a varied quality of lots. I know the minister has recognized that, so why can we not run the lottery on lot specific rather than division specific?

Mr. Struthers: As a matter of fact, Madam Chairperson, we do that. I encourage Manitobans, when they are checking out the cottage lot program—I think we have a very cool Web site that not only starts with the sounds of Manitoba nature, with loons and other animal calls and bird calls, but it moves on to be very specific in terms of (a) the subdivision that we have surveyed and are putting up as part of the draw, and (b) in terms of the lots that are available within that subdivision.

*(15:30)

We make every effort that we can to make sure that Manitobans can go out and look at specific sites within subdivisions. We actually try to set our rules so that it gives Manitobans ample time to go out and actually look at the piece of property that they are going to be putting their name forward for. That actually can happen twice: once before they have name drawn, and then, certainly, if they are part of the lucky group that does get their name drawn for a site, we make every effort to ensure that, if they get drawn for the subdivision, they have every opportunity to go out again and see specifically which site that they would prefer to be drawn for.

They get drawn on the basis of a subdivision, and then the group of people that are drawn for a particular subdivision congregate. If you are the lucky one in that subdivision that got drawn first, then you get your choice of which specific site to choose. If there are 30 sites and you are No. 30, then you get to pick 30th, but if you are the first one, then you get your choice of the site within that subdivision.

I think it is a fair way to do it. There is an equal opportunity for everybody that way to make sure that as many Manitobans can access these great sites that we put up through our cottage lot draw program. I think it is a fair way to handle the kind of interest that we have had in this program.

So there is an opportunity, and I really do stress and encourage Manitobans to check out the Web site, to actually go out and check the site that they are interested in, look over the subdivision, look around the lake, if it is in question. I want people to understand what it is they are putting their name in for, and I am finding that more and more Manitobans are doing that as we go through our third draw in this cottage lot program.

Mr. Faursehou: I appreciate the minister wanting to make certain that we fully comprehend the issues at hand here, but I will say that, in the interest in time, I will try to be brief. I know the minister recognizes that brevity is next to godliness and that he will be trying to comply as well.

I will say, though, that in regard to the cottage lots here there have been a significant number of disappointments, as I think the minister knows. Potentially, if one can look at the lots and actually go right directly to the lot rather than going through the divisional side of things, it would allow for others to take a look at it.

Also, too, consideration, I do believe, should be given to those individuals that are of Manitoban origin and have had to go elsewhere to work within their careers but do want to come back to Manitoba to retire, and, essentially, cottage living is something that they would like to have. But, currently, that does not exist. Persons that are elsewhere in the country or even in the United States cannot apply for the lottery on cottage lots, and I think that is short-sighted. I think we should be able to afford that to individuals that want to return here and to spend their time in retirement. Now, I know that 199 lots have not been picked up for various reasons. I hope that the minister is looking at those lots as to potentially what can be done to make those lots more attractive.

I will also leave it with the minister, I am a strong proponent of, I know it may come as a surprise to some, of the Holland No. 3 Dam proposal, which would, in my assessment and that of past ministers, including the Honourable Eugene

Kostyra, recognize that the addition to Spruce Woods Provincial Park could be enhanced with the building of the Holland No. 3 Dam.

I hope that, at some time during his tenure, you will look at the value of that proposal. The potential cottage lot development within an hour-and-a-half's drive of our major city, Winnipeg, I believe, is one worthy of the minister's time and that of department time.

Is the minister having a short comment, and we will move on out of cottages?

Mr. Struthers: I want to assure the Member for Portage (Mr. Faursehou) there are a lot of possibilities in terms of cottage lot development in this province. We have some absolutely gorgeous areas that we have looked for in conjunction with local leadership, in conjunction with a lot of people who are very interested in this initiative. I want to assure him that, first and foremost, we are working to put Manitoba families in cottages.

We are finding that the interest level is high amongst Manitobans. We are finding that the cottage lots that do not get selected in one draw, we carry forward to the next, and we have actually had an uptake when people get a second crack at some of these lots. Some of them are brand-new lots. They are gorgeous, and they get taken on the next draw. So we have been trying to tailor our draws so that we can maximize the number of Manitoba families that can access this opportunity. His advice on the Holland dam, I think I have heard the member speak eloquently about that in the past, and I am sure I will hear him speak about it again in the future. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I appreciate the minister's comments on cottages, and I think we do agree on this side of the House that we would like to see Manitobans in appropriate cottage lots and appropriate facilities. We were just concerned to hear the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) make statements in the House not long ago that he did not believe seniors should be allowed to use their funds to buy cottages. He came out and said that he thought it was inappropriate that they would be able to access funds to buy those cottages to enjoy their senior years. I wonder if the minister, in his role as Minister of Conservation, has taken it upon himself to take aside the Member for Elmwood and sharply bring

him into line on those kinds of comments and bring him into focus in terms of what this government may believe.

Mr. Struthers: I want to assure the Member for Steinbach, despite his paraphrasing of my colleague's statement in the House and the actual way that that bill that the Member for Steinbach refers to did actually play out in the end—I want him to know that the Member for Elmwood has a lot of good advice that he gives all of us, and I think, amongst us, that the Member for Steinbach would be well served to listen very carefully to the advice that the Member for Elmwood has given him over the last few years and actually act upon that at some point. The member from Elmwood, as it is with me and as I understand with members of the opposition, is supportive of putting Manitoba families into cottages, having them have that kind of opportunity, and I fully hope that members opposite would take that same kind of an approach.

Mr. Faurshou: Thank you very much. Continuing on with the increased revenues, you are looking, Mr. Minister, at increasing park fees by \$1.3 million this year. Is that by direct increases on previously existing services, or are you looking at extending services that are generating more revenues?

*(15:40)

Mr. Struthers: Earlier, I was describing some of our cottaging opportunities on Crown land where we sell the land. Some of our opportunities are in parks, and we have seen some sites in parks that do move. The increase that he has pinpointed on that line reflects the increases due to the cottaging development that we have done. So it ends up being more service. We have not increased the fees in the parks. It fits into our philosophy that we need to make sure that Manitobans can be out there enjoying the parks, because I think we have some of the most beautiful in the country. That is reflected in our approach here in the Estimates procedure.

Mr. Faurshou: The other substantive increase in revenue is under Wildlife Sundry. Is that derived from the proposed legislation that the minister has tabled regarding licensing of animal parts and making available the opportunity for royalties and levies to be charged on animal parts?

Mr. Struthers: Actually, the Member for Portage has put his finger on part of the answer in terms of

The Wildlife Act that we have briefed him on. We are always looking for ways in which we can ensure that the Manitoba public get its money's worth out of Manitoba's resources. I think it is a pretty—*[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. Can we keep the level of—*[interjection]* Well, I just cannot stand missing anything. Please try not to be disruptive in your conversations and lower the level.

Mr. Struthers: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Yes, certainly the Member for Portage is on the right track when he talks about the fees that we have introduced in conjunction with Bill 16. I think it is a pretty well-accepted premise that, if there is a resource that belongs to the people of Manitoba, we need to ensure, all of us as legislators, that we do get our money's worth out of that resource.

