

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

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The Honourable George Hickey
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 1, 2007

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 8—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Regional Vocational Schools)**

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford), that Bill 8, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Regional Vocational Schools); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (écoles professionnelles régionales), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Bjornson: I'm pleased to introduce today a bill entitled The Public Schools Amendment Act (Regional Vocational Schools). This legislation will enable the regional vocation school, once established, to continue in operation in a partnership with the province of Manitoba, and I'd like to commend the governing board of the Winnipeg Technical College and the Pembina Trails and Louis Riel school boards for their excellent work in the area of vocational programming.

I recommend that this legislation be passed so that the work of WTC can continue effectively and seamlessly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PETITIONS

Headingley Foods

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The owners of Headingley Foods, a small business based in Headingley, would like to sell alcohol at their store. The distance from their location to the nearest Liquor Mart, via the Trans-Canada Highway, is 9.3 kilometres. The distance to

the same Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard is 10.8 kilometres. Their application has been rejected because their store needs to be 10 kilometres away from the Liquor Mart. It is 700 metres short of this requirement using one route, but it is 10.8 kilometres using the other.

The majority of Headingley's population lives off Roblin Boulevard and uses Roblin Boulevard to get to and from Winnipeg rather than the Trans-Canada Highway. Additionally, the highway route is often closed or too dangerous to travel in severe weather conditions. The majority of Headingley residents therefore would travel to the Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard, a distance of 10.8 kilometres.

Small businesses outside Winnipeg's perimeter are vital to the prosperity of Manitoba's communities and should be supported. It is difficult for small businesses like Headingley Foods to compete with larger stores in Winnipeg, and they require added services to remain viable. Residents should be able to purchase alcohol locally rather than drive to the next municipality.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act (Mr. Selinger), to consider allowing the owners of Headingley Foods to sell alcohol at their store, thereby supporting small business and the prosperity of rural communities in Manitoba.

This is signed by Marlene Boyda, Mike Staub, Judy Bargaen and many others.

Mr. Speaker: According to our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Provincial Trunk Highway 2—Glenboro

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

As a result of high traffic volumes in the region, there have been numerous accidents and near misses along Provincial Trunk Highway 2, near the village

of Glenboro, leading to serious safety concerns for motorists.

The provincial government has refused to construct turning lanes off Provincial Trunk Highway 2 into the village of Glenboro and on to Golf Course Drive, despite the fact that the number of businesses along PTH No. 2 have increased greatly in recent years.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider implementing a speed zone on Provincial Trunk Highway 2 adjacent to the village of Glenboro.

This petition is signed by Ellen Rawlings, Sherman Leader, Wilma Andrews and many, many others.

Provincial Trunk Highway 10– Brandon Hills Estates

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Provincial Trunk Highway 10 serves as a route for an ever-increasing volume of traffic including heavy trucks, farm vehicles, working commuters, tour buses, campers and the transport of dangerous goods.

PTH No. 10 access travelling south to Brandon Hills Estates is not only unsafe for school students who must cross the busy highway but also for the turning vehicles who must cross a solid line to enter the park community.

Traffic levels are expected to escalate further due to projected industrial expansions.

Highway upgrades to Provincial Highway 10 are occurring within a short distance of this site. Priority should be given to this community based on the dangerous access to highways for residents.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to act on the situation by considering construction of turning lanes that would reduce the danger posed in traffic access to Brandon Hills Estates, which is home to 85 residents.

This petition signed by Linda Wakefield, Ryan Braund, and W. Rogers.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The 2007 provincial election did not clear the NDP government of any negligence with regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by A. Reyes, N. Reyes, C Bustamante, and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2006-2007 Annual Report for Manitoba Agriculture, Food, and Rural Initiatives.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review: 2007-2008 Departmental Expenditure Estimates* for Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

* (13:40)

ORAL QUESTIONS

West Side Bipole Power Line Status of Deal with Minnesota

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier announced that his government was going to plough ahead with a plan that is going to leave a legacy of debt of \$650 million or more to the next generation of Manitobans. He's going to give up the opportunity to displace coal-powered plants by wasting a minimum of 100 megawatts of power by running a power line down the west side of Manitoba rather than the east, a decision that's going to result in cutting as much forest as the east side route.

