

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

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authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

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.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
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

Wednesday, March 22, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Gerrard: A matter of privilege should be raised at the first possible time, and it must present the reasons that there is a prima facie case of privilege. This matter of privilege concerns statements made yesterday in this Legislature by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick), in relationship to the investigation or reviews that she has committed to on the murder of 31 children.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter. The murder of 31 children, who were in the care of the minister's department at the time of their murder or had been recently released from care, must be taken very, very seriously. We have all been saddened, appalled and shocked at these 31 brutal murders; the most shocking of which may be that of Phoenix Sinclair reported just last week.

Yesterday, I asked the minister, and I quote: "So will the minister unequivocally state that she will ensure that people's jobs will be protected if they bring forward information which is critical to certain aspects of Child and Family Services because they believe that it is in the best interests of children?"

Yesterday, the Minister of Family Services said in response, and I quote: "We have the protection currently under The Child and Family Services Act for all individuals who feel they have information that they would like to provide."

Mr. Speaker, earlier today, I was provided details of an individual who was terminated from his position February 14, of this year 2006, because he brought forward care issues, and he was honest in raising concerns over the way things were being done. This individual worked as a manager of a provincially-funded group home which was one of the homes operated by DASCH Inc., Direct Action in Support of Community Homes. This was a provincially-funded group home with children in the

care of the provincial Child and Family Services system, and the individual in question was terminated because he raised issues with respect to how children were being treated and cared for in the home.

Mr. Speaker, the individual in question has asked that I not mention his name specifically today in the Legislature because he is indeed fearful of further retribution from this government or the agencies funded by the government. He has indicated, however, that he would be willing to meet privately with the minister to provide specific details to her so that she can understand the validity of the complaints raised. I should add that this individual is known for speaking up, and he has previously spoken of concerns about children in care in relationship to Hydra House. But, in spite of his honesty in bringing forward concerns over the care of children, I would add on more than one occasion, he was terminated from his job February 14, just a little over a month ago.

* (13:35)

This, Mr. Speaker, is a very important issue, and it is important to be raised in the Legislature because the minister is broadcasting to people to call in, you will be protected, when we have evidence that, in fact, people are not being adequately protected in their jobs and their positions. We have evidence that the statements of the minister yesterday in this Legislature were clearly misleading not only to the members of the Legislature, but to people outside the Legislature and in the general public.

Mr. Speaker, it is untenable that those who come forward with concerns about children in care have to fear for their job. Indeed, it is very sad that this episode has occurred, and, as I say, this episode puts into question the statement of the minister yesterday in the Legislature. It puts into question the two reviews which she has indicated that she is undertaking.

Now why is this important, Mr. Speaker? It is a very important issue because this government has a very poor track record when it comes to protecting honest whistle-blowers who raise issues. When Jim Small came forward with issues around Hydra House, he was treated very poorly by this

government. He has had problems getting jobs since, perhaps because of some of the actions and the influence of this government.

On the Workers Compensation Board, we know and it has been raised repeatedly in this Legislature that Pat Jacobsen raised issues, came forward honestly with concerns and was terminated from her position. We know, Mr. Speaker, that in the Aiyawin Corporation, there were whistle-blowers who came forward honestly raising concerns, who spoke at length to the Auditor General, provided evidence in detail, and, yet, those individuals were not protected in their jobs.

So this government has a sad history when it comes to protecting whistle-blowers who come forward honestly with information, and that is a reason why the minister's statement was suspect to begin with. I present you evidence that it is not only totally lacking in credibility but it is misleading this Legislature.

Now I know that, with a matter of privilege, we have to provide evidence that the minister deliberately misled the Legislature on this respect, and I have to spend a little bit of time because this is an important point. It is clear when the minister brought forward her review that she had a vested interest in trying to make this credible even when it was not. She had a vested interest in deliberately misleading the House and people in the community that they would be protected when all the evidence from previous experience with this government, and as recently as I have said, on February 14, is that such individuals will not be adequately protected.

The minister quoted section 18 yesterday afternoon. Now this is a part of the act which governs the children in care, and the minister used section 18 to imply that anybody who raised issues was going to be fully protected. Now, in looking at section 18, it would apply where somebody brings forward a complaint or a concern about child abuse, but there may be a wide variety of issues related to children in care which may or may not be fully covered when they come forward. This is what I was looking for full assurance from this minister and that is why my question yesterday to her was as clear as it was.

The fact is that the minister should have known the act, must have known the act. She quoted from it, and yet, she was not being fully honest in how the act applies. I would suggest to you that it is very likely that she was indeed deliberately misleading the

House that everybody who came forward with information and concerns as part of these reviews would be fully protected in terms of their jobs and other aspects.

* (13:40)

Now, the concern here, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that yesterday we had very important statements from the minister which, as I have shown you, are now completely discredited and which clearly are misleading the House. It will be up to your judgment certainly as Speaker to make a judgment as to whether this was deliberately misleading, but I would believe and I would argue that there is a valid case to be made.

Certainly when we look at the history of this government, and in terms of such reviews in the past, there are valid reasons to be suspect of the government when it brings forward such reviews. We had a review in terms of Hydra House, and that review done in 2001 said that the issues have been addressed and we are satisfied with Hydra House's plans to comply with the requirements. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we found out some time later, I might add, when the Auditor General reported that there were huge problems which had just been covered up, and, indeed, the former Minister of Family Services said he was satisfied but, indeed, it turned out it was most unsatisfactory.

I raise these issues because we have had major previous problems with the credibility of this government on reviews. This is why it is so important if these are to be done that they be done in a way that is going to be useful. The more information that I find and the more information that I present suggests that these reviews are not going to be nearly as good or as useful as the government has proclaimed, and for some of the reasons that I have provided today.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I believe I have made the case as quickly as I could having received this information this morning of the individual who was fired February 14, which totally contradicts the minister, and that I have made the case which is a reasonable and a responsible case to make.

I, therefore, move, seconded by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that a standing committee of this House investigate the matter I have raised and report back to this House.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same privilege.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, it is my duty, of course, to reply to the daily matters of privilege that the member brings in here now. I remind the member of what *Beauchesne* says, a matter of privilege ought rarely to come up, and that is because the conditions that satisfy a matter of privilege are rarely to be found. It is a serious matter and what we have here in no way comes anywhere close to being a matter of privilege.

You, Mr. Speaker, and, indeed, every Speaker has consistently ruled that arguments about a minister misleading do not form the basis of privilege. If a member alleges a member has deliberately misled the House, there has to be a provision of specific proof of intent to mislead on the part of the member in question. I just refer to your Speaker's Ruling of December 6, 2005, which I think is one of the more recent restatements of this. Of course, it goes on to say that in such situations where there is not that evidence, they are disputes over the facts in this House and do not fulfill the criteria for a prima facie matter of privilege.

* (13:45)

Mr. Speaker, I would say that actually to qualify that this appears not just to be a dispute on the facts, it is actually a dispute on the law. The Child and Family Services Act can speak for itself. The member can read that for himself, and, of course, section 18 deals with the requirement for reporting.

It is a mandatory reporting requirement that can result in penalties if there is not compliance. Within that section, the member can read for himself in the "Protection of informant" provisions that say, "No action lies against a person for providing information in good faith and in compliance with section 18." It goes on to say, "No person shall interfere with or harass an informant under section 18", and that similar penalties will follow for any breach of that. So it is simply a matter for discussion and for debate, Mr. Speaker, certainly not subject to a matter of privilege.

I also would like to caution the member when he says that there were 31 brutal murders, I think was what he said, of children in care, Mr. Speaker. The member might want to act more judiciously in his description. Unfortunately, there may well have been some of that category, which is a shame on all of us, but he perhaps would want to be more cautions with what he describes as these tragic losses to our community. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same privilege.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): On the same privilege, Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the matter of privilege because, once again, sadly to say in this Chamber, we have witnessed the kind of activity that this government has stooped to in order to protect its own skin.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter that should be taken lightly, and I think the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has put his case straightforwardly in terms of the prima facie case of this matter and, secondly, having raised it at the earliest possible opportunity. If we in this House can sort of discard this kind of matter as an argument over the facts then we are not doing a service to Manitobans.

The minister announced two reviews to deal with the deaths that have occurred in children under the care of Family Services and, specifically, with respect to little Phoenix Sinclair, but, Mr. Speaker, as we have pointed out to the public of Manitoba, this government has conducted itself in very unorthodox ways when people come forward with concerns about matters within their own areas of responsibility. These are loyal civil servants of the Province of Manitoba who are doing their duty to ensure that matters do not go unattended and that matters are addressed when they go awry.

Nothing is more serious, Mr. Speaker, than the safety of a child or children, especially when they are in the care of the government. In this case, it appears that we have a situation where, again, an employee of the government, an employee of the Province of Manitoba, has come forward with concerns only to see himself being fired. Now I see the minister of industry, science and technology is shaking his head, and I hope he is shaking his head because of the disgust of this situation.

Let us go back a little bit and look at what has happened to other people who have come forward. Now this government talks about the need for whistle-blower legislation, whistle-blower legislation to protect people from this government, and, Mr. Speaker, if a government has any moral authority in governing then they should not need whistle-blower legislation.

But now we see somebody who has come forward, raising concerns taking place in the Family Services Department, who gets fired. Where did we see that before? We have raised that in the House.

Do we have to go back to Hydra House and look at the issues there and the individual's name mentioned by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), Mr. Jim Small, and in terms of how he was treated by this government?

* (13:50)

Do we have to go to the Workers Compensation Board and look at the president and CEO of the Workers Compensation Board, Pat Jacobsen, who legitimately came forward to the minister in a letter advising her about problems that were occurring in Crocus, and what did the minister do? She referred it back to the person who the CEO was having some problems with and she also was fired.

Mr. Speaker, what about Aiyawin? We have not even able to get into the Aiyawin matter in this House because of these cases before us. But what has happened in Aiyawin, when people came forward to raise concerns about the scandals that were going on in Aiyawin, how did this government treat them? What has the Auditor General said about this government's treatment of those individuals and those situations? But, yet, there is still one other one out there.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the whole issue of TRAF, the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund, and that is still to be laid before the people of this province, but there again we see how this government treats individuals who come forward. You can call them whistle-blowers, but these are people who take their responsibilities seriously. They do not go to us as opposition, they do not go to the media, they go to the government. They go to their employer and they advise their ministers about the problems to keep their ministers out of hot water, and what do the ministers do? They fire them.

This is a matter that I cannot see how a ruling of a dispute over the facts can ever come back to this House on this matter, because if we treat this as a dispute over the facts then in the eyes of Manitobans we are all liars. We are all collectively liars, Mr. Speaker, and we are better than that. We have a responsibility to the people of this province. We have a responsibility to ensure that people who work for the government are protected.

Mr. Speaker, this goes beyond that. The minister announced the other day two reviews; one internal review, one external review, but, in essence, the minister oversees these reviews. Now, how can people ever have the comfort of coming forward and

speaking openly about what they know in these cases if there is the threat of them either being fired or some kind of retribution by the government on their actions? That is why we have called for an independent public inquiry because then there is protection for people who come forward. There is protection for those who are going to tell the truth. There is protection for those who will tell it all as it was. If the government has nothing to hide then they will call the public inquiry.

I see the huddle that is going on, on the government benches, and surely they should be concerned about this matter. So, I have to conclude, but enough has been said about why there is suspicion about the process that this minister has put before the people of Manitoba in terms of the external and internal review because she and her government can no longer be trusted to do the right thing. We have yet another example that has been placed by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) before this House. For that reason, I think his matter of privilege is an important one and is a serious one. We should all take this matter extremely seriously. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: A matter of privilege is a serious concern. I am going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities, and I will return to the House with a ruling.

* (13:55)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 29—The Degree Granting Act

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson), that Bill 29, The Degree Granting Act; Loi sur l'attribution de grades, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Speaker, the proposed Degree Granting Act will ensure that degrees from Manitoba's post-secondary institutions will have the confidence of students, graduates and employers since, as a result of this legislation, only institutions legislatively recognized as degree granting institutions may present themselves as universities to students and prospective students.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

Highway 10

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

A number of head-on collisions, as well as fatal accidents, have occurred on Highway 10.

Manitobans have expressed increasing concern about the safety of Highway 10, particularly near the two schools in Forrest where there are no road crossing safety devices to ensure student safety.

Manitobans have indicated that the deplorable road condition and road width is a factor in driver and vehicle safety.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased flow of traffic on this highway in the future.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider providing sufficient resources to enhance driver and vehicle safety on Highway 10.