One small example of that is the fur royalties that are part of that overall approach. As we talked about in the briefing that we had, there is a long-established practice of having a royalty connected to fur. I think we have established that there are solid reasons for doing that. That is simply what we try to continue on in our approach here. Our approach is not to gouge. Our approach is not to be exorbitant, but we do believe, and I understand that members opposite believe as well, that we need to have a fair return for the resources that are so abundant here in Manitoba. That applies across the board, whether you are talking about everything from timber, furs, quotas for fishing, licences for fishing, all of that.

We need to make sure that we reflect fairly the pricing that is out there. We need to understand what is happening in other provinces so we do not price ourselves out of the market and those sorts of things. All of these issues are issues that I have appreciated the advice of the Member for Portage on in the past.

Mr. Faurshou: I appreciate the minister's answer in clarifying the revenues. The other area of revenues, though, that does come through the department is the Environmental Protection Tax that is allocated to the stewardship corporations, Tire Stewardship, and also to the Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation. I know the minister is well aware that those two particular entities, which I have mentioned, are facing imminent insolvency with the current level of support garnered.

I would like to ask the minister this: Has the minister pursued this with the Finance Minister because I did raise this question with the Finance Minister in regard to the provincial sales tax that is collected by the Treasury off of the environmental levy? In essence, it was double taxation. In 2000 budget, March 31 or April 1, 2000, the provincial sales tax component levied on the environmental levy was not forwarded, as it was in the past, to the Environmental Stewardship Corporation. I want to ask the minister if he has pursued this with the Finance Minister because these are monies that are justly earned by the operations of the stewardship corporations and should be provided by a grant to those organizations.

Mr. Struthers: The Member for Portage has put his finger on a very important issue. We need to be doing everything we can to work with the Tire Stewardship Board, the Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation and others who are involved in not just recycling, but reducing the waste we have in the first place and reusing goods so they do not end up having to be recycled, or they do not end up in our landfills.

In the case of both the Tire Stewardship Board and the Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation, they came forward to me with business plans, and I went through those business plans. I signed off on the Product Stewardship Corporation's business plan, but I did not on the Tire Stewardship Board. I did not feel the business plan submitted by the Tire Stewardship Board covered all the bases. The officials in my department and I had been working with the Tire Stewardship Board to ensure that we do not end up with tires being left out on the landscape and that the people and businesses involved with converting tires into recycled products are in as strong a position as they can be able to continue to do that.

I know the member is aware through different media reports that that is a concern. It is a concern of mine and this government as well. We are, I believe in a position where we have to make some fundamental changes to the way in which we approach these programs, or we are going to find ourselves in a position where we lose the programs. Many other provinces are reviewing what they are doing in terms of these programs. I do not want to be in a position where every year we just fork over a bunch of money. I want to build in some safeguards so I know if there is money going towards these

programs from whatever source, there are safeguards there that say, "Here are some outcomes that we can count on. Here are some results that we can get for the kind of money that is being spent in these areas."

* (15:50)

I want the member to know that what we are looking for is a long-term solution. We understand we have to work with the program to make sure on a day-to-day basis that they are solvent, that they are working the way they are supposed to, but I just want to be very clear that we need a longer term approach than that. No government wants to sit down every year and go back to Treasury and find more money and simply throw it to the programs and not have the results that we all want.

So it has taken some time now, and I am hoping that we are much closer to the end of that process than the beginning, because I think we need to get this stewardship model retooled, so that it can move into the future and continue to do the kind of job that we have been experiencing in the past, in terms of success and keeping these products out of our landscapes and out of our landfills.

Mr. Faurichou: While I appreciate the minister's willingness to study the program, I will say time is running out. We have to make some very definitive decisions very quickly, and one of the immediate decisions that should be taken is a return of the monies of the provincial sales tax garnered on the environmental levy. I believe the minister should, and must, write to the Finance Minister, demanding that the, in my own calculations, well over a million dollars that is in the Treasury that should have been granted back to the individual corporations that are doing a very good job of collecting.

Now, if the minister has a short comment on that, then I will move on.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I understand exactly the argument that the Member for Portage is making, but I want to stress, again, that we can argue about some of the finer details. I do not want to have these kinds of debates go on and watch the programs implode. I want to make sure that we take the bull by the horns on these issues and do some things that are going to put us in good stead for the long run.

Simply taking money from whatever source and simply throwing it into the program is, at best, a very

short-term approach. We need to retool these programs and we need to do it on the basis of some successful models. One of them is right here in our province in dealing with oil and the oil recovery, with not just oil, but oil filters, the excellent job that is happening in that particular model.

So I understand the point that the member is making. I know that the clock is ticking and we need to be moving quickly on this. That has been my goal.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, the minister has been very diplomatic, but I am asking for a yes or no. Is he planning on approaching the Finance Minister to try and have these monies that are justly deserving to the corporations returned to the corporations?

I said that it was over a million dollars. Perhaps in my own rudimentary calculations it could very well be over \$2 million. That, potentially, is a question that I would like the minister to ask of the department. Precisely how much money is in the Treasury that would have gone to the product stewardship corporations if these grants had not been changed?

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. A recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess and proceed to the Chamber for a recorded vote. We are now recessed.

The committee recessed at 3:54 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:38 p.m.

Mr. Faurshou: Just to recap, I was asking the minister for his commitment to find out exactly what the amount would be owing to the respective organizations had the change not taken place in the budget year 2000-2001 not to issue the grant in lieu of the provincial sales tax collected on the environmental levies.

I was looking for the minister's commitment to find that figure and to make it known to the Finance Minister that it is imperative that these monies be returned to the respective organizations.

Mr. Struthers: I think I can make the undertaking that the member is asking for.

Mr. Faurshou: I appreciate the minister's response. Now, moving away from the revenue side of things at the present, I just want to touch briefly on the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund. I see that allocations will remain static, year over year, \$3.4 million for this very valuable initiative that does see many worthwhile undertakings supported in the province in Manitoba to sustain our environment.

I wonder is there any opportunity to see a breakdown of the grant-supported endeavours or undertakings here in the province, just to see where the monies are distributed over the course of the year, some projects that are being supported. Is there a listing somewhere that I could access or is that possible that the minister could provide it?

I have been informed by the Clerk that the supplementary information as pertaining to the Manitoba Sustainable Development Innovations Fund is actually enabling and not for discussion within this committee of Estimates, so I withdraw, unless the minister has comment.

* (16:40)

Mr. Struthers: I can make that undertaking as well. There are a lot of very good projects submitted by Manitobans that get consideration and are supported through the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, and I can undertake to get that information for the member.

Mr. Faurshou: The minister mentioned in his opening remarks the Manitoba Lowlands National Park proposal. Could the minister update me as to when the expected public consultation meetings will be taking place? I understood they were initially forecast for last November, then February and April, but I have yet to see notice.

Mr. Struthers: Yes. I am pleased to talk a little bit about that proposal, a proposal that is predominantly led by Parks Canada and the federal minister, Stéphane Dion. The federal government has undertaken at some point the process of consultation that needs to take place.

A lot of things have changed in terms of determining where parks are eventually going to reside. Gone are the days where the public does not get a say in where these parks go. That undertaking has been committed to by the federal government.

We signed a memorandum of understanding just over a year ago with our Premier (Mr. Doer) and the federal minister at the time, David Anderson, to kick this process off.