The reason the Premier gave was that he was concerned about doing deals with Minnesota Power. Given that there was an announcement last November of a deal with Xcel Energy to sell power to Minnesota, which is one of many customers that Manitoba Hydro has, I wonder if the Premier can indicate whether he bargained away in that deal the right of Manitoba to run the power line down the common-sense route, the route that's going to clean up our environment and the route that's going to save the next generation of Manitobans from \$650 million of debt.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): *[inaudible]*

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has confirmed that that is not a term of the deal with Minnesota then, so I wonder if the Premier can indicate: Is he telling the truth this week or was he telling the truth last week because it wasn't both? Last week—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We're going down the little slippery slope here because all members in this House are honourable members and I'd be picking my words very carefully. I just caution the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier said that an east side line will jeopardize the deal with Minnesota. Today he's saying it will not jeopardize the deal with Minnesota. Which one is it?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, Minnesota is a customer. In fact, Xcel Power is one of the largest customers for Manitoba Hydro, some \$600 million a year. There are regulatory bodies in Minnesota. The Democrats control the legislative house and the Senate. The Republicans control the Governor's office. If the

member opposite does not believe that those committees are subject to public opinions in the state of Minnesota, including environmental opinions and including opinions dealing with First Nations, he's extremely naive, which I suspect he is.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the boreal forest, we've already made our points known. On the issue of debt, I would point out that the debt equity ratio was 86.5 percent when we came into office. The decision of \$400 million was not even included on the books for the purchase of Centra Gas. Many other issues of reliability, including transmission reliability, were absolutely dithered away by members opposite, but certainly, if you look at the issue of customer regulatory bodies, it is a factor to consider in any decision that the government of Manitoba and Hydro have to make.

I would say to the member opposite, there are groups that have lobbied in Minnesota that have stopped the sonar project of President Bush. They've stopped decisions dealing with ozone layers. There are very, very important environmental considerations with customers in Minnesota.

Mr. Speaker, we have always said to the member opposite that these are factors that you have to consider, and I would point out that Duff Roblin, when he was faced with the Ste. Agathe dam, it was \$12 million. When he was faced with the cost of going with the floodway, he went with the floodway at \$65 million. Was that the cheapest option in Manitoba? No. Was it the best option? Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the Premier. He's concerned about the impact of lobbying on Minnesota legislators. I wonder, then, if the Premier is concerned about the fact that he has got east-side residents, including NDP MLA Elijah Harper, saying that east-side chiefs were totally devastated by this announcement to keep their people in poverty.

Over the weekend we had a release from MKO, which is the group that represents the northern bands in Manitoba, led by Dr. Sydney Garrioch, issuing a release that they had not been consulted with respect to the decision to run the line on the west. So he's given some east-side chiefs a veto over what happens on the east side, yet he hasn't consulted with those on the west side.

Is he trying to convince Manitobans, because of this half-baked scheme to waste half a billion dollars and pollute the environment with more coal power?

Is he trying to suggest that Minnesota legislators are going to be attuned to what people might be saying on the east side, but aren't going to be concerned about those on the west side who are saying they haven't been consulted and those on the east side who are saying they're devastated by this decision? Where do those people come in, Mr. Speaker?

Why does he listen to a handful of opponents? Why doesn't he listen to Elijah Harper? Why isn't he listening to MKO and chiefs on that side? Why isn't he listening to the next generation of Manitobans who, if they could go to Minnesota and lobby, might say: Don't leave us a legacy of a half billion dollars in debt. Don't leave us a legacy of more coal power. Do what's right. Do the common-sense thing. Why won't the Premier stand up for Manitobans? Why is he rolling over to American activists?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite puts false assumptions on the political agenda. He is now accepting the fact that the proposal made by some proponents of the east side, including Mr. Harper, would include the full ownership of the hydro line by that community. You should know the advice this government has received from Hydro, that that proposal to own the line was never, ever considered. So the member opposite is taking a view that is absolutely mythical. That's the problem with transmission lines. You have to make real decisions on a number of factors on real issues.

I would point out, just today, the Alberta government with the transmission line from Calgary to Edmonton had to put it on hold. The transmission lines are very, very controversial. They are opposed by anyone that is adjacent to it over the longer term. That's why we had 82 meetings with people in First Nations. I would also point out to the member opposite, I was just looking at some of the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we believe that the most doable route is the best and preferable route to Manitoba, and we recognize that there will have to be public hearings on cemeteries, on public parks, on First Nations communities on the west side. It will include the 90 miles that is already developed.

When city hall, back almost 100 years ago, bought the land that is now Assiniboine Park, newspapers and contrarians said: Why would you spend all that money on a cow pasture? Thank

goodness the elected people then had the vision to do the right thing for future generations in Manitoba.

* (13:50)

Manitoba Housing Suspension of Staff

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister responsible for Housing tell this House why three senior executives in the maintenance and improvement branch of his department have been suspended pending administrative review?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, because of checks and balances that are in place, management at Manitoba Housing was able, on a very timely basis, to uncover some concerns about conflict of interest regarding three staff members. It's as a result of that the matter's been referred to the Civil Service Commission and to the audit services of Finance, and those individuals have been put on leave without pay pending the outcome of those investigations.