We request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services to consider upgrading Highway 10.

This petition is signed by J.C. Douglas, Alfred Fremond, B.R. Montague and many, many others.

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

Funding for New Cancer Drugs

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death of Manitobans.

Families are often forced to watch their loved ones suffer the devastating consequences of this disease for long periods of time.

New drugs such as Erbitux, Avastin, Zevalin, Rituxan, Herceptin and Eloxatin have been found to work well and offer new hope to those suffering from various forms of cancer.

Unfortunately, these innovative new treatments are often costly and remain unfunded under Manitoba's provincial health care system.

Consequently, patients and their families are often forced to make the difficult choice between paying for the treatment themselves or going without.

CancerCare Manitoba has asked for an additional \$12 million for its budget to help provide these leading-edge treatments and drugs for Manitobans.

Several other provinces have already approved these drugs and are providing them to their residents at this present time.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to consider providing CancerCare Manitoba with the appropriate funding necessary so that they may provide leading-edge care for patients in the same manner as other provinces.

To request the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Health to consider accelerating the process by which new cancer treatment drugs are approved so that Manitobans are able to be treated in the most effective manner possible.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by John Gray, Sydney McArton, Ashley Ewasko and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund—Public Inquiry Request

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Auditor General's *Examination of the Crocus Investment Fund* indicated that as early as 2001, the government was made aware of red flags at the Crocus Investment Fund.

In 2001, Industry, Economic Development and Mines officials stated long-term plans at the Crocus Investment Fund requiring policy changes by the government were cleared by someone in "higher authority," indicating political interference at the highest level.

In 2002, an official from the Department of Finance suggested that Crocus Investment Fund's

continuing requests for legislative amendments may be a sign of management issues and that an independent review of Crocus Investment Fund's operations may be in order.

Industry, Economic Development and Mines officials indicated that several requests had been made for a copy of Crocus Investment Fund's business plan, but that Crocus Investment Fund never complied with the requests.

Manitoba's Auditor General stated, "We believe the department was aware of red flags at Crocus and failed to follow up on those in a timely way."

As a direct result of the government ignoring the red flags, more than 33,000 Crocus investors have lost more than \$60 million.

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seems to be the primary reason as for why the government ignored the red flags.

The people of Manitoba want to know what occurred within the NDP government regarding Crocus, who is responsible and what needs to be done so this does not happen again.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Premier to consider calling an independent public inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund scandal.

Presented on behalf of Cheryl Rivers, Nitin Oberoi, Neena Oberoi and many others.

* (14:00)

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Auditor General's *Examination of the Crocus Investment Fund* indicated that as early as 2001, the government was made aware of the red flags at the Crocus Investment Fund.

In 2001, Industry, Economic Development & Mines officials stated long-term plans at the Crocus Investment Fund requiring policy changes by the government were cleared by someone in "higher authority", indicating political interference at the highest level.

In 2002, an official from the Department of Finance suggested that Crocus Investment Fund's continuing requests for legislative amendments may be a sign of management issues and that an independent review of Crocus Investment Fund's operations may be in order.

Industry, Economic Development & Mines officials indicated that several request had been made for a copy of the Crocus Investment Fund's business plan, but that Crocus Investment Fund never complied with the requests.

Manitoba's Auditor General stated, "We believe the department was aware of red flags at Crocus and failed to follow up on those in a timely way."

As a direct result of the government ignoring the red flags, more than 33,000 Crocus investors have lost more than \$60 million.

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seems to be the primary reason as for why the government ignored the red flags.

The people of Manitoba want to know what occurred within the NDP government regarding Crocus, who is responsible and what needs to be done so this does not happen again.

We petition the Legislation Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Premier to consider calling an independent public inquiry into the Crocus Investment Fund scandal.

This petition is signed by Brent Olynyk, Michael Diamond, Marjorie Warkentin and many, many others.

Funding for New Cancer Drugs

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death of Manitobans.

Families are often forced to watch their loved ones suffer the devastating consequences of this disease for long periods of time.

New drugs such as Erbitux, Avastin, Zevalin, Rituxan, Herceptin and Eloxatin have been found to work well and offer new hope to those suffering from various forms of cancer.

Unfortunately, these innovative new treatments are often costly and remain unfunded under Manitoba's provincial health care system.

Consequently, patients and their families are often forced to make the difficult choice between paying for the treatment themselves or going without.

CancerCare Manitoba has asked for an additional \$12 million for its budget to help provide these leading-edge treatments and drugs for Manitobans.

Several other provinces have already approved these drugs and are providing them to their residents at present time.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) to consider providing CancerCare Manitoba with the appropriate funding necessary so they may provide leading-edge care for patients in the same manner as other provinces.

To request the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Health to consider accelerating the process by which new cancer treatment drugs are approved so that more Manitobans are able to be treated in the most effective manner possible.

This is signed by Sharon Pratt, Doreen Cummings, Heather Pratt and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba government was made aware of serious problems involving the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

Manitoba's provincial auditor stated "We believe the department was aware of red flags at Crocus and failed to follow up on those in a timely way."

As a direct result of the government not acting on what it knew, over 33,000 Crocus investors have lost tens of millions of dollars.

The relationship between some union leaders, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP seems to be the primary reason as for why the government has ignored the red flags.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider the need to seek clarification on why the government did not act on fixing the Crocus Fund back in 2001.

To urge the Premier and his government to cooperate in making public what really happened.

Signed by G. Ziprick, F. Ziprick, Mike Baert and many, many others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba 2004-2005 Annual Report.

* (14:10)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

2006 Juno Award Nominees

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

Prior to today's Question Period, I held a small luncheon in the dining room to honour and recognize some gifted artists from Manitoba's sound recording industry here. My guests today were the 2006 Manitoba Juno Award nominees.

These talented artists will be competing for Canada's most prestigious music awards at the 2006 Juno Awards in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on April 1 and April 2. Attending the luncheon, as well, were people from the Manitoba Audio Recording Industry Association, MARIA, and from my department's Crown agency, Manitoba Film and Sound Recording Development Corporation. MARIA and Manitoba Film and Sound are tireless in their efforts to support Manitoba's recording industry and help countless artists each and every day.

The success that Manitoba artists enjoy at events like the Juno Awards happens in large part because our province has the infrastructure necessary for recording artists to build meaningful and successful careers in the music industry. I think we all remember last April when Winnipeg hosted the 2005 Juno Awards at the MTS Centre and impressed the nation with the dynamic and exciting sound industry that we have built here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce our 2006 Juno Award nominees to honourable members. A few of these talented people were able to join us in the gallery this afternoon. The nominees include: The Duhks, nominated for Roots and Traditional Album of the Year; The Perpetrators for the Blues Album of the Year; Amanda Falk, nominated for Contemporary Christian/Gospel Album of the Year for her self-titled album, *Amanda Falk*; Dr. Robert Turner, Classical Composition of the Year; James Ehnes, up for Best Classical Album, Solo or Chamber Ensemble, an impressive and a diverse list indeed.

Also, Billy Joe Green, Eagle and Hawk and Burnt Project I, an impressive and diverse list, as I was saying, a true testament to the rich diversity that exists in our local music community. We have everything, from the acclaimed composer, Dr. Robert Turner, who recently celebrated his 85th birthday and still produces work that is the envy of his peers, to the younger generation's equally mesmerizing energy of The Duhks and The Perpetrators.

I think it also speaks volumes for our industry when you look at the Aboriginal Recording of the Year nominees, represented by one of our most beloved veteran artists, Billy Joe Green, the multi-talented Burnt and the immensely popular Eagle and Hawk. Our Aboriginal recording sector must be doing something right when Manitoba takes three of the five available nominations in that category.

Although he could not be here today because he is performing in Europe, there is little that I could add to describe Brandon's own internationally renowned violinist, James Ehnes himself, no stranger to Juno nominations or the fresh new talent of Amanda Falk for capturing a Juno nomination for her debut album.

I would like to also thank all honourable members in this Chamber for the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge these talented and dedicated members of Manitoba's sound recording industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege and an honour really for members on our side to recognize the diverse talent and wonderful entertainers we have in this province. I join with the minister in congratulating him for hosting the luncheon that was this afternoon. I did have an invitation from the minister and I thank him for that invitation. However, I did have a previous engagement in my constituency that I had to forestall

the wonderful time and the entertainment that the minister provided to the nominees.

As mentioned by the minister, Mr. Speaker, the recording industry, the film industry here in Manitoba has certainly grown over the years, and mainly that is because of the talent and the abilities for individuals to express themselves in their various venues, whether it is in music or in film or dance or recordings or all the other entertainment that has been associated with the culture that we so much enjoy here in Manitoba. We are so rich in the diversity here in Manitoba with the various components that we are able to highlight in our entertainment package, if you want to call it.

We have a growing Aboriginal community that is deeply traditional in their music and in their presentation to the other areas within our culture. I think, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of us are recognizing the tremendous talent that is in that community. I know the minister also hosted the Aboriginal Music Awards. I believe it was here in Winnipeg last year, which was greatly anticipated and enjoyed by a lot of people here in Manitoba.

The nominees, as was mentioned by the minister: The Duhks, The Perpetrators, Amanda Falk, Dr. Robert Turner, and I congratulate him for 85 years and still going strong and making music and entertainment. It is a great attribute and it shows the aliveness and the entertainment component that this gentleman is passing on to other people; Mr. James Ehnes and Billy Joe Green, who are also nominees.

I would only hope that, as they go down east to Halifax for the Juno Awards, they have the blessings of all Manitobans. We hope they all come back as winners. We feel that here in Manitoba we have the ability to compete worldwide. We saw that last year with the Junos here in Manitoba, a tremendous achievement, great participation, great entertainment, a great showcase for Manitoba at the MTS Centre.

So, Mr. Speaker, I join with the minister in congratulating these nominees. I noticed here that they talk about the Manitoba sound stage. I should just bring in the fact, although you know it is hard for me not to resist the offer for a sale, the purchase for \$3 million. I believe they are working very hard but, unfortunately, they still had a deficit this year of \$60,000. Other than that, a lot of the industry is perking right along, so I join with the minister in congratulating these nominees. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I seek leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I join the other members of the Legislature in offering our congratulations to all the 2006 Juno Award nominees. We believe that this is a sign of real strength in the Manitoba music and sound industry, and we wish them all the very best of success in the Juno Awards competition in April in Halifax.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my left where we have with us Mr. John Angus, who is the former Member for St. Norbert.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child Welfare System Public Inquiry

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, for the safety and well-being of children and families in Manitoba, we have called on this minister to do the honourable thing and resign, or we have asked the Premier (Mr. Doer) to replace this minister and remove her from her portfolio. We have called for immediate action to protect children in Manitoba.

We have also called for a public inquiry with a broad mandate looking into the specific circumstances surrounding the life and death of little Phoenix Sinclair and her involvement with CFS as well as the CFS system generally.

Mr. Speaker, in response to our suggestions the minister has dragged her feet for over two weeks, and then finally she has called for two reviews. The problem is that these reviews are not protecting children right now, today. The problem is that the minister anticipates these reviews will leave questions unanswered.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the review committees will not have the power to compel witnesses to testify. The problem is the minister has set up these reviews and, yet, in her own words, she expects them to be insufficient.

We have also heard today that when somebody has come forward with issues, what is the response of this government? They fire them. It is absolutely important for all Manitobans, for the sake of all children in the province of Manitoba, that this NDP government do the right thing and call for an independent public inquiry today.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): Mr. Speaker, it is really interesting that the members opposite cannot keep their questions straight. They came forward, and I will quote the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), who said, "When will she announce an independent external review?"

That was what they were asking for last week, Mr. Speaker. They asked for that and our government has responded. There are two reviews going on. Now they are changing their mind and they want an inquiry. I would also suggest to the members opposite that they should have more respect for the people who have been put in place.

You have to remember that the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman are independent offices. I would remind the members opposite that they were part of the team that put these independent officers in place, Mr. Speaker. They have put them in place, they are professionals. Let them do their work.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, members opposite always are concerned about the record or correcting the record. Well, I want to go on record and I hope the minister listens when I go on record because there were three things that we asked for: No. 1 was the removal of that minister; the second thing was an external review and the third thing was an independent public inquiry. That is what we asked for.

This is an issue in front of all Manitobans about the credibility of this government. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when asked a question, and I quote from Hansard, the Deputy Premier made this comment to a question I asked about why we needed an independent public inquiry and she said, we are moving swiftly. Well, in 2002, we asked for an inquiry. In 2004, we asked for an inquiry. Now we know the record of this NDP government.