Our commitment was very clear, that there needed to be public consultations, and the federal people have assured us that there will be. We also indicated there were a number of local concerns and local issues that needed to be addressed as well, that we were going to work to make sure that those issues were considered and that, at the appropriate time, public consultations would take place.

There is also interest from mining corporations, forestry corporations. All of those things need to be considered throughout this process. That is what the consultation is designed to do.

Our advice to the federal government has been that they have to do these consultations, but that we want to also work on some local concerns at the same time.

Mr. Goertzen: I wonder if the minister can inform the committee—I understand that I am going from memory, which is sometimes a dangerous thing to do, but I believe that there was a report commissioned into the operation of Manitoba Parks, I think it was commissioned for \$50,000, a private report commissioned by his department into park operations. Could he indicate what the status of that report is, Madam Chairperson?

Mr. Struthers: Yes. That is good advice, not only for the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) not to rely on his memory, but this minister as well. But I am reminded that we have received that report, just received it, and that the department is looking to comment on that report now.

Mr. Goertzen: Given the minister's earlier comments about the importance of ensuring that natural resources and all those things that pertain to natural resources are public and are for Manitobans, I am assured, then, that the minister will make the fullness of the report and the recommendations public in good short order?

Mr. Struthers: The first step that I need to make with this particular report is to look internally and see what kind of changes we can look at in our park system, always with the eye of improving the park

system, accessibility and those sorts of things for Manitobans.

Eventually, when we can glean what we need from that report and think of ways that it can be implemented, then the next step would be to make sure that is open for the public.

Mr. Goertzen: So, in terms of when the full report, and I appreciate for the record that he has made the commitment to make the full report and the recommendations public—can he indicate when Manitobans will be privy to that information regarding their natural resources?

Mr. Struthers: I am hesitant to actually give a date or be too specific. I want to be thorough in what we do, and I want to make sure that my department and that this minister has a complete look at the report and a complete understanding of how that would impact our park system. But I always want to get things done as quickly as we can but as thorough as we can as well.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate if any recommendations in those reports go toward privatization of parks in Manitoba, and is that his reluctance to make the report public?

Mr. Struthers: Well, as I have said, the department has just received that report, and I am going to be very diligent in looking for the kind of things that the Member for Steinbach has just indicated.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I have a specific question for the minister and his staff in regard to Spruce Woods Provincial Park. As he probably knows, we had significant flooding this spring due to an ice jam, and approximately two thirds of that park was under quite a bit of water. I know the staff is working diligently to get the park ready for this spring season.

I am just wondering if the minister knows whether that park will be open and available for the May long weekend.

Mr. Struthers: Many people took the opportunity to go out to Rural Forum last Friday. Many people out in that area had the opportunity to go to different sites and different events. That Saturday morning, after the wonderful banquet at the Rural Forum, I took the opportunity to go out to Spruce Woods and

take a look with some of my staff from out of the Brandon office and from the office at Carberry, and a couple of things struck me right off the bat.

First of all, I am not surprised by the fact that park, given its structure, given what it offers Manitobans, is one of our busiest parks. Such a good family location, play structures, a beautiful beach, walking and biking trails, an interpretive centre, unfortunately, most were covered with slime and sludge and topsoil from the Assiniboine River. Mother Nature did quite a job in Spruce Woods Park. They showed me the high-water levels at some of our buildings. It was pretty much up to my chin as I stood there and measured myself up against the mark that they put on the side of some of those buildings.

* (16:50)

Fortunately, I believe bays 8, 9, 10 and 11 in the upper ground, a little further east, I believe, were not touched. Those will be open on the May long weekend. Unfortunately, it is going to take a lot of hard work and a lot of diligence. I want to say that our department has been out there, first of all assessing to see what kind of damage has been done, and now really turning their attention to cleaning up and to putting back together. They told me they were picking picnic tables out of some trees. So they have diligently been working at getting the lower part of those campgrounds out at Spruce Woods back and operational. Those in the lower part will not be ready for the May long weekend, but our goal is to make sure that they get opened as quickly as we possibly can do it.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that response. We know the staff certainly are working hard there.

Is there going to be any disaster funding outside of the provincial budget for either clean-up, repairs to the facility, and I guess the second part of that would be that, in terms of a business in particular that is located within the park, they are going to suffer serious economic loss. Is there some type of assistance available for that particular business?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, our first objective with the money that the provincial government will be putting forward is to get back up and running again. That is going to be a huge undertaking out at Spruce Woods, and I think that needs to be our primary objective. As far as money for other enterprises, I do not believe

that we have that ability here in this department. The best thing that we can do on behalf of businesses that are there and on behalf of the economic development for communities such as Carberry and Glenboro and that area is to make sure that we get our park back up and running as quickly as we can.

As I said earlier, it is about our third busiest park in the province and a lot of people come from all around. I know that is a good, positive impact on the communities in that area and in that region. So I think probably our best use of money from this department and from the provincial government is to make sure that we get those campsites cleaned up, put back together again and offer the same kind of quality experiences as we have had over the last number of years.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Chairperson, the Estimates book had indicated there are going to be 25 new sites established in parks throughout Manitoba. I am just wondering where those new sites may be and if there is any view to expanding the park at Spruce Woods Provincial Park in the near future.

Mr. Struthers: We have an interesting concept in most of our parks. We will have a weekend that is very busy, and a waiting list for campsites that are electrified. You can go to the next bay over that is unserved, and there will be nobody in these spots.

What I have been trying to do is trying to, first of all, convert non-served sites into served sites so we can get a greater uptake, get more Manitobans and our visitors into more of our parks. So, in that vein, we are looking to upgrading 145 sites in this fiscal year, in addition to 25 new ones. We are trying to be innovative with some of these, as well. I would point to Tulabi Falls. What we want to do is we want to make this as environmentally a friendly park as we can, incorporating composting toilets or solar energy. I am open to ideas that can make our park have as small a footprint on Mother Earth as we can.

We are looking at really prioritizing those sites out there in our existing park system that go unused, converting them to served sites. What we have found when we have done the ones that we have last year at places like Watchorn and Stephenfield and West Blue Lake and New Nutimik, where we have actually done some conversions and we have seen that there has been more of a usage than by the general public.

So our first focus is conversions into service sites and we are looking to add more, as well. The member asked specifically about Spruce Woods Park. Again, I think first we get the ones cleaned up and fixed up that are there. Then I think we need to, that can be part of the consideration down the road. Right now we don't have a plan specifically to expand Spruce Woods.

Mr. Cullen: One question specifically regarding the new provincial park, the Criddle/Vane Homestead Heritage Park. We have a nice facility there. Unfortunately, the access is not that good along Provincial Road 340. I wondered if the minister had any discussions with the Minister of Transportation regarding finalizing the pavement on that stretch of road and, as well, if the park itself has a separate operating expense statement for it, or whether it is lumped in with Spruce Woods Provincial Park. If there is a separate operating line for that particular park, if he could have that forwarded to my office.

* (17:00)

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I can undertake to get a specific number, as specific as we can make it, for Criddle/Vane Homestead park. I can tell the member that he was there when I actually made the commitment to provide \$2,500 to the bug house that they were talking about. I can tell him that money has flowed to that particular project. Percy Criddle, I believe, was quite the entomologist, and that was something that we had committed to.