KPMG Review

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that chaos reigns supreme still in the Department of Housing, and the scope of the KPMG review had to be expanded as a result of mismanagement by this government. The final report is due now. How much has it cost to date? When will it be completed? When will it be made public?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to confirm for the House that indeed there is a major overhaul that has been started already in Manitoba Housing. More decisions have to be made as a result of the ongoing work of KPMG. We thought it was very important that the challenges facing Manitoba Housing over decades be looked at and that this Province put in place a housing department and an organizational structure that better meets the needs, particularly of those who rely on public housing in Manitoba for their shelter.

Accountability

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, for years this government hasn't been able to get its act together, and as a result, had to bring in outside consultants because this government couldn't do the job internally. Can the minister assure this House that the checks and balances are in place to ensure that another Aiyawin scandal doesn't occur?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, not only are there plans afoot to strengthen Manitoba Housing internally in terms of its structure, its governance and its accountability, but it was this government that recognized the importance of making sure that all of the agencies that are out there run by community boards, run by good-willed Manitobans, have accountability measures in place to guard against misappropriation and wrongful expenditure of public funds.

Unfortunately, the former government disbanded that accountability mechanism. Mr. Speaker, not only have we put in place the Agency Accountability Unit, but we are doubling its capacity in order to make sure that those agencies not only are better accountable, but have the support they need to do the job.

Crime in Winnipeg Gun Control

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): This past weekend was a particularly violent one in Winnipeg. On Saturday one Winnipegger was shot and killed, another was shot outside a business, and yet another was shot in his own home. Three shootings in one day, Mr. Speaker. This all comes a day before the Minister of Justice's gun amnesty plan ended.

So I ask the Minister of Justice, rather than encouraging law-abiding citizens to turn in their guns, why has he failed to get the guns away from the criminals?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the gun amnesty that was put in place the last month has, at last count, brought in about 140 weapons. It was recommended to me, it was recommended to the government by the police departments in Winnipeg, Brandon and rural detachments in the RCMP.

As I have said to the member often, one hundred times out of a hundred I will take advice from police departments versus advice from the member opposite who—I don't know if he supports our initiatives on reversing some of the decisions in the Criminal Code, but certainly his leader was on side when we went to Ottawa. Full bore, all of the provincial parties for the first time supporting the changes to the federal Criminal Code that'll deal with some of these serious issues.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government's priorities are all wrong when it comes to

justice. Forcing Manitobans, first of all, to install immobilizers in their vehicles targets the victim. The gun amnesty targets law-abiding Manitobans, not criminals. No member of a street gang or criminal organization will turn in their guns. It's as simple as that.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has he failed to take guns out of the hands of criminals, street gangs and criminal organizations?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite have trouble, but we can do a number of things at the same time to deal with a number of issues.

First off, Mr. Speaker, I think the 155 additional police officers that we have put in place are going to have something to do with that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the increasing prosecutions to Court Services by almost 40 percent has something to do with that.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member might ask why the federal government has made it mandatory to install immobilizers in all new vehicles starting this month in Canada—all the vehicles for which the owner will have to pay the price. I wonder if the member talked to the federal government about why they asked all new autos to have immobilizers installed in them.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, this weekend's shootings in Winnipeg's North End prompted a resident to say, and I quote, it's not safe for kids here. After the violence he promptly packed up his belongings, and he moved his entire family to Hollow Water First Nation where they set up illegal barricades.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has he failed to control gun violence in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I had this conversation with the Minister of Justice in Alberta last week where there had been eight killings in Calgary. There have been eight killings in Calgary, one on the weekend where a youth was bludgeoned to death with a pickaxe, and we talked about the issues and also the issues of gang and related violence that are occurring. One of the reasons that we put in place our tough measures is to deal with gang issues and violence. We put in place some of the toughest rules in the country dealing with safe houses, dealing with houses—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: –closing sniff houses, closing houses of prostitution, Mr. Speaker. The major issue is gang violence and dealing with gangs. When three youths were killed up in Island Lake recently as a result of gang violence, and the ministers remember—I wonder if the member would discuss that. Perhaps he can address that in Estimates about the terrible issue facing us with respect to organized—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Privacy Commissioner Status of Legislation

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, this week is Right to Know Week. Access to public information while protecting one's personal information is key for an open and accountable government—an open and accountable government, not this NDP government.

The Premier first promised in 1999 to establish a privacy commissioner. Last November he promised again to bring in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Culture and Heritage (Mr. Robinson) why he and his Premier are afraid to be open and accountable to the public.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the Ombudsman's report this year deals with some of the suggestions on how we best can do it. We are planning on bringing in that commitment shortly, and we are committed to it. We're working with the existing administration, and I would quote the Ombudsman's report and how best to do that, but certainly we support the idea. I think having been somebody that was denied all kinds of issues of waiting lists for every procedure in health care because it wasn't available, when we came into office we found out it was all available. We're not perfect; we have more to do on right to know, and we're going to do that, but we've made some strides forward.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, it's been a year. He promised a year ago to bring in legislation. There's still nothing on this Order Paper and nothing on the Notice Paper.