When somebody comes forward with an issue because they want to ensure that the minister has all the facts, what do they do? They fire that person. This screams and it calls for an independent public inquiry so that the public can understand and all children in Manitoba can be protected. Do the right thing and call for one today.

* (14:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: I want to go back again to the people who have been put in place to do these reviews. I want to remind the members opposite that the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman are professional people who were selected by a joint body and approved by the members opposite. Everybody looks at those people as honourable, professional people.

I say to members opposite, let us not make politics of a very sad situation. Let us not make politics, Mr. Speaker. Let those professionals, and I quote the Children's Advocate who says, this office is an independent office and the one thing I want to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the members opposite of the three issues facing this NDP government: No. 1 is they have a minister who has lost the confidence of Manitobans; No. 2 is an external review is required immediately so there is some action taken today and No. 3 is we need to have an independent public inquiry.

I want to quote back because this minister loves to stand in her place and talk about quoting out of Hansard. Well, let me quote back to this minister exactly what the First Minister (Mr. Doer), when he was in opposition, said to this House. He said the following: It is the Premier who is responsible for the care and custody of children under The Child and Family Services Act. He cannot wash his hands of his responsibility.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am asking for the sake of little Phoenix Sinclair and all children who are under the system in the province of Manitoba. The minister has failed them and the only way to get to the bottom of this and to have an open and transparent accountable system to all Manitobans is for this government to do the right thing and call for an independent public inquiry today.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, if I was the member opposite, I would not talk too loudly about having people lose confidence in you.

We have a Children's Advocate and we have an Ombudsman, who are independent offices, Mr. Speaker, and have been put in place to do a review. The Premier has said clearly that there are possibilities to look at an inquiry, but I say to the members opposite let the committee, let the people who all of us have confidence in, and we have put in

place in the Children's Advocate and in the Ombudsman, let them do their job. Let us not make politics of a very serious situation.

Child Welfare System Accountability

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, a social worker today said that caseloads of 50 to 100 are just too high and that is putting children at risk. She blames the Minister of Family Services for her poor planning in dismantling the child welfare system.

In 2003, the then-Minister of Family Services said, and I quote: The Province will set workload standards for social workers and supervisors in Manitoba's new child welfare system. They did not do that, Mr. Speaker, and now children have died.

There have been 2,600 children transferred during the reorganization of the child welfare system. What assurances can the minister give that all those children today are accounted for and no children have been lost in an overburdened system?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, a review of caseload is one of the items in the terms of reference that the external review committee will be looking at. I think it is very important for this House to acknowledge the seriousness of the incident that has happened and to be supportive of the experts that have agreed to be part of this review.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: The heckling coming from the other side of the House continually, Mr. Speaker, makes me question their commitment to really finding out what went wrong and how we can work on recommendations to better protect our children.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned for the children in the child welfare system right now, and it is three to six months before the external review will be complete.

Mr. Speaker, from the government Web site, we know that, and I quote, Manitoba does not require or use a standardized risk assessment tool to determine the level of risk to children. This forces the individual caseworker to decide the best place for the child, and that is just not fair. The minister has shuffled her responsibility on to front-line workers by not setting a standard for which people can work by.

Can the minister assure Manitobans that today all children who have been transferred or who have gone home are not at risk and are accounted for?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, risk assessment is done in a professional way every day in this province by front-line workers. I wanted to mention that part of what we are working on through the devolution is that for the first time ever there will be province-wide standards. This is an important accomplishment, and it is something that I really want to commend all the front-line workers on and working together co-operatively to put together provincial standards for the care of the children in Manitoba.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, three months in the life of an abused child is a long time, and six months is twice as long. Manitobans demand to know that today, next week and next month children are safe. We cannot wait for the minister's processes to be completed.

What assurances can the minister give today that not one single child is missing and unaccounted for in the child welfare system?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly give assurances to this House that every front-line worker, every worker in the child welfare system in the province of Manitoba does their best today and every day to take care of the children who are in care. I can also assure this House that during the time of the external review that care will be maintained by everyone who is caring for the vulnerable children. I have also said that if recommendations come forward for change during the lifetimes of any of these investigations or reviews we will act. We will not wait for a final report. We will act immediately.

Mental Health Care Adolescent Psychiatric Referrals

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): On the night of March 7, 2006, the RCMP brought an adolescent with a history of depression and suicidal tendencies to the Minnedosa hospital. He was non-compliant with his medications and he was an involuntary patient.

Doctors in Minnedosa are raising red flags to this minister because, after they were told they could not refer this suicidal teen to Brandon for treatment, they were informed they could also not refer him to Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) tell the Minnedosa doctors: Where are they

supposed to send adolescent psychiatric patients if they are told they cannot refer them to either Brandon or Winnipeg for treatment?

* (14:30)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Healthy Living): I thank the member for the question. I can tell you that, in November of 2005, the Youth Inpatient Unit of the Child and Adolescent Treatment Centre in Brandon was closed and did transition into a crisis stabilization unit.

The CATC catchment area does include the RHAs of Brandon, Assiniboine and Parkland and the west part of Central. We know that members from the ARHA met with Minnedosa doctors last week, or March 15, with Dr. Hildahl from Winnipeg to address these concerns. We know that the ARHA will be providing any additional staffing required by doctors when a patient needs to be held overnight. The ARHA is working to resolve this problem, and we want to ensure that patients in all of Manitoba requiring mental health assistance will have that assistance indeed.

Mrs. Rowat: I think the comment from the people who were attending that meeting were calling it double-talk.

On March 10, 2006, the Minnedosa medical centre sent a letter to the ARHA's chief of medical staff outlining their frustration with the lack of support provided for attending physicians when admitting adolescent psychiatric patients. The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has a copy of this letter in which the attending physician states, and I quote, "I am afraid, one of these days, there is going to be a tragedy."

Mr. Speaker, a similar experience occurred in January 2006. This Minister of Health is ignoring the red flags these doctors have raised. How will he ensure that teens get the psychiatric treatment they need when they need it?

Ms. Oswald: I would concur that when a family or an adolescent is undergoing a crisis situation, particularly related with mental health issues, it is a very grave situation, indeed, and parents and families want help. That is why there was a meeting with Dr. Hildahl and that is why assurances have been made that Dr. Hildahl and staff in Winnipeg will help to address these concerns.

We know that the Brandon RHA is actively working to recruit child psychologists, and we also

know that the crisis stabilization unit is, in fact, currently meeting the need to between 90 percent and 95 percent of the situations that are arising. We want to ensure that gets to 100 percent and that patients and families are getting the care they need when they need it.

I know the member opposite talks about double-talk. How about straight talk about work that is being done in Manitoba?

Mrs. Rowat: It is not my words. These are words from physicians who are working in the Westman Region who are feeling the crunch of this government's inability to answer questions and deal with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, this letter, supported and signed by five doctors, goes on to say, and I quote: "If qualified psychiatrists are not willing to take responsibility, how can we? Our other recourse will be not to see adolescent psychiatric patients in emergency if there is no support from psychiatrists."

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) needs to assure the Minnedosa Medical Group and, most importantly, the families of Westman that adolescents in need of psychiatric care will get the services they need. Adolescent psychiatric patients should not have to wait for service or, worse, be turned away.

Mr. Speaker, what steps is the Minister of Health going to take to ensure that there are no more teens at risk who fall through the cracks?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I will reiterate that the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority did meet with Dr. Hildahl who—[interjection] I am not certain, but did the member opposite just call an unqualified doctor? Ghastly, I am sure.

Moving right along, however, Mr. Speaker, they met with Dr. Hildahl, have a plan in place. Furthermore, I can also say that recently our government, in December that is, invested an additional \$6.7 million in mental health and addictions services. We know that early intervention is exactly the way we need to address people with mental health issues.

We hope that, once again, we can get on with the business of debating the budget so we can go forward and ensure that people with mental health issues and all health issues get the care that they need. Thank you.

Government Services Fee Increases

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): This NDP government increased its sneaky, backdoor taxes by \$34 million in this budget.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why would he increase these sneaky, backdoor taxes at a time when he has unprecedented high revenues and he has unprecedented federal transfer payments?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, fees in this budget represent less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the revenues of the budget. Most of them were announced before the budget, for example, park reservation fees. Any other ones were announced in the budget press releases. The member opposite is just inaccurate in his allegations.

Mr. Hawranik: I guess what the minister is saying is he is only sneaky by one-tenth of 1 percent. It is no coincidence that eliminating the ESL costs \$34 million, and the increase in sneaky, backdoor taxes added that same amount to the Treasury, \$34 million. It is the classic move by this NDP government. The NDP giveth, then they taketh away.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why can he not make a tax cut a tax cut? Why can he not keep his hands out of Manitobans' pockets?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member opposite raises what we have done in the budget on taxes, which they are afraid to debate. We have reduced taxes for families in this budget. We have reduced taxes again for small business in this budget. We have reduced the capital tax in this budget. We have reduced taxes for corporations in this budget. We reduced \$34 million on the ESL. That is significant tax relief. The members opposite are afraid to vote against it.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, we are not afraid of debating the budget. What the minister is afraid of is calling a public inquiry. In 2006, in the budget speech, the Finance Minister claims that there is now one less tax in Manitoba. What the Finance Minister forgot to say was that the budget 2006 creates a whole lot more of the taxes we already have, the sneaky, backdoor way by a minister who cannot keep his hands out of Manitobans' pockets.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Why can he not keep his hands out of Manitobans' pockets?

Mr. Selinger: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing the government is doing is putting a rebate cheque into

the hands of farmers for the education tax relief. We do not have to put it in their pockets. We put it right in their hands through the budget, through tax relief, and members opposite seem to be afraid to debate the budget because they know this budget has a lot of benefits for Manitobans, benefits that they do not want to debate.

When it comes to a public inquiry, Mr. Speaker, that is why we have everybody in this House to debate the budget. They are afraid to do it.

Education Taxes Impact on Property Taxes

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, this government, this Minister of Finance and everyone over there likes to crow about their so-called education tax relief for Manitoba property owners. Yet, they may want to listen to the rest of it. Today, the real numbers have been released on education taxes and, go figure, in the typical NDP way the taxes have risen for residential property taxpayers and property owners in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, why did this Minister of Education allow for a \$2-million increase in education taxes for property owners in the city of Winnipeg?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Well, where do we start, Mr. Speaker? You know, in 1990 to 1999, we saw increases of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind all honourable members that the clock is ticking and decorum is very important in this House.

* (14:40)

Mr. Bjornson: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, in 1990 to 1999, the increase in property taxes in Winnipeg for school division taxes was 58.7 percent. Now, under our administration, with the efforts that we have made by increasing the property tax credit, by increasing the seniors' tax credit for education, the taxes have actually gone down net by 13.5 percent.

We are a government that has eliminated one of two taxes on property for education. We are a government that has exceeded our contribution to education funding at the rate of economic growth promised, of 16.5 percent; we have increased it by 20.1 percent. We are a government who has promised to cut property taxes for farmers by 20

percent, but we have gone beyond at 60 percent. Members opposite should debate that budget, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, talk about avoiding debate on the budget. I ask a budget question and he goes back and rattles off something that happened in the 1990s. What is this?

What this government does not seem to understand is that there is one taxpayer in Manitoba. To try and claim that they are decreasing education property taxes in the city of Winnipeg is both irresponsible and borderline unethical.

What steps did this Minister of Education take to ensure that property owners, many of whom are young families, what steps did he take to ensure these families would actually see the tax relief this government promised and that they deserve?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, clearly our actions have spoken very loudly compared to the words and the rhetoric of members opposite. What members opposite need to understand is that to have a robust education system, first of all, you have to fund that education system. Members opposite, in the previous five years when they were in government, increased funding to education, net \$1.6 million for the entire education system. Our increased funding to the education system is \$155 million more, 100 times the investment in our children that members were prepared to make. The only thing that went up significantly in education lines were the increases in property taxes under members opposite.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, either this Minister of Education does not understand the real numbers or he is avoiding telling the truth to many property owners in the city of Winnipeg. Either way it is unbecoming of a Minister of Education.

Why did this Minister of Education turn his back on Manitoba families forcing them to pay higher education taxes while leaving them with the false pretence that they were to expect tax relief on their property tax bills? What did this minister do other than increase taxes?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before recognizing the honourable member, I want to remind all honourable members in the House that each and every member in here is an honourable member and I would pick my words very carefully.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the honourable member that we increased the property tax credit from \$250 to \$325 and, then again, to \$400 in property tax credit transparency now, where it is clearly indicated on the tax bill that this is an education property tax credit from the Province of Manitoba.