We also, I believe, have helped out in terms of signage. I think we have dedicated about \$2,500 again for signage and those sorts of things to help with people and making it accessible. I have not had a specific conversation with the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) about PR 340. It was the first park that I had an opportunity as minister of cutting a ribbon on, and the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) joined me in doing that. I have high hopes for the park. I think it is a great example of what we need to highlight in rural Manitoba and the history that we can bring forward.

The Friends of Criddle/Vane park, the former Member for Gladstone, Charlotte Oleson, who leads up that group and her merry band of volunteers need to be commended for the work they have done in pushing that agenda and that park forward. So we can endeavour to get a bit more specific number for the member.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask the minister about the listing of caribou under endangered species legislation. The minister has indicated that he is not prepared to list caribou. My understanding is that the science is there, the evidence is there that the caribou are threatened and should be listed as such, that the federal government has already done that, that is, list the caribou, I believe, as threatened across the country.

So my question is to the minister. Does the minister have any concerns with the science, or is the science, as my information would suggest, adequate in terms of the status of the caribou?

Mr. Struthers: Well, the first thing I want to point out to the member is that I have not indicated that I am against in some way listing the caribou. My concern about the question that he brought forward is that it is not for me to question the science. It is for me to make sure that we act upon the science. I am not going to put myself in the place of people out there who know a lot more about the science involved in caribou than those of us around the table.

If I had made a determination that we were not going to list the caribou, as the member has suggested, then we would not have spent a lot of time putting together management plans. We would not have spent a lot of time getting the stakeholders, everybody from Tembec to Hydro to the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and also the First Nations chiefs and councils and elders together time and time again to work on this problem.

So the first thing I want the Member for River Heights to understand is that we are working towards management plans. We do realize that our federal counterparts have listed the woodland caribou as a threatened species. I am not into doing half-measures; I want this job to be done right. I suppose I could have taken the opportunity here a couple weeks ago when we had a big crowd and lots of scientists and lots of people involved with this. I probably could have played the role of the big shot and gone and made announcements, but I would rather do it right. I would rather get the work done that needs to be done and come forward with a real plan that does help protect the caribou. That is my strategy. That is the approach I have taken, and we are working very diligently to make sure that managements plans for all of the herds of caribou that we have in the north, the northwest and the

northeast of this province do receive the kind of protection they deserve.

Mr. Gerrard: Just so that I understand the minister clearly, he is saying that the science is adequate, that the caribou should be listed as threatened. He is saying the caribou deserve protection, and he is just setting up a plan in order to be able to do that. Is that correct?

Mr. Struthers: We have been working very hard for a period of time to put together the management plans for each of the herds of the woodland caribou that are threatened, and we want to make sure that as we move forward, we are moving forward with all the stakeholders involved. I have been clear that I want to do a thorough job with this, and I have been clear that we are going to see the caribou protected adequately. There are consequences. There are impacts that impinge on Aboriginal communities, on others involved, so I want to make sure we do this right.

Mr. Gerrard: I just want the minister, and I think he essentially did this, to say he acknowledges the caribou, certain of the caribou herds in particular, are threatened and it is just a matter of putting the process in place to take the next step.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, that work has been going on for a period of time, and I am determined to see that work carried through to the end.

Mr. Faurchou: I am prepared to move line by line.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,497,900 for Conservation, Support Services, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$44,392,000 for Conservation, Regional Operations, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,749,400 for Conservation, Conservation

Programs, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,972,000 for Conservation, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: 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, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,542,600 for Conservation, Minor Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,189,600 for Conservation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

* (17:10)

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department of Conservation is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary, \$29,400, contained in Resolution 12.1. At this point, we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item.

Mr. Faurchou: Just in closing, I want to thank the minister's staff as they are leaving the table for their tireless work and effort in the area of conservation and natural resources. It is truly appreciated by not only myself, but all Manitobans. We do, indeed, carry a weighty responsibility to maintain the natural resources and the pristine nature of our environment for future generations, a responsibility none of us should take lightly, to be respectful of that responsibility and to do it to the best of our ability.

One point on that I might just mention. You cited Provincial Road 340. That, with the new Criddle/Vane park, I will say that that road does need major improvement, now that the Princess Patricia's battalion have been relocated to Shilo. I will say that your department has a protected area in the Douglas Marsh identified. That has an encumbrance upon the upgrading of the 1940s vintage road of a curved oriented nature so that straightening did not take place in the war years, and also to the road itself, is a narrow blacktop, not up to standards whatsoever. I encourage the minister to discuss with his colleague the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) the vital need to upgrade that road for safety reasons, for personnel both coming and going from Shilo Canadian Forces base, so I encourage the minister to do that.

I know that the environmental groups are willing to trade lands, that if we needed five or whatever number of acres to upgrade the road as necessary, if some other areas near in proximity could be designated as a protected area, it would be important to consider that. I leave that with the minister on the note of safety.

I also want to thank the minister for the opportunity for the Estimates, although I think we just brushed the surface, but, as time will allow, I hope we will once again be able to engage in questioning within concurrence. Pass.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 12.1. RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,695,300 for Conservation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Conservation. This concludes our consideration of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply. I would like to thank the ministers and the critics for their co-operation.

Committee rise.

ABORIGINAL AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply will be

continuing with a global consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Will the minister's staff please enter the Chamber. We are on page 23 of the Estimates book. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Chairperson, I have a question of the minister, I think relating to a comment I made on Thursday with respect to his, I believe, lack of attention to Métis rights. What I was alluding to was, at the legislative committee meeting on March 23, the MLA from River East asked the minister what plans he has with respect to protecting the rights of Métis at South Indian Lake, considering the fact that South Indian Lake will, hopefully, become a reserve in its own right. The MLA from River East asked if he would assure the Métis that their interests were going to be looked after in that reserve creation process.

In response the minister indicated he did not see himself as protecting those Métis people who are going to be living in South Indian Lake. Given that the minister has said that, could he clarify for the record exactly what he meant with respect to that? He knows there are a number of Métis who do have homes in that area. Certainly, if a reserve is created at South Indian Lake, those homes may be part of the reserve. What we are concerned about is whether or not the rights of those Métis people who do have those homes, after the reserve is created, will they be protected with respect to their investment on that new reserve.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Chair, I remember the question asked by the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). I may not have been clear in my response to the member's question at the time.

I certainly did not want to leave the impression that I did not care for Métis people, as was reported in an Aboriginal newspaper subsequently. I can go on to give reasons why, and I want to deal with that question first, the issue raised by the Member for River East, in case the Member for Lac du Bonnet is not clear in what I meant by that. Let me first deal with the impression the Member for Lac du Bonnet tried to leave on record last Thursday, his suggestion I did not care for Métis people.

I want to start off by telling him about my commitment, this government's commitment, to

work with Métis people in this province. We have been pretty active in dealing with Métis issues in this province. Perhaps I should start by mentioning that it was not our government who eliminated the funding to the MMF in this province, to the Indian and Métis friendship centres and, indeed, including AMC, MKO, SCO and so forth. It was his party, when they were in government, the Tory government eliminated funding for the MMF at that time. When we got into government the first thing we did was reinstate that funding his government had eliminated from the MMF budget. We have been maintaining that funding each year. So who is not caring for the Métis people, his party or ours? I think the record speaks for itself.

Our child welfare initiative is the largest in Canada with a Métis Child authority, a first in Canada. There is an annual budget of over \$100 million that is going to be transferred to the Aboriginal Child Welfare authorities, and this includes the Métis children and families. So the commitment is obvious.

The member also mentioned something about Hydro pre-project training. As the member may know, this project is being funded by the provincial government and also by the federal government. Let me tell him the total budget for the pre-project training in Hydro development in the North is about \$60 million. That is the budget. Of that, the federal government's contribution is 25 million and Manitoba Hydro's commitment is 25 million. That is 50. Then there is \$10 million coming from the provincial government. That is 60. Needless to say, that \$60 million is not all targeted for First Nations people. A good chunk of that budget is also targeted for Métis people. Those are only a few examples that I want to give in terms of the commitment that we have and this government has in working with the Métis community. I have many other examples I can give, but I will just use those.

*(15:20)

Now let us go on to the question on South Indian Lake. Again, I want to remind the member that perhaps he may not have been around at the time that his party, when they were in government, were actually the ones who, in 1992, went forward with a plan to co-operate with the federal government for the establishment of a reserve at South Indian Lake in 1992.

Around 1995-96, the federal government apparently threatened to stop providing income assistance for those people living at South Indian Lake because there was little or no progress on the 1992 commitment that was made by the Tories. It was only under some threat that the Tories finally signed an MOU to create a reserve in 1992. So perhaps the member should have done a little research reading to determine the history of South Indian Lake, and then he would know how that particular file evolved over so many years.

On April 12, a letter was sent to the deputy minister of federal Indian Affairs by our deputy minister explaining very clearly the history of South Indian Lake, the efforts, the activities they were involved in, in supporting the creation of a reserve at South Indian Lake. I will just read part of the letter into the record.

The purpose of the deputy's letter was to describe the approach that Manitoba was taking with respect to consultations with the residents of South Indian Lake on the matter of creating a reserve, including Métis residents that, we are informed, make up 1 to 2 percent of the current residents of South Indian Lake.

"As you may be aware, the effort to recognize South Indian Lake OPCN dates to the 1908 adhesion of Nelson House Band to Treaty Five and has been pursued by many residents of South Indian Lake on several occasions since then.

"Manitoba has a legal obligation to make land available for the First Nation at South Indian Lake under the 1992 Manitoba Hydro settlement agreement with the community, the 1996 Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Northern Flood Agreement, comprehensive implementation agreement, and the 1997 Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreement. These obligations are defined and solemn commitments of the Province which it must fulfill. The current initiative dates to a commitment within the 1992 agreement with the community followed by a 1995 MOU between the First Nations peoples of South Indian Lake, Canada and Manitoba.

"I think it will be helpful to outline some of the communication that has taken place with community residents throughout this initiative. The principles guiding the current process were developed by

the leadership of the community of South Indian Lake as represented by a number of local organizations, many of whose membership include treaty Métis and non-Aboriginal residents of South Indian Lake. Resolving reserve establishment and servicing agreement principles were signed in May 29, 2002, by Chris Baker, the headman; Gary Truin [*phonetic*], the mayor at the time; Leslie Dysart of the community association of South Indian Lake; Hilda Dysart of the South Indian Lake Housing Authority; William Dysart of the South Indian Lake Trappers Association; and the South Indian Lake Fisherman's Association."

That is just an example of the kind of work that has gone into the potential creation of South Indian Lake as a reserve.

With respect to, say, for example, housing, there is a paper that was circulated called municipal service delivery in South Indian Lake information sheet. I will give you an example of some of the questions that were contained in that paper.

"Will I receive the same level of service that I am currently receiving from the incorporated community of South Indian Lake? Yes. A municipal development and services agreement is being negotiated with OPCN where levels of service within a community are anticipated to be equal to or improved.

"Will I be treated the same as OPCN members in the provision of municipal services? Yes.

"How will I receive these services? These services will be provided by OPCN through the municipal development services agreement for both on-reserve and off-reserve people.

"Will I need to pay for these services? If user fees are applied, they will be applied equally to OPCN members and non-members throughout the community on reserve, off reserve.

"Will I be able to keep my home? If your home is on privately owned or leased land, the option is yours if you want to keep your home or transfer it to OPCN. The Province will arrange for an independent legal counsel to provide advice to those who have a third-party interest in land, owned or leased.

"If I am a non-treaty, third-party interest holder, can I give up my interest in the land and continue to

occupy my house on reserve? Yes. OPCN is prepared to negotiate a lease to non-treaty residents for their lot in exchange for it being included in the reserve.

"If so, would the home be eligible to be upgraded under the capital upgrade trust fund? Yes. Properties converted to reserve will be eligible to be upgraded from the capital upgrade trust fund. Buildings on land that will not be transferred will not be upgraded with trust fund money.

"How will non-treaty residents be represented? Non-treaty and treaty non-members of OPCN residing off reserve land will be represented by a contact person who will liaise with the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs."

I think this is the question that the member from Lac du Bonnet was asking. "Will I be able to build a home on reserve land? Non-members will require a lease from chief and council before they are legally able to build a house on the reserve. These lease agreements would detail the type of housing and land use that would be allowed and the price for services, the lease fee for land and other matters of importance to the parties."

Now I also tried to explain to the member last week that there are 61 Indian reserves, First Nations lands, in Manitoba. Mostly all of them, those 61 First Nations, have Métis people resident on reserve. In fact, many Métis people marry into the reserve, and some people have lived there from whenever, and they are still living there. Métis children go to school in Indian schools, they live in Indian homes, and they use the infrastructure. Everything that is on the reserve that is available to First Nations people is also available to the Métis people.

* (15:30)

In fact, most of the NACC communities, for the most part, have treaty people, First Nations people, living in the Métis community. Many of them are reinstated treaty Indians as a result of Bill C-31. Everything is going fine. There are no problems. I tried to explain to the member last week as well that at OCN, where I come from, and a band that I am most familiar with, I also explained to him that the same scenario repeats itself at almost every one of those 61 First Nations communities, Métis people and treaty Indians living together.

At OCN, I told the member that there is an estimate of some 200 Métis people living at OCN. In fact, last night as I was leaving The Pas, I went to one family at OCN, a Métis person who had married into the reserve, has a house there, kids, doing quite well, as a matter of fact. He is a carpenter. I had gone there to ask him to do some work for us in town. That is a Métis person. From what I was able to observe he was doing quite well. He was under no threat from anybody and raising a family there, and kids are going to school on the reserve. So Métis people are not going to be mistreated once South Indian Lake becomes a reserve.

Mr. Hawranik: I know my time is limited with respect to the Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Estimates, so I hesitate to ask another question about Métis people of the minister, who takes 20 minutes to actually give me about a minute and a half answer. If he would have directed his attention to my question, he certainly could have answered the question much more appropriately, but he will have his turn in concurrence in any event, Mr. Chairperson.