Increasing the tax credit for seniors, reducing the portioning on farmland saving farmers \$7 million and increasing the farm tax rebate from 20 percent to 60 percent; clearly our commitment to funding education at the rate of economic growth, and exceeding that commitment, providing meaningful tax relief for property owners, and exceeding that commitment, has spoken volumes to our commitment to education.

Members opposite—

An Honourable Member: Back to the 1990's, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Mr. Bjornson: Oh, now, you know, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: I am reminded once again, Mr. Speaker, why members opposite wanted to take history out of the curriculum as a compulsory subject.

Crocus Investment Fund Superfund Concepts

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that taxes are up and education is underfunded.

In November of 2002, there was a meeting between the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the former CEO of Crocus to discuss a superfund concept to invest public pension funds and funds from Crown corporations. The Premier and the Minister of Industry have both stated that this concept was rejected. Was the minister able, the Minister of Industry, to explain why this was rejected?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, as you might know, under the Conservative government, there were also proposals by different organizations to create a superfund where all pension and different organizations would go together to create this superfund.

The previous government, the Conservative government, did not act. They did not act because it did not make sense in that case. In our case, we also were asked by the Crocus management whether we would set up this huge superfund for pensions to all invest. We did not move forward. It did not make sense economically and that is why we did not move forward.

Mr. Cummings: Well, in 2004, when the Compensation Board, the Teachers' Retirement Fund and the Province were all co-investing with Crocus, the Minister of Industry appears to have been plotting to take money out of the Civil Service Superannuation Fund.

Mr. Speaker, clearly he knew that the Crocus Fund was in trouble at that time. Was he planning to bail it out using the pensions of government employees?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I know it is getting near Easter but he cannot keep on saying he sees the Easter Bunny everywhere. There was no Easter Bunny. This is a figment of your imagination, sir. There was no movement to a superfund. There was no group plan but what there was, was each fund, the TRAF, superannuation, all the pension funds and all the different companies decided to do their own due diligence to make investments.

We do not control their investments. We do not tell them where to put their money. What we do is on the MIOP program, we do our own due diligence and, as I have said before, we do good due diligence. We do not lose \$39 million like the Tories did.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, this minister is the opposition's best dream. The NDP government have their fingerprints all over the Crocus Fund and the scandal that has risen around it. It was desperate to keep Crocus afloat, so it coerced the WCB, TRAF, civil service pension funds. Desperate measures by a desperate government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cummings: So, again I ask, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cummings: I would like to ask that group of giggling ministers over there: Was it their intent to prop up Crocus by using the Superannuation Fund?

Mr. Rondeau: Once again there was no movement to create a superfund. Once again, Mr. Speaker, what happened was under the Conservative government there were requests from Crocus, I understand, to create a superfund. Under our government there was discussion about Crocus wanting to create a superfund. There was no superfund. There was no movement to create a superfund, so that did not take place. As far as political interference, we appointed civil servants to the Crocus board. You wonder whether Michael Bessey, Robert Swain and John Meldrum were independent civil servants.

Child Welfare System Judicial Investigation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the killing of 31 children in care or shortly after they left care calls for the strongest possible response, a full judicial investigation. Yesterday, the minister tried to imply that her press release contained the full terms of reference for her reviews, yet the press release does not even mention the 31 children.

Will the cases of all 31 children be covered by her reviews? Why does the minister not do what is really needed and call a full judicial investigation into the 31 deaths?

* (14:50)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the section 4 review of being inclusive of the case that we have all been so very concerned about over the last while. As well, I have asked the reviewers to look back over the last two years to see if there is anything that we can learn from that.

I do find it very unfortunate that the Member for River Heights would be so denigrating of the professionals whom we have asked to work this very difficult issue. He did go so far, as I believe, referring to them as "minions," and I think this is not respectful of the serious nature of what happened.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights, on a point of order?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. The minister is deliberately distorting what I said. I have the greatest of respect for the people who are trying so hard, working in the Child and Family Services system when she cannot even meet the kinds of standards that need to be met and be responsible for what she needs to be doing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I did use the word "minions," but it was referred—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. A point of order is to draw attention to the Speaker a breach of a rule or a departure from our practices and not to be used for debate. I ask the honourable member to get to his point of order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I refer specifically to a number of party hacks who have been put in inappropriate positions and one of the reasons we are not getting the kind of government we should have.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite was trying to extract himself from the words which are on the record, I think he just made the case that the minister just made out. He just made the case worse.

He seems to be denigrating way beyond his initial words the hard work of people involved in the child welfare system. I also would again ask him to reconsider describing the loss of our children as "brutal murders and killings of 31 children." He wants to go over the top for attention; he is doing that. But the attention, I guarantee him, will not be positive.

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, we have reached a low level in this Chamber. This government and this minister are in such chaos within their departments that all they can do now is twist the facts when they are put on the table.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) made it very clear as to who the minions were. He explained that just now, but the minister cannot answer the question so she begins to twist and

distort the truth like she has been doing with regard to children who are losing their lives in this province. This has to stop.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to once again remind all honourable members that points of order are to be for a departure of our rules or a departure of our practices. Points of order should not be used for the purposes of debate.

The honourable member does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable minister, to continue.

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, the quote is from the Member for River Heights from March 21, 2006: ". . . arbitrary power of people within Child and Family Services and no protection from the arbitrary power of this government, its agencies and its minions." I think the meaning is very clear.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. We have 31 children who have been killed in care or shortly after leaving care in the last six years. The numbers are horrific.

The minister has said her acceptable standard for CFS workers is 28 cases per worker, but we hear repeatedly of Child and Family Services workers having far more cases than this. I ask why CFS workers have not been meeting her standard. Why is this minister so poor in actually adhering to her own standards? When will this minister do what is really needed and call a full judicial investigation into the 31 children?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the Member for River Heights has actually fully read the press release on the external review, but part of that external review will deal with caseloads per workers. I can assure the House that this government respects the people who will be doing that hard work. We will make public those recommendations and we will take them very seriously, unlike members opposite collectively.

Mr. Gerrard: Why have you not met the standards which you, in fact, had recommendations about for years and years? Mr. Speaker, the 31 children, the minister has appointed the Child Advocate to have a central role in the reviews, yet concerns over some of these children may have already been raised directly with the Child Advocate, putting her in a conflict of interest because she will be reviewing decisions that she made.

I ask the minister: Why did she put the Child Advocate in such a conflict of interest position? When will the minister do what is really needed and call a full judicial investigation into the 31 cases?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to remind all honourable members when putting a question or giving an answer, please do it through the Chair.

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Children's Advocate most eloquently answered this herself on CJOB yesterday morning. "The Children's Advocate is an office that is an independent office. One thing I do want to make clear is that I am not a representative of the Child and Family Services system. Our office is an independent office that was appointed as part of the recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry to have an independent body that would be able to review the matters being dealt with by the child welfare system and that it would do it through the perspective of the child, that it would be the voice of those children who cannot speak on their behalf."

Again, Mr. Speaker, the current Children's Advocate is a professional social worker. She has cared for many foster children as well as her own children. We believe she is an independent person who will be able to help us find the answers that this government so wants to find so we can make improvements on behalf of the children in care.

Eye Surgery Wait List Reduction

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): The Government of Manitoba and the Minister of Health have been working hard and have taken proactive steps to reduce wait lists in most areas of health care.

Now, can the minister inform the House what efforts have been made recently to address the concerns of those who are facing the quality of life issues surrounding eye surgeries in Manitoba?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): We do almost 10,000 cataract surgeries a year now and the Centre of Excellence at Misericordia hospital has been recognized nationally as a centre that provides the optimum quality of patient care, tracks cases carefully, and by having all of those surgeries done there we now have a Centre of Excellence so that patient safety, professional skill and the needs of Manitobans are being very well met.

* (15:00)

Through that Centre of Excellence, we are expanding our cataract surgery at the Pan Am Clinic, almost doubling the volume that we are going to do there next year from 950 to approximately 1,850 cases. This will help us bring our waiting list down, like we have brought down our pediatric dental waiting list by over 60 percent from over a year to under four months.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CPR Station Preservation (Minnedosa)

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House about both the movement to save an important part of rural Manitoba heritage and the group of people behind the effort to restore and save this historic building.

The movement to save the Minnedosa CPR Station is truly a testament to the community spirit in Minnedosa. Minnedosa has had a long history of involvement in railroading and the most viable symbol of this is the CPR Station that has unfortunately fallen into disarray in recent years.

The railroad opened up western Canada in the time following Confederation and these small-town stations are a testament to the hardworking people who settled in rural Manitoba to start a new life in Canada. As I mentioned, a movement is underway to save the station, and I am very pleased to share some background on this effort to save a piece of Minnedosa history.

The Save Our Station committee has recently accepted ownership of the station from CPR in an effort to restore and preserve it. This is truly a wonderful initiative for the community to undertake, and what is even more amazing, is that all of the labour and funding for this project came through volunteerism and donations. This is truly a community effort, and the community has taken it upon themselves to make sure that the CPR Station remains an important symbol in Minnedosa for future generations.

As I mentioned, the funding for this project is through donations and volunteer work, and I would particularly like to thank the support of the Legion Ladies Auxiliary, Lions, Kinettes and Rotary, as well as the many corporate contributions that have helped to see this initiative succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of the Save Our Station committee and thank them for undertaking to save this piece of our railroad history. I wish them the best of luck in their efforts and look forward to seeing the Minnedosa CPR Station restored and maintained well into the future. Thank you.

Sisler Spartans

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Sisler Spartans boys' basketball team who won the AAAA provincial high school basketball championships. In front of over 2,000 fans, the team faced a strong challenger in MBCI and suffered a setback when one of their leading players was injured early in the second half. However, they did not relent, and when the bells sounded, they became provincial champions, winning 81 to 71.

Defeating teams from all over Manitoba on their way to the final, this victory is especially sweet for Sisler as it is their first boys' championship win in 33 years. Led by Kurtis Sansregret, their top scorer, the team showed exceptional depth when he was injured midway through the final. Guard Eric Garcia immediately stepped in, scored a game-high 26 points and helped hold off a final charge by their opponents.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of the House, I would like to congratulate all members of the 2006 Sisler provincial champions who all played an excellent game. They are: Eric Garcia, Kevin Tipan, Jan Soriano, Shaun Reyes, Josh Olaes, Ferosh Tailor, Nathan Habte, B.J. Popovitch, Kurtis Sansregret, Brad Bullard, Eric Guieb, Abraham Daniels, Myles Posthumus, Jonar Huertas, Justin Sadua and Travis Hrabarchak.

I would also like to congratulate their coach, Scott Martin, whose leadership throughout the season helped guide this team to a provincial championship. Congratulations must also be made to the parents and teachers who helped organize the tournament.

Already nationally recognized for their academic depth, the Sisler Spartans continue to demonstrate the strength of their basketball and sports teams. Go Spartans.

Education Taxes

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that we are in the presence of a

government right now that likes to stand up and crow about what they say, that they are actually cutting taxes, education taxes in Manitoba. I think what is really unfortunate is that they are not willing to stand up and tell Manitobans that they told them that under false pretence. They may have eliminated the education support levy, but other education taxes have gone up and they have gone up in a net way of over \$2 million.

So I would encourage this government to come forward and tell the truth when it comes to education taxes in this province and indeed in the city of Winnipeg and understand that education is in the responsibility of the provincial government. They are responsible for all taxations when it has to do with education taxes. I think it is unfortunate that time and time again this government likes to get up and crow about the tax cuts that they have provided Manitobans, the tax relief, Mr. Speaker. But it is wrong. They are filled with backdoor taxes that they are giving Manitobans. It is under false pretences that they are telling Manitobans that they are actually cutting their taxes.

So I felt that it would be prudent for me to stand on the record and put a few words on the facts of what is taking place when it comes to taxation in Manitoba. I think it is unfortunate that this government likes to provide false hope to Manitobans. What we will do, Mr. Speaker, is we will hold them accountable for what is actually taking place out there, the fact that they are increasing taxes for Manitobans. It is unacceptable and it must stop. Thank you very much.

Volunteer Recognition Month

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to inform all members that April is Volunteer Recognition Month worldwide. As we make the transition from winter to spring it is important to recognize and celebrate the contributions that are made each day by countless volunteers across the province. These donations of time, talent and energy on the part of volunteers are the strength of our community and something for which we should be truly grateful.