I have one further question with respect to a constituent of mine, Paul Gibson, from the Lac du Bonnet area. He has put together a proposal to offer helicopter services to two communities, Little Grand and Pauingassi, to be able to allow those helicopters to transport people who require regular ambulance services if they require medical attention. He would provide the service to Little Grand and Pauingassi.

The problem is, first of all, I guess, that he needs some funding to get it going. He has already purchased a helicopter to do the work. The helicopter pads that are required in those two communities, the communities will build them at their expense. The problem is there needs to be a lighting source at each of those pads, which is around \$8,000 to \$10,000 per pad. My question to the minister is whether or not, as the Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister, he would be prepared in his budget to cover the cost of the lighting source in each of those two pads.

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Chairperson, I can advise the member that I have never received a proposal from the person he is referring to. However, if I should get a proposal from that person, of course, I would look at it.

I also have to advise the member that, you know, is he referring to the Métis, NACC community, or is

he referring to the First Nations community. If it is a First Nations community that he is talking about, Health Canada would also have to be involved.

Mr. Hawranik: I can advise the minister that the constituent has said that he has put a proposal together to the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and to the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. If the minister does not recall receiving such a proposal, I will ensure he does forward that proposal to him for consideration.

We would be prepared to go line by line at this point.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$22,889,800 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Operations, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,356,500 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Capital Grants, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$62,500 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Now we come to the consideration of the Minister's Salary. The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary \$29,400, contained in Resolution 19.1.

At this point we request that the minister's staff be excused from the table for consideration of this item.

The floor is now open for questions on Minister's Salary.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I would just like to put on the record that I appreciate all of the hard work done by staff in the department during the

year. I know that they have a very difficult job. I heard comments from some of my constituents that, in fact, the staff deal with issues, some issues particularly, very appropriately. So I would like to just draw attention to the fact that the staff, I can congratulate them and thank them for all their work during the year. Thank you.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,111,200 for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Executive, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

The next set of Estimates to be considered in this section of the committee is the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Government Services.

Shall we recess briefly to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: No. We can continue.

**TRANSPORTATION AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply will be dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Government Services.

Will the minister's staff please enter the Chamber?

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Chairperson, I have some questions in regard to the Government Services end of the department that the minister is responsible for. It is to do with the land management

review committee or Land Value Appraisal Commission, I guess it is called in the book. I believe I am right in assuming that when it says, are responsible for the acquisition of land by any designated authority the power of purchase or expropriation, I was wanting to ask the minister whether the land management review commission had any dealings with the Seven Oaks School Division in their purchase of the property in Swinford Park.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Just a point of clarification, is it the land management services or Land Value Appraisal Commission?

Mr. Reimer: Land Value Appraisal Commission.

Mr. Lemieux: No, not to my knowledge.

Mr. Reimer: Was anybody who does appraisals, were they approached to put an appraisal on that piece of property that was purchased by the Seven Oaks School Division?

Mr. Lemieux: The short answer is that we were not involved when the land was purchased.

Mr. Reimer: I refer to the objectives of the Land Value Appraisal Commission. In their objectives, it says, "to act as an independent group to review government land purchases." I would assume that a purchase made by an arm of government, somehow this commission would be aware of it or would condone it or give direction in regard to any type of purchase that government is involved with. I am surprised when the minister says that this department was not aware of this type of purchase. Is this what the minister is saying?

* (15:50)

Mr. Lemieux: Just a comment with regard to the Land Value Appraisal Commission. Its activity essentially is this: It determines and certifies due compensation for the acquisition of land. It is an independent body that certifies the value of property, as I understand it, and that is what I have been advised.

Mr. Reimer: I agree with the minister, and that is exactly why I am asking if this commission did put a value on the property, because, as the minister has

indicated, the activity clearly states that it determines and certifies the compensation for the acquisition of land by a designated authority. The designated authority would be the PSFB, which is a part of government purchasing property, we are led to believe, which is worth \$2 million. Pardon me, for the development, pardon me. That was not a purchase, I am sorry. For the purchase, what I would want to know is whether the appraisal was done by the appraisal commission on the piece of property for the PSFB in the Seven Oaks School Division, because it is part of government. It is an arm of government spending taxpayer dollars, and I was wanting to know whether there is an appraisal done on it by this department.

Mr. Lemieux: I guess at this point, I think I would take it under advisement. I am not sure what the correct information is, so I just want to be accurate in my response.

Mr. Reimer: That is fair, if the minister would get back to me on that, because the objectives and the activity are fairly explicit in what it does. Like I say, the objective is to act as an independent group to review government land purchase and expropriations. This was a purchase. The activity is to certify compensation for the purchase of the land, which this PSFB did. I repeat my question: Was there an appraisal done, or was there an approach made through his department to the Land Value Appraisal Commission to put a price for the acquisition of this piece of property in Seven Oaks School Division?

Report

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Chairperson of the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254): In the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 considering the Estimates of the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) moved the following motion:

I move

THAT the Legislative Assembly condemn the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) for his contemptuous treatment of the Estimates process with his refusal to be forthright and accountable in answering questions about the

Seven Oaks School Division's illegal scheme to develop land.

Mr. Chairperson, this motion was defeated in a voice vote. Subsequently, two members requested that a formal vote on this matter be taken.

Formal Vote

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

All sections in Chamber for formal vote.

In the section of Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 considering the Estimates of the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) moved the following motion:

THAT the Legislative Assembly condemn the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth for his contemptuous treatment of the Estimates process with his refusal to be forthright and accountable in answering questions about the Seven Oaks School Division's illegal scheme to develop land.

This motion was defeated on a voice vote. Subsequently, two members requested that a formal vote on this matter be taken.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 21, Nays 32.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

Mr. Chairperson: We will now resume consideration of the Estimates in the Committee of Supply.

Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply will resume its dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Government Services.

Will the minister's staff please enter the Chamber?

Mr. Reimer: I just wanted to, as we were questioning just before the interruption, the Seven

Oaks purchase of property in the Swinford Park area and, I believe, lands management review, out at Portage la Prairie. It is the one that did the report on it, and if I am not mistaken, the appraisal commission, part of their responsibility is to review these agreements that are made by land management services.

I was just wondering whether the commission did have any type of input into that decision that was made by Seven Oaks to purchase that property.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, all along, Mr. Chair, we had been talking about how the Seven Oaks School Division purchased the land, and now I understand that purchasing of land by a school division is appropriate to do so. You know, I guess, that is the answer.

Mr. Reimer: I am not disagreeing with the minister that the school division has the ability to purchase land. I guess what I am looking at is that there was a process, and the process went through a lands management review out of, I believe, it is out of Portage la Prairie. They would have had to do some sort of an evaluation on it. It then goes to the commission for a review, and I just wanted to know whether that process was followed. That is all, really.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Chairperson, they were not involved at all in the acquisition of the purchase.

* (16:40)

Mr. Reimer: I am not sure what the minister meant: they were not involved with the purchase. Does he mean the land management out of Portage la Prairie was not involved, or the Land Value Appraisal Commission was not involved?

Mr. Lemieux: I have been advised that, no, they were not involved in the purchase of this land.

Mr. Reimer: From that answer, then, I can surmise that the Seven Oaks School Division purchased it on their own initiative without any review done by land management or by the Land Value Appraisal Commission. Is that true?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, it has been awhile since I have been Minister of Education, but under The Public Schools Act the school division has the authority to

purchase land. Any school board may acquire property.

Mr. Reimer: I know there are other members that were wanting to ask some questions, and I am just going to jump further into the book, into another section. That is Government Air Services and the services that are provided by the Government Air Services, not only to the air ambulance, but also to the Government Services and other departments that use the aircraft.

I understand there are two government jets. One is used primarily for medivac purposes, air ambulance. The other one is also used from time to time for medivac. The one that is not outfitted, because I believe one is outfitted entirely as a medivac airplane, the other one that is used, is it on call for medivac air ambulance use at all times?

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for the question. There is, as he mentioned, a dedicated jet that is 24/7. When that particular jet is being serviced, then the backup jet is used, my understanding is, in that 24/7 capacity as well. If the dedicated jet, the 24/7 dedicated jet is being used, then there is the backup jet.

Mr. Reimer: The backup jet, I guess that is the one I will refer to. Its use is for the government for various endeavours and things like that, plus the fact that it can be used as an air ambulance. Is there a certain percentage of times, or is it mainly used for transport of, say, provincial personnel than for air ambulance?

Mr. Lemieux: We talked about the dedicated jet, 24/7. That is not the question the member is asking, he is asking about the backup jet. The backup jet's primary purpose is for medivac or medical purposes. That is the purpose of it.

Mr. Reimer: The jets that are used and all passenger planes, whether it is the Cessna or the Navajo and that, are available for use by the various departments for various department overtures if they have places they have to go to or functions and things like that. I believe they all have to have a manifest on the plane as to the people that are being transported. Those manifests, are they available?

Mr. Lemieux: Just a point of clarification, what does the member mean by "available"?

Mr. Reimer: What I mean is, the listing of the people that are being ferried on any type of particular plane, are they available for members of the Chamber to have access to.

Mr. Lemieux: I guess a point I do want to make is that probably about one fifth of the time different aircraft are used for general transportation, but I do not know if the member has a specific example that he wants me to comment on.

Mr. Reimer: I am only asking with the jet whether there is access to the manifest as to when the jet is used and the passenger list when the plane is in service.

Mr. Lemieux: I have not looked at the manifest to see when Premier Filmon was flying or when he did not fly, or the member from Southdale when he was a Cabinet minister. As I mentioned, the primary purpose of the dedicated jet is 24/7 for medical purposes; the backup jet is used for medivac or medical purposes, but also it is used for organ retrieval flights. They serve us well, both of those jets. Thank goodness that we have them because they have been used efficiently.

I can only comment on, of course, our government. I am presuming these jets and the aircraft were used appropriately by the previous government. I think Manitobans are certainly very fortunate to be able to have such service. I know that these pilots—I just want to comment on that. We are very, very fortunate to have the dedicated staff that are part of the crews on government jets. We are very fortunate to have a very good track record with regard to repair and so on.

I know there are many people that owe their life, literally, to these aircraft flying, not necessarily in great weather. They come in. They pull people out. They bring them back into Winnipeg. The pilots do a tremendous job. I know the member from Southdale appreciates that as well.

Mr. Reimer: How many aircraft are utilized for what they call water bombing? How many planes do we have now?

* (16:50)

Mr. Lemieux: We have currently seven water bombers. We have three Otters and three bird-dog aircraft for air support with regard to fire

suppression. The water bombers really provide essential services with regard to suppression services. They save, every year, hundreds of thousands of hectares of land, and protecting Manitoba communities.

I do not know if the member has had an opportunity to see them, but we are really fortunate to have, again, dedicated service or a group of people who are skilled aircraft pilots that fly a variety of planes, including the bird dog which I referred to. I can stand corrected by my staff here today, but I know that the water bombers have been called for duty outside of our province, I believe as well. So it is not just servicing communities in Manitoba, but servicing communities and land outside of our province. I know that they are not necessarily used 24/7, but they provide a lot of service outside of Manitoba as well when there is a need and an emergency. We are pleased to do so.

It may not seem like it now because it is raining outside and it is quite wet outside here, but it will not take very long for things to warm up in an awful hurry in northern Manitoba and dry out. Then we are really going to be calling upon these water bombers and other aircraft to save thousands of hectares of land in protecting Manitoba communities, not only in northern Manitoba, but throughout Manitoba.

Mr. Reimer: The seven water bombers, have they been utilized at all this year?

Mr. Lemieux: My department has the aircraft, but Conservation would have a better idea of the exact location of where they were used and so on. I believe they have been used once. I believe a water bomber has been used once already this year, but Conservation would have the specifics as to near what community or where it was called into action.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I only have a few questions as our time is being limited here in regard to the Estimates for Transportation and Government Services. I wanted to ask just a quick question on Government Services. There has been some discussion in other provinces about changes through government services of the care in looking after legislative grounds; in this particular case, it is the Lieutenant-Governor's residence and the surroundings around the Legislative Building.

Has the minister had any discussions or any thoughts in regard to changing the control of that

over to the Speaker of the Legislature as opposed to the Minister of Government Services?

Mr. Lemieux: I thank the member for the question. Currently, the department is responsible for the grounds and staff, and ensuring that the grounds and this building remain the No. 1 tourist attraction in the province. We have so many people. It will not be that long, hopefully, the weather will warm up and you will see the beautiful flowers and the grounds, and you have many, many bus tours that come to the Legislative Building.

I have to tell you, and maybe this is an opportunity to compliment all the staff that work so hard with regard to the gardening and taking care of the grounds in such a way that, arguably, it is one of the most beautiful properties in all of Manitoba. We take great pride in that. We look forward to all the great plants and flowers that are going to be blooming soon on these properties. This building will remain the No. 1 tourist attraction in the province.

Mr. Maguire: I have no doubt in what the minister has indicated. My question was, is he going to continue to look after Government Services with these facilities? There are lots of government services, and of course, he would still be the Government Services Minister, but have there been any discussions in his department in regard to the Speaker looking after the grounds around the Legislative building and the building itself?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Chairperson, with regard to the grounds, to the best of my knowledge there have not been any discussions with regard to looking after the grounds. I am not sure what happens in other provinces, whether or not the Speaker is actually responsible for the grounds or not, but in our particular case, currently, as it stands the Minister of Government Services is responsible for the grounds. Into the foreseeable future, as far as I know there have not been any discussions, as I know it, that the Speaker will be taking over the grounds or responsibility for the grounds.

Mr. Maguire: Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the Winnipeg Airports Authority's annual general meeting over in the Fairmont for a few hours that it was on, and I had the opportunity of listening in on their question period that came forward. I just wanted to ask the minister a question in regard to it.

There were many fine questions that came forward around the airport rental fees and a number of those issues, but one that came up, and I think it is something that needs to be brought to the minister's attention, if he is not aware of it already. It was brought up by a questioner at the AGM on the floor of the Winnipeg Airports Authority's annual general meeting, and that was that he had a good experience coming through even the present facilities out there without the new airport that is going to be built starting this fall, but the person, who travels in and out of Winnipeg considerably, indicated to the minister that his fine experience with travel ended once he got to the door of the taxi in Manitoba.