Mr. Speaker, our province would be a much poorer place without volunteers. Most volunteer hours in Manitoba are given to activities in the arts, culture and recreation. We need only think of events like the Fringe Festival, the Folk Festival, the Corn and Apple Festival, the Sunflower Festival, the Pioneer Days in Steinbach, Winkler Harvest Festival,

Folklorama, Festival du Voyageur and Trappers' Festival to imagine how much poorer a province would be without the countless hours donated each year by thousands of volunteers province-wide.

The contributions made by Manitoba volunteers go well beyond the activities in the arts, culture and recreation. Volunteers put millions of hours each year into our churches, charitable organizations, schools, neighbourhoods, associations, boards and committees. All members are well aware of the invaluable contribution that volunteers make to our political parties and political campaigns. In large part we owe the strength of our democracy to volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of the Legislature I would like to thank the thousands of volunteers across Manitoba for their invaluable contribution of time, talent and energy. Their efforts are an inspiration to all Manitobans. I hope that their example will encourage others to become volunteers and get involved in making Manitoba a great place to live. Thank you.

Phoenix Sinclair

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the horrific death of Phoenix Sinclair has deeply saddened and troubled all of us. The death of 30 other children in care or shortly after leaving care over the last six years is also very, very sad. I would like to take the next minute of my member's statement as a minute of silence in memory of Phoenix Sinclair and the 30 other children. I would ask all members to rise and take a moment of silence with me in memory of Phoenix Sinclair and the other children.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to rise for a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

We will rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

* (15:10)

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) has been asked to bring forward legislation again to incorporate, as a private bill, the association of former MLAs. They advertised and now, given that the bill did not go forward last time, by leave, I would ask that Rules 157(1) and (3), regarding the requirements for

publishing a notice of application for a private bill and the proof of publication, be waived for the association of former MLAs.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for publishing notice of application for a private bill and the proof of publication be waived for the association of former Manitoba MLAs? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I understand there is agreement, and this is the third and final day that I can interrupt the budget debate for other matters in the budget and, therefore, under 32(5), this is to request that we deal with Interim Supply today. Would you please call Supply?

Mr. Speaker: The House will resolve into Committee of Supply to consider resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Chairperson's Ruling

Mr. Chairperson: Before we start the proceedings, this is a ruling for the Deputy Speaker on a point of order raised by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) on Interim Supply on March 21, 2006.

During consideration of Interim Supply on March 21, 2006, a point of order was raised by the honourable Member for Inkster regarding the recognition by the Chair of the honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) to answer a question that had been addressed by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) just prior to the Committee of Supply rising on Monday, March 20. The honourable Member for Inkster suggested this was a deviation from our usual practice.

Page 1324 of Hansard from March 20 indicates that the honourable Member for Ste. Rose posed a question to the honourable Member for Industry, Economic Development and Mines on the subject of political authority of the Province and the leadership of the Crocus Fund. The honourable Member for Ste. Rose posed his question and said, "The Chairman is signalling an end, so we will carry forward." The committee then rose.

At the start of the Committee of Supply on Tuesday, March 21, I, as the Chairperson, identified that a question had been posed by the honourable

Member for Ste. Rose. As it turns out, the honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines was not available to provide an answer, but, when the minister was available later on, he sought the floor in order to provide an answer to the Member for Ste. Rose.

This is something that is not a deviation from usual practice. However, I respect the fact that members were having concerns on both sides of the House about certain ministers being listed for answering questions. As I identified yesterday, when dealing with Interim Supply, there are no official procedures for the listing and calling of ministers for questions.

Keeping this in mind and keeping in mind that there were some concerns raised by several members that ministers should only provide answers from a previous day at the start of the Committee of Supply, I would agree with the suggestion of the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) that this is an issue that the House leaders may wish to discuss in order to try to reach a consensus or common understanding for future practice. Thank you.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The committee has been considering the resolution respecting operating procedure. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I would like to, in regard to the hearings, the public hearings or so-called public hearings that have just been held by the Ministry of Water Stewardship across this province—and I believe there have been actually nine meetings called. One was an extension of the Steinbach meeting where not all the people could enter the hall that was provided for the meeting. I believe there were some 250 people at the first meeting and a hundred-some-odd that attended the extension of it the following Monday.

I would want to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship whether he can tell this House whether there has been an analogy done by his department or others in government as to what the total cost might be to the implementation of the legislation and the regulations, the draft regulations that were proposed at the hearings, and whether he has done any consideration as to the effect those regulations would have if applied as they were drafted.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): I am certainly pleased to answer questions in this House on the consultations that have been taking

place, the second round of consultations in regard to the proposed regulations under The Water Protection Act. I remind the Member for Emerson that, when we unanimously passed The Water Protection Act, one of the key elements in the act was the establishment of water quality management zones. We were very up front about that. That is indeed the subject of the draft regulations, and also the fact that we also included in the act a requirement for consultation. In fact, not only have we consulted once on this, we are going through a second round of consultations.

* (15:20)

I think that is important because the water quality management zones are indeed an integral part of The Water Protection Act, which is an integral part of our strategy to protect Manitoba's water quality. I would point out that protecting Manitoba's water quality is critical not only in an environmental sense, but also to sustainability in terms of the economy. In fact, we believe that, through going through this consultation process and establishing appropriate water quality management zones, we will not only have improved water quality, but we will be able to ensure the sustainability of economic activities in the future.

So I believe that, notwithstanding some of the comments that the member opposite has put on the public record, certainly in newspapers throughout rural Manitoba and a letter of identical wording that was also signed by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), we take seriously the consultations.

Quite frankly, we reject the premise that was probably best put forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) yesterday. Some of the alarmist type of comments that we saw from the Leader of the Opposition yesterday do not reflect the reality that under this government, Mr. Chairperson, we have seen a significant diversification of agriculture.

We have done this, Mr. Chairperson, at the same time that we did bring in improved protection for the environment. We have established new regulations, particularly dealing with livestock that have reduced the number of animal units that are covered by the various aspects of manure and mortality regulation. At the same time, there has been an increase of the livestock industry in this province by over 70 percent over the last number of years.

So, indeed, it is a false premise for the member to suggest, as he has, that somehow by taking the

time, as we are, to do it right in terms of the water quality management zones by protecting Manitoba's water, there is anything other than ensuring sustainability of agricultural activity, of industrial activity, of human settlement.

I mean, the bottom line, Mr. Chairperson, is that this is all about sustainability, and we believe by the approach that we are following here this will have benefits for Manitoba environmentally and economically in the future because it will ensure the sustainability of a wide variety of economic activities.

So we certainly reject the premise. I do want to indicate I am disappointed at the degree to which members opposite have escalated the rhetoric. I wish at some point in time they would recognize that we have consultations for a reason, and that is that we do believe it is important to take the time to go through this process to listen to people throughout Manitoba.

We have been getting a lot of feedback, and I think, Mr. Chairperson, that is good. That is why I have always said, we have always said as a government that we believe that our approach has to be based on full engagement of Manitobans.

We have already seen with The Water Protection Act some significant advances, particularly in terms of municipal wastewater treatment, the licensing required by the City of Winnipeg. We are seeing in the farm sector that many producers are already part of the solution, and we see the water quality management zones as an extension of that, Mr. Chairperson.

So it is not a question of the kind of rhetoric we heard yesterday or the rhetoric we have heard from the member opposite in terms of the farm community or any other community. In this particular case, we have indicated we will listen to the comments.

I would like to remind the member that he was part of this. We also brought in provisions for transition elements, so there are all sorts of case-by-case abilities to deal with the situation. We have also indicated that we will be looking at incentives as well. There is an ALUS pilot project that is designated for Manitoba.

We have already seen the Riparian Tax Credit. We have indicated in this budget, and I hope we will debate it soon, Mr. Chairperson, that there will be further incentives to deal with that. In fact, the budget also includes additional provisions for drainage which, again, is part of the overall solution

in terms of water management issues, clean water quality management issues. So we believe that our approach is the right one. One, to protect Manitoba's border, but, No. 2, to listen to Manitobans, to consult with Manitobans. That is what we are doing right now, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, there is no question that all Manitobans, including and, I would say, maybe above all the agricultural community in this province, respect the efforts made not only by government and others to ensure that there will be clean water. There is nobody, nobody that is more dependent on a good supply of ongoing clean water than the farm community and rural communities in this province of Manitoba. If it were not for the agriculture community being able to be the base supplier of the food products in this nation, this nation would be in dire straits, and we all know that. The agricultural community depends on clean water. For that reason, the agricultural community, over the last 30 years, has made massive changes that have cost them millions and hundreds of millions of dollars, probably even billions of dollars. They changed the equipment that they use. They changed the tillage practices they use. They even changed the harvest practices they use to ensure that the very land that they operate on will be protected.

I remember well in 1988, when I was first elected, the first year I was elected, the huge dust storms that we saw, and that was after 12 years of NDP government doing nothing. And what do we see? Dust storms that filled ditches and filled rivers and streams, and this government sat there and did absolutely nothing to ensure that the agriculture community would be given some kind of support to make the changes that they themselves were driving at.

However, 20 years later, Mr. Chairperson, that very community, again without any meaningful government support, has made those massive changes. It is interesting to note that this minister has constantly used the Red River as an example of nutrient loading and nutrient contribution to Lake Winnipeg. Yet, when I look at the photos that this minister—and some of the farmers out there at these public meetings were saying this minister is making policy from 30,000 feet up. Well, when you look at the photos that the minister and his staff have constantly used at some of these meetings, you know how these photos have been computer-enhanced to show the green and the blue and/or colour them green and blue. However, what is most interesting is

that the Red River enters Lake Winnipeg at the very south end of the lake. When you look at his even colour-enhanced photos that they have used to show at these meetings, you would note that the south basin of the lake is virtually algae-free. Why would that be if the Red River was the main contributor?

Secondly, there are 22 years of testing that have been done according to a publication that the minister's own department put out in 2001. That publication clearly shows the Red River from south of Fargo to Emerson has seen a very slight increase of nutrient level enhancement, but, from Emerson to Winnipeg, there has been a slight decrease in the contribution to nutrient loading in the Red River. It is interesting to note that the Pembina River, which the minister's staff have talked about as having higher levels of nutrient loading, the Rat River, the Roseau River, the La Salle River—I should remind the minister that the La Salle River, which his department loves to use as an example of increased nutrient loading, the La Salle River—I understand that the Aboriginal word for La Salle, or the meaning of that word with only one "l" means "stinking river." In other words, this river has been highly loaded with nutrient material for ever and a day, as long as the Aboriginal community can remember, and they were here much sooner than the minister or I were.

*(15:30)

But I want to say that, even though those rivers flow into the Red River from Emerson to Winnipeg, the nutrient loading is down slightly. The reason I want to mention this, I want to say to the minister that the agricultural community has done more to decrease the nutrient loading over the last 20 and 30 years than any other sector in society, I believe, has. If the minister would take that into consideration, I think he would not have brought the kinds of regulations to the legislation that he has pointed clearly at only the farm community as being the culprit that is polluting our rivers and lakes and our streams. I heard again this morning some reference to the regulations that had been presented.

Well, Mr. Chairperson, I say to you this, that if all members of society and if the minister would have given some credence and some credibility to the farm community that he so ruthlessly is attacking now with his regulations, and that is why I asked the first question: Can the minister tell this House what the cost to the province is going to be, what the cost to the farm community, again, is going to be to meet those enhanced requirements? Some of the farmers at

the meetings, and it would have behooved you, and you would have thought that the minister would have at least shown up at one of those hearings, but nowhere was the minister to be seen. I think that was a precedent, that he, wanting to take credit for changing the way the farm community has to do business in this province, and then portraying that as his efforts to change the nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg, I think, is somewhat presumptuous of the minister.

I have been told by some people who have done the analysis that there are some municipalities that will lose up to 50 percent of their farmers in their municipalities if the current regulations are enacted. I have also been told that there is specifically one municipality that might lose as many as 77 percent of their livestock producers in their municipality. I ask this minister: What action is he going to take, what action is this government going to take, to compensate those farmers properly, as Ontario and other provinces are doing, to meet the requirements of his regulations?

Mr. Ashton: First of all, I do not take any lectures from the Member for Emerson when it comes to science related, to water quality issues because the Member for Emerson has, right from day one, denied that there is a problem, Mr. Chairperson, has come up with all sorts of fanciful explanations not supported by science. But, again, the same Member for Emerson was the same member who questioned climate change, global warming, and I do not know what he is going to be arguing after this past winter. I believe we have had an increase in average temperatures of five degrees.