He ended up saying that the state of the taxis in Manitoba was deplorable, and that the roads they travelled to downtown on were the worst in Canada, if not elsewhere, if not beyond, I think was his exact term. I just wanted to ask the minister if he has any pertinent plan, or any plan to improve that road structure, and do anything in regard to the taxicab licences in Manitoba.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I have to tell you, first of all, that the Taxicab Board as well as many of the taxis in Manitoba should be congratulated. We have one of the safest records in North America with regard to assaults or robberies anywhere in North America, thanks to the cameras and the shields that have been installed and good work, actually, that took place because of the MLA for Radisson who participated in a working group to ensure that would happen.

Now, you know, our taxicab drivers have a great deal of responsibility to be the ambassadors for the province, and many of them do. You know, I will not say 100 percent of them are great ambassadors to the province because one will always find an example of one person that might have been rude to someone or to a passenger, but I would say overwhelmingly, the majority of cab drivers take pride in their job. They are great ambassadors for our province to any tourist.

When I was the Minister of Tourism, when we had the North American Indigenous Games held here in Manitoba, we had a great deal of positive feedback on how people were treated by the cab drivers and so on. They are trying hard. They do not make a great deal of money in that profession, and they are doing the best service that they possibly can at the time.

With regard to the roads, I am not going to take a shot at the City of Winnipeg with regard to the roads travelled to and from the airport. We have heard criticisms when I was in a previous portfolio about what it is like to drive to the airport or from the airport downtown.

No doubt, it needs some work. It is something that I would be pleased to pass on from the member to officials of the City of Winnipeg to see what their possible plan is with regard to that roadway from here or from downtown to the airport or from the airport downtown.

* (17:00)

As the member knows, most of the routes inside of the Perimeter belong to the City of Winnipeg. I know that Stephen Harper said that he would be supporting the amount of money going to municipalities as well. The municipalities, I am sure, will be looking at things just like that, roads and transportation infrastructure, when they get the money from the feds and, possibly, that is one area where they could dedicate that money.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I would hope that even more money would go into those. That future governments would look at expanding the resources that have been offered to date on these issues, but there is a question around project labour agreements in the province of Manitoba. Can the minister indicate to me how small a project he would consider from his department in regard to a project labour agreement, a master labour agreement?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, it is quite hypothetical in nature. I mean, if the member is referring to the floodway or any other projects, I would ask him, certainly, to pose that question to the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton).

I have to tell you, one thing we are pleased with on the transportation side, is the 50-cent bridges that we are getting. The federal government is essentially paying for half those bridges, being part of the floodway expansion project, and that, for us in Transportation, replacing all those bridges, and many of them are getting up in age and are starting to show their wear and tear, so we are very pleased to be receiving all those bridges, essentially 50-cent bridges, because we are paying for half of them, where normally the Province of Manitoba would be responsible for the majority of those bridges and

replacing them at a high cost. With the price of steel going up and China buying up a lot of our steel, the prices are rising as we speak, by the minute, almost. That we are truly grateful for, in Transportation, to have those bridges included as part of the floodway expansion project.

Mr. Maguire: So the minister will guarantee me that there will be no project labour agreements, no master labour agreements on the construction of the Winnipeg Airports Authority's facilities, the new facilities they are building?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for hop, skipping, and jumping from the floodway to the Airports Authority or two, but it is hypothetical, Mr. Chairperson.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Point of order being raised.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, I never mentioned the Winnipeg Floodway Authority. Just for the record, I asked the minister if there was going to be any project labour agreements and how small a project he would consider for those, but nowhere did I mention the Winnipeg Floodway. So, if he was feeling that I had, that is a concern that he has to wrestle with, but I did not mention—

Mr. Chairperson: Disputes over facts are not points of order.

* * *

Mr. Lemieux: Well, even though it is not a point of order, I thank the member for the clarification. The Winnipeg Airports Authority is responsible for their projects, and they are also responsible for looking at their drawings, and ensuring there is public consultation. They are the ones that determine what they are looking at, the size of airport, and so on. Barry Rempel and many of the people out at the Winnipeg Airports Authority do a fantastic job. When the member raised the question about people getting out, arriving at the airport, it will not be very long where they are going to be arriving at a new terminal and a new airport. I believe most Manitobans would welcome that and look forward to that.

Mr. Maguire: I thought, Mr. Chairman, we would move to deal with the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$66,128,200 for Transportation and Government Services, Highways and Transportation Program, for the fiscal year ending 31 day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$39,214,600 for Transportation and Government Services, Government Services Programs, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$127,198,300 for Transportation and Government Services, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$146,649,200 for Transportation and Government Services, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimate of this department is item 15.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 15.1.

Since the minister's staff has left the table, the floor is open for questions.

Mr. Maguire: I just want to congratulate the workers in the department for the effort that they put forward on Manitoba's roads. I know that the minister is probably not giving them enough for the infrastructure projects that we need to deal with keeping the roads safe in Manitoba, but I commend them for the work that they do with the resources they have, and look to passing this on.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, just to respond to the member, I wanted to say that with our many, many initiatives underway with regard to twinning of highways and so on in northeast Perimeter, Highway No. 1 west, and so on, that we have done a commendable job trying to address the transportation deficit, but the

department should be congratulated. They work very, very hard day in, day out, to manage the transportation infrastructure that we have. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,722,700 for Transportation and Government Services, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for the Department of Transportation and Government Services.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the committee is the Estimates for the Legislative Assembly.

Shall we recess briefly to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates? Yes? No?

An Honourable Member: Recess until 5:30.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there agreement that we recess until 5:30? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 5:09 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:29 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being almost 5:30 p.m., the recess for the Committee of Supply has automatically ended.

The hour being 5:30 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

House Business

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Just on House business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: House business?

Mr. Derkach: We might not see the clock for 10 seconds or so. I would—

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to not see the clock for a few seconds? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the requirement for ministers for concurrence at our next session.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. It has been tabled.

* * *

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, May 9, 2005

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Petitions		Neighbourhoods Alive! Program Swan; Smith	2500
Pembina Trails School Division–New High School Loewen	2491	Affordable Housing Initiative Dyck; Melnick	2501
Ambulance Service Schuler	2491	Members' Statements	
Generally Accepted Accounting Principles Lamoureux	2492	National Nursing Week Jha	2502
Supported Living Program Goertzen	2492	Stefanson	2502
		Mother's Day Brick	2503
Tabling of Reports		Sierra Leone National Association Taillieu	2503
Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2005-2006–Departmental Expenditure Estimates–Revenue Estimates Selinger	2493	Selkirk Hospital Palliative Care Program Dewar	2504
Oral Questions		Grievances	
Mental Health Services Murray; Doer	2493	Derkach	2504
Cullen; Oswald	2494	Mitchelson	2507
Physician Resources (Brandon) Stefanson; Sale	2495		
Seven Oaks School Division Driedger; Bjornson	2496	ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Lamoureux; Bjornson	2500	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Rate/Fee Structure Hawranik; Selinger	2497	Committee of Supply (Concurrent Sections)	
Dauphin Legion Derkach; Smith	2498	Education, Citizenship and Youth	2510
Nursing Research Gerrard; Sale	2499	Conservation	2523
		Aboriginal and Northern Affairs	2535
		Transportation and Government Services	2539