His comments on Lake Winnipeg, quite frankly, I think, are, well, I am being careful here because I know the member is a member of the Legislature, but I think does a disservice to any of the discussion or debate that is being put forward, and I respect those who put forward arguments. By the way, I have met throughout the province on The Water Protection Act. We have had several rounds of consultations, and we have made sure that the scientific experts are there to answer very good questions that are being raised by producers, by municipal officials and by citizens. *[interjection]*

Well, the member says he had no answers. Mr. Chairperson, we know the Member for Emerson has all the answers. I am sure he has ordered one of those Ph.D.s that Linda West managed to get, mail-order Ph.D.s. I just hope it is on registry of degrees that the

Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) is considering under Bill 29, The Degree Granting Act.

But, you know, I have had some interesting comments, too, from my staff in my office, from people who have been at the meetings where the Member for Emerson has been ranting and raving at the microphone when producers, when municipal officials, when private citizens have been wanting to ask questions, that put forward legitimate concerns about the draft regulations.

Now, I just want to deal with some of the fearmongering from the Member for Emerson. Let us talk about some of the concerns that are out there. Zone 4s that are being proposed by the regulation. Now, what are Zone 4s? They do actually prohibit certain activities, Mr. Chairperson. But let us deal with what Zone 4s are: sand dunes, swamps, areas in close proximity to rivers. Now, I suppose the member opposite thinks that these zones are zones that should be put into active use, agricultural use, certainly, any kind of water quality planning. Now, if the member wants to put on the record where we should be putting fertilizer, on sand dunes, I think he should put that on the record because that is what he is proposing.

I note that the co-operation between the Liberals and the Tories in the Legislature on the budget has extended to the water quality management zones. I quote from a recent article in the *Neepawa Banner* in which the Leader of the Liberal Party has expressed grave concerns about the proposed regulations attached to The Water Protection Act. He says this act to set up the system is too bureaucratic, too inexpensive and not all that effective.

So, Mr. Chairperson, we have both the Liberals and the Conservatives who, after they voted for a bill that brought in water quality management zones, are now saying that they do not agree with water quality management zones. It is a sort of a typical Liberal response here. They do not agree with how it is being done. Well, I think we are seeing with the comments from the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) today that the vote for The Water Protection Act was a hollow vote because I have seen where the Member for Emerson is now questioning the whole concept of water quality management zones.

Let it be clear, Mr. Chairperson, that this is only one element of our approach in terms of water quality. He can run around like Chicken Little suggesting that the sky is falling all he wants. But that is not the case. In fact, the water quality

management zones are based on the clear and evident fact that, if we are going to deal with nutrient overload, we need to have regulations for all activities. I particularly think it is offensive for members of the opposition to suggest, and I have seen these kinds of comments, that somehow only agriculture is going to be part of the solution, when, right here in the city of Winnipeg, we have licensed, not the members opposite who ignored this for 10 years, the wastewater system, the first licence is in place. What does it require? Wastewater treatment that removes nutrients.

In fact, the biggest single source, and I say that at every public meeting, of nutrients in Lake Winnipeg is the city of Winnipeg. It is going to go from being a 6 percent source down to 2 percent.

I can say to members opposite, and particularly to the Member for Emerson, that their agenda is very clear: they are only interested in very short-term politicization of this. That is fine because I think most Manitobans, including most rural Manitobans, including most producers, have been saying very clearly that what they want is to make sure we have a system that works, that we listen in terms of regulations, which we will do. They want to make sure, Mr. Chairperson, that we do have incentive programs. I mentioned we already had incentive programs that were put in place. I make no apologies, this government makes no apologies for protecting Manitoba's waters.

It is ironic, Mr. Chairperson, that we recently had World Water Day. I would have expected a question on some of the water issues we are dealing with. Instead, we see the real agenda here.

They voted for The Water Protection Act, but, in reality, they oppose the fundamental premise of it, is that we do need combination approaches including regulations.

I want to say, again, that this is critical to the future of all economic and all human settlement activities in this province. It is important to industry. It is important to municipalities. It is important to agriculture. It is a false premise because no one I have talked to has said that there is any reason—and, by the way, I talked to many people throughout the province. I held meetings throughout the province when the Member for Emerson was nowhere to be found in terms of water protection, when he did not even know which way he was going to vote, Mr. Chairperson, because I know they had some disagreement on that internally.

* (15:40)

But the reality is either you are for protecting our water in this province and for water quality management zones or you are against it. I reject the premise that is being put forward, the fearmongering from the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), the fearmongering from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), the kinds of statements that have been put out in the media. They do not reflect the reality of this province, that Manitobans know we cannot improve water quality in this province unless we change the way we do things.

There is a legitimate debate over any and all of the regulations there. We listened after round one. We will listen after round two, but we will listen to the reasoned and legitimate concerns put forward by Manitoba citizens, not the really low-level political approach taken by members opposite. It is very clear, Mr. Chairperson, that if they were ever elected to government again they would do exactly what they did in that decade they do not like to talk about, the 1990s.

In the 1990s they did nothing in terms of water quality. They cut the budget in terms of water by 33 percent. They cut drainage. They cut water quality testing. They did not license the city of Winnipeg. They did not even have Clean Environment Commission hearings. They came out with a substandard licence. As a result, they did not have public hearings on the Maple Leaf process.

This government believes in protecting Manitoba's water quality, and, Mr. Chairperson, we will stand firm against any and all of the kind of fearmongering from members opposite.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, I just want to remind the minister that during the nine meetings that were held in the province of Manitoba nary a minister was seen, any one of them. I believe, if I am correct, and I stand corrected on this one, but I do not believe that there was one member of the government side of the legislation that attended any of these meetings. *[interjection]* The honourable minister of highways says he attended one of the meetings, and I congratulate him for that because he will have heard the farm community indicate their concerns at these meetings. There were many, many that were voiced about the ability to meet the standards that the minister was setting.

We are not opposed to clean water. We support clean water. The farm community has done, as I said

before, a yeoman's job of making the changes that are protecting the water and the soil in this province. The minister has not yet recognized that. I would invite the minister to come join me and this spring we will do a tour of Manitoba. I will show him how the business of farming has changed immensely over the last couple of decades. I think that is to the credit of our farmers and the farm community.

We made sure, Mr. Chairperson, that The Water Protection Act would include a clause that said there must be scientific evidence demonstrated before action is taken to make changes, for two reasons: No. 1, if it was clearly demonstrated that the soil nutrient levels were balanced and should be maintained to grow good crops and to cause good soil husbandry. We wanted science to show that and demonstrate that. We wanted to ensure that the balances of nutrient levels in our rivers and our lakes and our streams were maintained at such levels that they would cause a good aquatic mosaic and balance in the lakes and rivers and streams to cause our fisheries to be enhanced and grow.

We believe that that scientific evidence must be demonstrated before action is taken and before the kind of regulation that the minister is proposing be imposed upon the very industry that makes its living off of our land and through good balanced adequate water application to their soil to grow those crops and indeed for good standards of water quality to be utilized and maintained on those farms that grow livestock. That livestock depends on good clean water.

So I say to the minister, be careful not to break your own act with your regulations because you will be called to task. We will hold you to the fact that you accepted the eight amendments that we proposed to your act and you accepted the scientific amendment that we made to your act. We ask you, Mr. Minister, to abide by the act as it is written.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Chairperson, let us deal with the fundamental flaw in the so-called logic of the member opposite because, again, I think it is irresponsible for someone that is in his position as critic for anything as important as the water quality issues in this province to suggest as he has that there is not a scientific base, for, in this particular case, moving ahead with water quality management zones for nutrient control. Let us deal with it.

First of all, there is clear evidence in Manitoba that the loading of nitrates and phosphorus into our water systems has steadily increased over 30 years.

The only person, Mr. Chairperson, that I have seen put forward the suggestion that that is not the case is the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner). These are responsible for problems in drinking water systems, massive algae blooms, beach closures, fish kills and many other issues. For the member to dismiss the fact that the La Salle River, there has been 150 percent increase in nutrients, suggests that has always been the case is, again, to misread the fact that we have seen an significant increase, not just in Lake Winnipeg, but in the La Salle River and in the lakes and rivers and streams throughout Manitoba. That is the clear scientific evidence.

Second of all, it is by scientific study that the sources of these nutrients have been identified. They have shown that there is not one single source responsible. Mr. Chairperson, these sources include municipal, industrial, agricultural and individual activities, and that has been made clear, everything from the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board report through every single one of our documents. At no time has anyone suggested that there is one single source or even one major source. The biggest single source, by the way, the single point source is the city of Winnipeg at 6 percent in terms of Lake Winnipeg nutrients. So the bottom line here is we have a series of contributing factors, and that is what is behind the approach.

Third, scientific studies unquestionably demonstrated that we do not have an infinite ability to retain nutrients such as phosphorus. That is why I say, Mr. Chairperson, it is absolutely common sense, I think, to anyone that you do have zones which are protected. By the way, that is approximately 16 percent of rural Manitoba, things like sand dunes, areas like swamps. If the member is suggesting that we should be spreading nutrients on sand dunes and swamps, let him put forward his suggestion that that is appropriate because I do not think I have heard anyone, other than the Member for Emerson, question that. I think it is very clear: you look at the studies that have been done, it dispels the myth that phosphorus remains in the soil indefinitely. We know that is not the case. The studies have demonstrated that increasing amounts are released, whether it be in terms of throughout the year or during the run-off period.

We also, Mr. Chairperson, have had significant improvements in modern day soil science. It has perfected our ability to determine appropriate levels of fertilizer application, taken into account soil tests, expected crops to be grown and reasonably estimated

yields. So fertilizers are added to the soil in greater amounts than can be utilized; the unused portion is available to leach into our ground water. I mean, that is a clear fact. It is recognized in existing regulations in terms of manure management plans, and that is a very basic principle of the water quality management zones. Again, you have application of nutrients up to the level to which they contribute to crop growth, but not beyond that level in which you end up with problems in terms of water qualities.

It also is a well-established scientific fact that by years of research that some landscapes are more likely to lose nutrients to ground water. I mean, erosion of soil containing phosphorus, accompanied by phosphorus is more likely to occur from steep slopes than flat lands. Nitrate is more likely to leach into ground water through sandy soils than fine, rich topsoils. Mr. Chairperson, these are the scientific facts. These have been validated by study after study. These are the kinds of scientific facts that are leading jurisdictions throughout the world, and some of our neighbouring jurisdictions, to look at strategies in terms of nutrient removal. They are not the be-all and end-all; they are part of the solution. So are incentives. So are actions that deal with municipal wastewater. In fact, we are acting on that.

I want to stress again, Mr. Chairperson, that for the member opposite to suggest that these are not scientifically based, I do not know where he believes he gets his scientific expertise, but we have gone through a five-year process in terms of phosphorus regulations with the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), who has been working on it. The water quality management zones are the result of working with all the best available scientific evidence. The consultations are hearing a wide variety of views and challenges in terms of that.

* (15:50)

But let it be very clear, I always felt members on this side always questioned the degree to which the members opposite, particularly with the kind of leadership as critic from the Member for Emerson, we question whether they were really committed to The Water Protection Act. I think we are seeing by the member's comments today that he is questioning even the concept of water quality management zones themselves and the fact that they are scientifically based.

Well, Mr. Chairperson, we will have to agree to disagree, but I can tell you I trust in the scientists, not just of the Department of Water Stewardship, the

Department of Conservation, the Department of Agriculture, but scientists throughout the world who have been clearly pointing to the fact that we have got to act in terms of nutrient issues; otherwise, we are going to see what we are already seeing in our province and not just on Lake Winnipeg.

Whether it be Lake Winnipeg or the La Salle River or our many lakes, rivers and streams, we have a problem, and we have got to get down to a solution, Mr. Chairperson, which makes sure we are all part of the problem and that we stay away from the kind of exercise we are seeing from the members opposite.

The member may want to try and politicize this issue; that is fair ball, Mr. Chairperson, but, you know what? When we are talking about Manitoba's water quality, I would have expected better from this member, from members of the Conservative Party and, dare I say, members of the Liberal Party who are now questioning something they voted on just months ago when we passed The Water Protection Act.

This party, the New Democratic Party, says one thing and we do the same thing, Mr. Chairperson. We said we would bring in water quality management zones, we will. I want to give this assurance that I have throughout rural Manitoba. I have been throughout rural Manitoba, by the way, many times; I do not need a tour from the member opposite.

I could probably give him a tour of northern Manitoba, though, because I am not sure, Mr. Chairperson, that the member is quite as familiar with northern Manitoba as I am with rural Manitoba, but, you know, I do not need a tour from the member opposite. I also do not need a science lesson from the member opposite because our approach is science-based and our approach is based on listening to Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, I find it very interesting that the minister uses the kind of rhetoric he does because, when I talked to one of the scientists and asked him the question what science is available to date to support the legislation, he said this: We are finding it very difficult to support the political rhetoric with science-based evidence.

I also want to say to the minister that I have yet to find a farmer that is able to farm on sand dunes, because they have not invented a tractor yet that can drive on sand dunes, nor have they invented a

wheeled vehicle that can actually farm through swamp.

So there are no swamps being farmed, there are no sand dunes being fertilized and there would not be a farmer silly enough to accept the rhetoric that the minister has just put on the record because the cost of phosphate and nitrates is such that no farmer could afford to indiscriminately just pour the fertilizer into water or lakes or streams.

So, Mr. Minister, all I am saying to you in closing, and I will turn this over to the honourable critic for Family Services before I quit, but the minister needs to recognize that there are responsible farmers out there. They are more concerned about water than he is because they make their living on the land and using water. That is their living and that is how they raise their families. I think we should let the honourable member ask the question.

Mr. Ashton: I just want to put on the record, Mr. Chairperson, the Member for Emerson just said that I had said that people were farming in Zone 4s. I said that the Zone 4s are sand dunes and swamps, so, by definition, they are not going to affect farming, and that is the point.

The member runs around, Mr. Chairperson, puts letters into the rural media; the member makes comments like he has in this House, scares people through the fearmongering tactics, but, when you have Zone 4s which prohibit activities, and they are already areas where people are not involved in farming and other activities, clearly, that shows the degree to which the water quality management zones are not going to shut down any activity, but are only going to regulate on a scientific basis in areas where there is sensitivity in terms of water.

I say on the record, Mr. Chairperson, and I want to repeat it because the member did not get it, the fact is that Zone 4s and the protective regime that we put in place are based on science. They are also based on common sense. It is not going to shut down the economic activities in rural Manitoba by saying you cannot farm or you cannot have an industrial activity in a sand dune. That is what the regulations say. No one suggested that those activities were taking place, other than maybe the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner).

I could deal with some of the other inaccuracies, but I do know there are other critics and ministers that wish to discuss issues. But I do want to indicate we are committed to the water quality management

zones, and we are committed to taking the time to get them right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): At the weekend meeting of MAST, one of the school trustees said that we do not have enough money for Bill 13 for expanded guaranteed services for special needs students, and that came from a trustee of a school division. At a public meeting the other night, at which the minister and I were both in attendance, a parent there challenged this Minister of Education and said, and I quote: I am glad you bring up the F-word, funding, which is the heart of all of this. It is a disgrace that it is up to the divisions, end quote, to decide the level of services and programming, she said.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education to explain to us what he has asked his department to include in the terms of reference that are being developed right now for a funding review of special education.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Well, presently, those terms of reference are being developed, and they are being developed because of the recommendations that were made in the Special Education Review. The terms of reference are going to look at all facets of how we fund special needs education; that is the intent of the review.

The funding, which has been mentioned a couple times now by the member opposite, yes, I am aware the concerns that have been raised by local school divisions and by parents, and I would like to reiterate that our commitment has been very clear on this issue with respect to the increases that we have made to support special needs. What we need to do is review and ensure that the money that is being provided for the students is being used as effectively as possible to support the students with special needs.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether the funding review that is being done is looking at the current level of funding, or is it actually going to be looking at what actually needs to be funded in order to achieve the guarantee he put forward in his legislation?

Mr. Bjornson: As I mentioned, we are developing those terms of reference around what the review will entail, but it will be looking at a variety of issues around the funding of special needs education.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I am assuming, as this is the Minister of Education who would be providing direction to his department, what is his intent as the minister in advising the department what should be in the terms of reference? That is a minister's role. So is the minister going to ask that, in the terms of reference, they only look at what is currently being spent, or what needs to be spent to achieve the guarantee he has promised?

Mr. Bjornson: By suggesting that we are only looking at what is currently spent would suggest that the funding would remain static. But we have indicated our commitment to provide more resources on an annual basis to appropriate educational programming. It is not just the amount of money that is being spent; it is how it is being spent. And that is what we will be looking at through the review process. I have had consultations, informally so, with some of the stakeholders. They have raised this issue as part of their agendas for a number of different issues that we meet and discuss, and we have taken note of the concerns that they have raised. That will be taken into consideration when we look at the terms of reference and develop those terms of reference.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is on record as saying that he is going to fully fund Bill 13, and, because Bill 13 guarantees appropriate education, I would expect that his terms of reference are going to look at what is needed to fully fund Bill 13. Am I accurate in my assessment of this?

* (16:00)

Mr. Bjornson: Again, the terms of reference are part of the recommendations that were brought forward in the Special Education Review Initiative, the suggestion that we do look at how we fund appropriate educational programming. That is our commitment; it is to take a look at how we have funded it in the past and how we will continue to fund and support it in the future.

Again, we recognize that there is a growing demand, and we recognize that there has been a significant increase in the supports for special needs education. As I said a couple of times now, our increase has resulted in a 36.5 percent increase in support, taking it from \$114 million under the previous administration to 155.6 under ours. In fact, as I said a couple of times now, the last two years alone, categorical increases to special needs education accounted for \$14 million in the last two years.

We are aware of growing needs. What we need to do is take a look at how that money is expended to make sure that it is serving our children appropriately.

Mrs. Driedger: I do not dispute the amount of money that has gone into education. I do indicate to the minister that that is not anything that I am raising concerns about. Certainly, with the amount of extra money coming into this government over the last few years from the federal government and other sources, they have been flowing in money. They have been flooding in money and have had an opportunity to put money into various portfolios, into various ministries, and so they should. They have had more money in their term of government than we could have possibly imagined in the nineties when the federal government was unilaterally taking money back, almost a billion dollars in about a four-year period in the late nineties from the Filmon government.

So, Mr. Chair, I am not disputing the amount of money that is going into special education. We know that the need is there and the government is doing what it needs to be doing, to a degree, to address the issue.

I would like to ask the minister: When does he intend to start and finish this review?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, certainly, our commitment is to consult a number of different stakeholders on developing the terms of reference, and the intent is to do it right. There has been some evolution with respect to how we fund appropriate educational programming, and the system has evolved somewhat. There have been some trials of different models on—what is the word I am looking for?—pilot projects that have been undertaken. So to take a look at the entire system and review how to best resource the programs and the need will take time, and we do want to do this right because there has not been a major overhaul in a significant time frame.

Having said that, again, our commitment is to work with the stakeholders. We worked with 19 different stakeholders in the development of the regulations and in the development of the legislation. I suspect we will be working with the same or similar number of stakeholders when we review how we develop the terms of reference for the funding. So the time line, I would be reluctant to give a final time line. Our commitment is to continue to work with the stakeholders and make sure we do it right.

Mrs. Driedger: I appreciate the complexity of it because I know it is not easy, and I know that there is going to be a lot of work involved in that. I am disappointed that the minister has not got somewhat of a time frame, though, that he can put forward to everybody who is waiting to see what he is going to do in order to provide this guarantee to kids that he is already committed to in his legislation.

Can the minister tell us if it is going to be a review that is going to be done this year or next year, or is there at least some kind of a ballpark? I am sure as the Minister of Education directing the department that he must have some expectations of his department in this area.

Mr. Bjornson: I do expect that the terms of reference will be developed in a timely manner, and I do expect that we will include many of our stakeholders at the table. As I said, the regulations have taken a significant amount of time because of the consultation and the desire by different groups to revisit the regulations. I would hope that this would be done in a timely manner.

Mrs. Driedger: Again, this minister does not seem to have a very good handle on this, as we have seen with other questions we have asked over the past year in terms of his direction of his department. I am a bit surprised that, as the minister, he has not had more clear expectations that he can provide to everybody who is wondering where this is at.

The other part of the legislation he actually put forward, there is a clause in there about a dispute resolution co-ordinator needing to be in place, and the legislation was passed two years ago. I understand that this person is not even in place yet, and the minister indicated the other night at the public meeting that this person will not even be hired till the end of July of this year. This is a little bit disconcerting to me because, again, did he not have his ducks in a row before he put forward this legislation? Why only now? That is a significant piece of that legislation, the dispute resolution component of it. Why has he dragged his heels on having that position filled?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, once again, the process has been a very involved process, and we expect that, speaking again to the development of the regulations, there were 19 different groups that were part of that discussion. We are going to continue to discuss with our stakeholders as we move forward on the funding review.

With respect to the dispute resolution mechanism, this is what really sets apart the legislation from what had been in practice previously, and that is the fact that there is now a mechanism in place for parents to appeal. That position will be filled shortly, and we are also moving forward and filling the positions of the various appeal committees as well. It is all underway.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister talks about consultations, and yet it was the former minister that had all these consultations. Then this minister has come forward with a whole bunch more consultations. It seems like they have really dragged their heels on this, seeing as they got the report back in 1999. It is sure taking them a long time to do anything with it.

The other question that arose the other night at the meeting in regard to this dispute resolution component of the legislation is: Could the minister clarify whether or not Level I special needs kids have access to that dispute resolution mechanism?

Mr. Bjornson: The dispute resolution mechanism is eligible for all students with IEPs.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, there was a woman that came to the mike the other night at that public meeting. She happened to be a school trustee, and they had been told by this minister's department that Level I was not part of the dispute resolution mechanism, and the school division was told to write policies excluding Level I. So the minister is saying something different to what his department said to this school trustee.

So is the minister then saying, unequivocally, that that dispute resolution mechanism is applicable to all levels, including Level I?

* (16:10)

Mr. Bjornson: The legislation applies to all students with IEPs, individualized education plans. IEPs are designed for a number of different students with a number of different needs. That is what the legislation is intended to do, is to address students with individualized education plans, IEPs.

Mrs. Driedger: Do Level I students have IEPs?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe they do.

Mrs. Driedger: I will just conclude so that other members have an opportunity to ask questions. But I would just like to comment that, indeed, as we are looking at inclusive education, it would be a shame if what his department had been saying to the school trustee was, in fact, in place because then that would

have meant exclusion. So I am glad that the minister has clarified that, and I thank him for that.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Chair, I have a few questions of the Minister for Family Services and Housing, but before I start I just want to pay my respects to Phoenix Sinclair who has tragically died. I think when something like this happens, we are all very concerned and certainly we welcome the internal review. We welcome the external review and, more importantly, we would encourage going to a full public inquiry in this matter so that we can address all of the children that are in care. We certainly support the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman in their abilities and their appointments to the review, but we do have some questions around the process and the mandate of the review.

I would like to ask the minister: Of the external review committee, who is the chair of that committee?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): We have asked the Children's Advocate to be the lead on that team.

Mrs. Taillieu: Does that mean that the Ombudsman is a co-chair, or what is her role then?

Ms. Melnick: The Ombudsperson will be a member of the leadership team. The Children's Advocate will be the leader of that team and the individuals will be working together. They will, I am sure, assign areas of responsibility, areas of research, areas of reporting. They will make sure that they are covering all the bases.

We do have individuals with quite a good collection of backgrounds. We have the Children's Advocate, who is a professional social worker, has also been a foster parent to many children, is a parent herself. The Ombudsperson has had a lot of experience in the area of justice and will be bringing her experience there. Michael Hardy is a long-time Family Services worker, child welfare worker out of Sioux Lookout and is currently the executive director of the Tikinagan Child and Family Services there.

So we believe that we have put together a leadership team, the primary leader there being the Children's Advocate, to look into the concerns around opening, closing and transmittal of cases, as well as any other questions that come up that they believe would be appropriate to be looking into.

Mrs. Taillieu: The minister spoke about the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsperson and a

Michael Hardy. Are these the only members of the leadership team or are there others? If there are others, can the minister tell me who they are?

Ms. Melnick: These are the members of the leadership team.

Mrs. Taillieu: I would like to question around the support then for the team. Who will be the support staff for this leadership team?

Ms. Melnick: We will be hiring three individuals who will be assisting in an administrative capacity. Certainly, technical support will be provided through the support of the director of child welfare. The members of the team may find that they also need to contract out for researchers. Perhaps other individuals with certain expertise that they find will be helpful to getting the answers to the outstanding questions. We will ensure that the members of the leadership team will make us aware of what it is that they need, and we will be very happy to make sure that they are getting the resources that they need to find the answers.

Mrs. Taillieu: Has the committee met?

Ms. Melnick: I believe the committee is in contact with each other. I do not know that they have physically had a face-to-face meeting, but I know that the Children's Advocate has already begun to spend most of her time working on this, focussing on this and organizing for this.

Mrs. Taillieu: Will the Children's Advocate be seconded then to do this review?

Ms. Melnick: Seconded to where, Mr. Chairperson?

Mrs. Taillieu: Will the Children's Advocate be seconded to do the work of this external review, or will she be doing the work of the Children's Advocate role as well?

Ms. Melnick: Again, I am not sure, seconded to where, Mr. Chairperson?

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Chairperson, will the Children's Advocate be working full time on the external review?

Ms. Melnick: Okay, that changes the question, Mr. Chairperson. The Children's Advocate will be working mostly full time on this. She will be looking at some of her duties. We are looking into backfilling within the Children's Advocate office to ensure that the proper staffing component is maintained there while the Advocate works on the reviews here.

Mrs. Taillieu: How much time, then, will the Ombudsperson be spending on the external review committee? Will she also be working full time?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Chairperson, there is organizing and co-ordinating going on. The Ombudsperson will be putting in as much time as she deems appropriate to do the work. Again, we can look into backfilling the position in the Ombudsperson's office to make sure that a full staffing complement is maintained there to make sure that the work of the Ombudsperson continues.

Mrs. Taillieu: With Michael Hardy, will he be a full-time paid person on the leadership team?

Ms. Melnick: Again, we are letting the team determine what would be best for them to do the work that they need to do, for them to make the recommendations that they need to make and to answer the questions that they feel need to be answered. So we are allowing the team to organize according to what they understand to be their scope of work, and we will be looking at what their needs are as they are identifying them.

Mrs. Taillieu: Will Michael Hardy be hired by the leadership team, by this review committee that the minister has struck?

Ms. Melnick: Michael Hardy will be a participating member and will be compensated for his work.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Taillieu: When will the team be reviewing their first files?

Ms. Melnick: I know the members of the team are very eager to get to work. I know that they are working on co-ordinating and consulting with each other, and I am sure that they will be meeting face to face very soon. They will then determine their work plan based on the questions that have been posed to them.

Again, if there are other questions that arise that they feel that they should be working on, they will let us know about that. So I think we have to let the team get together, put forward their work plan and then carry on with that work.

Mrs. Taillieu: It is very imperative that the review teams begin their work immediately. We have seen two tragedies in the last two weeks, and I do not think that we can just wait. I think that we should be looking at this very seriously and looking at opening

these files and looking at them. I would have expected that would have happened by yesterday.

I am going to ask the minister again: When are they going to start the review? When are they actually going to look at cases and files?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Chairperson, I agree it is very important to get going, which is why we announced the external reviews on Monday. I know that there have been discussions ongoing between the external review team members. I know that they are focussing. I know that they are putting together a plan that will meet the request that they report by June in an interim report with a final report by September. These people are professionals. These people are dedicated to getting this task done, and I know that they are working hard already.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Chairperson, we believe that the minister is the one giving the directives here for the review. What she said so far leads me to believe that nothing has been done. No one has met yet, although they have been in discussion, staff have not been hired, they have not opened a file yet. What are the expectations here from this minister? When will she see that this case's investigations begin?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, the member misleads the House by saying nothing has been done. I have already stated that, in the terms of reference which were released in the press release on Monday, there are discussions under way. Certainly, the Children's Advocate has been preparing for this. I know that there has been work going on with Michael Hardy. I know the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman's office is looking into doing the work.

I think it is a disservice to suggest that nothing has been done and thereby implying that these people are not serious about their task. They are very serious about their task; they are professional people and they will get the job done. I think the best thing that this House can do is be supportive of their efforts.

Mrs. Taillieu: We all are concerned about children in care and particularly concerned about the children that are in the system as we speak. We do not want to wait for three to six months to be assured that the children that are in the system or may have been released from the system are at risk. I am simply asking this minister: When is she going to do her job? When is she going to start the committee in action? When are they going to meet, and when are they going to open their first file?

Ms. Melnick: I have answered that question.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Chairperson, for clarification, I have asked the question a few times and not received an answer. I am going to ask it one more time and would ask that the minister answer the question. When will the first file be opened?

Ms. Melnick: I have answered that question a number of times.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Chair, I am very, very disappointed, as all of us are in this House and in this province, as to the answers that the minister is giving. She is shirking her responsibilities, and that is very unfortunate. We are just simply trying to get something started here. I understand that there have been discussions. Yes, I can understand that, but I am simply wanting to know when things will start. I do not think that is an unreasonable question. I am simply wanting to get this process going.

I do not have another question for the minister because she is refusing to answer my questions, so I would like to pass to other members of the House that may want to participate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chair, I do have a couple of questions that I would like ask for the Minister responsible for Agriculture. The price of beer is uniform across the province of Manitoba. I know the minister is somewhat aware of the issue that I am likely going to raise because I know she was interviewed on it, yet the price of milk fluctuates considerably, especially up in northern Manitoba, compared to the city of Winnipeg.

One of the discussions that I had gotten into at a local restaurant was the issue of why it is that the government would not fix a price on a litre of milk, given the importance of milk. I understand that the price of beer is, in fact, fixed, and to carry the argument, one would say: Well, the government can fix the price of beer, why can it not fix the price of milk? I would put that in the form of a question to the minister.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Chairperson, beer, the price of beer is set by the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission. It is a Crown corporation and there is ability to set the price of beer through the corporation. The price of milk is set by the Milk Prices Review Board, and that is not a Crown corporation. It is the producers, individual producers, that the price of milk is set for. So I do not think the member is suggesting that we move toward a Crown

corporation type of system where the price of milk could be controlled and then you could cover off the costs of transportation.

What we do have set is the minimum price for a litre of milk, but there is no ability to set the price as there is for liquor through the Liquor Control Commission. Having said that, there have been lots of discussion with the Manitoba Milk Producers, and Manitoba Milk Producers have looked at how we could supply milk into schools so that people can get it into their diet.

There is also milk that is called UVD-treated milk that has a very long shelf life, and we are encouraging people to move that milk during the winter months so that you can get it in bulk and not have to have some of the higher transportation costs. But, to the member's question, there is not the ability; it is not a Crown corporation, and there is not the ability to set the price of milk as liquor is set.

Mr. Lamoureux: Then, Mr. Chairperson, if I were to demonstrate to the minister that the government does have the ability to set one price for milk, would she then support that?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, I am always interested in hearing new ideas on how we might be able to get cheaper food prices in the North. I can tell the member that we are working in a lot of areas, looking at how we can have more local production so that all foods do not have to be imported. If he has some suggestions, I am willing to hear them.

* (16:30)

Mr. Lamoureux: Just to indicate to the minister that one of the reasons why we have a base price for milk was in consideration of our dairy farmers, and it helps the dairy farmers. Would she agree with that?

Ms. Wowchuk: Milk is a supply-managed commodity, and, as a supply-managed commodity, you control the production and you control the price. The price is set by the milk pricing commission as to what the cost of production of milk is. That is how the price is set.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, we do that in order to protect the industry, is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chair, the member knows full well that we have certain commodities that are under supply management. Under supply management, there is the ability to set price. That is what happens with milk and other commodities that are under the supply management, and these prices are set. I am

not sure where the member is going. If he is saying that supply management is not a good thing, and we should not set the prices and control the amount of production, then let him put that on the record.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I am trying to get very clear and concise answers from the minister, and I appreciate her conciseness on this. What she, in essence, has said is that the government does have the ability to influence the price of milk, and it does do this through supply and demand, and that affords the industry the opportunity to prosper.

What I am asking the Minister of Agriculture is to recognize that children are, in fact, the most valuable resource that we have, and one of the biggest benefactors with a fixed price of milk across the province would, in fact, be our children. Would she not agree that children are our most valuable resource? If we can do it to protect the milk industry, Mr. Chair, in terms of the regulation of milk, could we not go the extra step and give the fixed price for our children?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chair, there is a system in place called supply management where we control supply, and the price is controlled by the producers in order that they can recover their cost of production and that there is not an oversupply in the market. That is the purpose of supply management.

But the member also has to think as well, I have had lots of discussions with people in the North and, yes, the price of milk is very high. The price of all their food is very high. We have to look at how we can get those prices down. That is why we are talking about and working with communities to establish community gardens so that there is fresh fruit and vegetables in those communities.

We have to also look at what else can be used to replace milk because, as I have talked to many people, milk is not necessarily part of their diet, even though it may be on the shelf. We assume that people want it in their diet, but, as I understand it, in communities where I have talked to people, milk is not always what they are looking for in their diet.

But, having said that, Mr. Chair, we do have to continue to work to ensure that we have fresh food supplies in the North and the ability to make sure that people can access those foods.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, first of all, I appreciate the minister appeared, in one of her answers, to be sensitive, or at least prepared to listen to a proposal, and, at some point, I will come forward with more of

a detailed proposal for the minister in regard to even the possibility of a private member's bill. I have been in contact with the Legislative Counsel, and I do believe that it can be done.

Mr. Chair, I did make a couple of calls. I just want to make reference to one, and there are others. One of the interesting ones was to Red Sucker Lake, where a litre of milk costs \$3.35. The corner Safeway by my place, I went and purchased one litre of milk, and it was a \$1.26.

Mr. Chair, I think that if the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) was to reflect on this issue with the Ministry of Healthy Living, in particular if we had a task force that went out and it talked about what was important for our children, and that the issue of milk and the ingredients in milk were of critical importance. Ultimately, what I would argue is that we set the price of beer because of a Crown corporation, yes, but, by setting that price, we are guaranteeing certain revenues to the Province. It has a lot to do with revenues for the Province.

When we look at milk, it is the Province that in essence agreed to and supported the establishment of setting prices, Mr. Chair, not a fixed price, but of setting prices because of the supply and demand management models which we support. But we believe you can go further, Madam Minister, by acknowledging that, if we can set the price of beer so no matter where you live in the province of Manitoba you are paying \$1.26 or \$1.36 for a bottle of beer, I would think we should be able to do the same thing for a litre of milk.

It is worth the investment because I believe it is just as important as the revenues. It is just as important as protecting the dairy industry. The issue, I believe, is providing affordability of milk in particularly the northern area of our province, which will enable more of our children to drink milk. The benefits are overwhelming in terms of pregnant mums and so forth. So I would ask for the minister to support the initiative. Thank you.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member said he had some suggestions as to how this could be done. I wait for his suggestions.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any further questions?

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$3,273,112,908, being 41.7 percent of the total amount to be voted as set forth in Part A (Operating Expenditure) of the Estimates, be granted to Her

Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2007.

Resolution agreed to.

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$144,816,480, being 64 percent of the total amount to be voted as set out in Part B (Capital Investment) of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2007.

Resolution agreed to.

That concludes the business currently before us. Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Conrad Santos (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted two resolutions respecting Interim Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid),

THAT the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

* (16:40)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh),

THAT there be granted to Her Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sums of \$3,273,112,908, being 41.7 percent of the total amount to be voted as set out in Part A (Operating Expenditure) and \$144,816,480, being 64 percent of the total amount to be voted as set in Part B (Capital Investment) of the Estimates, laid before the House at the present session of the Legislature.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 26—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 26, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006; Loi de 2006 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

Motion agreed to.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 26—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice,

THAT Bill 26, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006; Loi de 2006 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a second time and be referred to Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The House will resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider the report on Bill 26, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006, for concurrence and third reading.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order to consider Bill 26, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006.

Bill 26—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006

Mr. Chairperson: Does the honourable Minister of Finance have an opening statement?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): No.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet, have a statement?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): No.

Mr. Chairperson: Any other member who wants to speak?

We shall now proceed to consider the bill clause by clause. The title and the enacting clause are postponed until all other clauses have been considered.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

That concludes the business currently before us. Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Conrad Santos (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered Bill 26,

The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006, and reports the same without amendment.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), that the report of the Committee of the Whole be received.

Motion agreed to.

THIRD READINGS

Bill 26—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 26, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006; Loi de 2006 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now read a third time and passed.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

Mr. Mackintosh: It is my understanding that His Honour is prepared to come to the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: We will now prepare for His Honour to come into the Chamber.

ROYAL ASSENT

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. Blake Dunn): His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.

His Honour John Harvard, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Manitoba, having entered the House and being seated on the Throne, Mr. Speaker addressed His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor in the following words:

Mr. Speaker: Your Honour.

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba asks Your Honour to accept the following bill:

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk):

Bill 26—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2006; Loi de 2006 portant affectation anticipée de crédits

In Her Majesty's name, the Lieutenant-Governor thanks the Legislative Assembly, and assents to this bill.

Mr. Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Five o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it five o'clock? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 22, 2006

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