The Premier also referenced during the public hearings on the FIPPA legislation when he promised the privacy commissioner, but those hearings were three and a half years ago. They've had three and a

half years to review this outdated legislation and to establish a privacy commissioner. Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House take this very seriously. There is currently legislation under debate to protect personal information from identity theft, something that was a recommendation in those reviews.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government refuse to pass The Personal Information Protection and Identity Theft Prevention Act?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): As the Premier said, we are going to be introducing legislation as soon as possible. We are looking at different amendments that can strengthen the act, including adding a number of things that are not currently within the legislation. As the member can appreciate, these issues are complex, and we are trying to move this along. We've been regarded as having among the best in Canada access to information, and I'm very, very proud of our government's record in that regard, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, they've had three and a half years. There's nothing yet. We want to see it on the Order Paper. The Premier and this NDP government have no interest in protecting personal information. Their legislation is outdated. They've dragged their heels for three and a half years, and there's still no legislation; no privacy commissioner after eight years, after they promised one. They refuse to support the private member's bill which would enhance protection of personal information and protect against identity theft, the fastest-growing crime today.

Mr. Speaker, in Right to Know Week, will the minister explain why his Premier has chosen to break the promise he made in 1999 and again in this House in November of 2006 to establish a privacy commissioner in Manitoba?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows our government inherited the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Robinson: –and we've made more information available, more readily available to the public. As the member knows, Orders-in-Council, as one example, are available on-line. That became effective in January of this year. We believe that this makes us more open and more accountable to the public.

We're looking at a number of other changes that I indicated earlier, and I expect to bring amendments before this House adjourns. We continue to support the work of public bodies and departments through our training and also the privacy risk medication project and through education activities such as the—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Economy—Manitoba Provincial Debt

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Last week the federal government held a press conference named Less Debt, Less Taxes. What a novel idea. They announced that the reduction in the federal debt has led to a decrease in interest costs. Those savings are going to be passed on to the taxpayers through tax cuts. In Manitoba, the situation is quite the opposite. This NDP government has continued to spend, spend, spend, and there's no reduction to debt in sight.

I would ask the minister if he's planning to hold his own press conference highlighting his government's lack of plan to reduce the debt. Might I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that he calls it More Debt, More Taxes.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member obviously missed it, but we've had eight press conferences on that. Each one of them has presented a budget to the people of Manitoba, and in each of those budgets, taxes have gone down all across the boards. In each of those budgets we've paid down debt across the boards. In each of those budgets we've reduced the cost of the debt from 13.5 cents on the dollar to 7.5 cents on the dollar, and in each of those budgets the debt-to-GDP ratio has gone down, which is why we have five credit rating upgrades while we've been in office.

Mr. Borotsik: The debt-to-GDP ratio may well go down, but the fact is that we're still spending more money right now in this province to service the debt. Since 1999, Mr. Speaker, the Province of Manitoba now has almost \$5 billion more debt than it did then. This means that each and every household in Manitoba must shoulder additional cost of about \$481 to service the debt. And that, by the way, is only assuming interest rates stay the way they are.

If the minister has not worked to reduce the debt during the period when the Canadian economy has been performing well, when on earth does he propose to start retiring the \$20 billion worth of debt that this province has?

Mr. Selinger: I really wish the member wouldn't just take the crib notes from the previous Finance critic. I wish he would use his own information.

First of all, he's just wrong on the facts. The net debt in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, is \$10.5 billion. The member should apologize, as his predecessor should have done, for putting misinformation on the record. The cost of servicing the debt was 18.5 cents on the dollar. It's now down to about 7.5 cents on the dollar. The debt-to-GDP ratio has gone down, and the members opposite did nothing about the pension liabilities for teachers and civil servants. We've addressed the pension liabilities with a long-term plan, something that would have doubled if they would have continued on the path they went. We've addressed the pension liability, and it has saved Manitobans millions of dollars.

Emergency Room Closures Rural Manitoba

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Rural Manitobans are becoming increasingly frustrated with this Minister of Health's incompetence. At 8 a.m. this morning, Mr. Speaker, the ER in Rivers closed indefinitely. Rivers now joins the community of Wawanesa where their ER has been closed for one and a half years. The minister is putting people's lives in jeopardy with their total mismanagement of rural health care.

Will the Minister of Health please explain why she is utterly failing the people of Rivers, the people of Wawanesa, and at least a dozen other communities throughout the province?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. It is indeed accurate that the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority did receive a resignation notice from a doctor who was working in Rivers. The notice was given with very little time between the notice itself and the departure of the doctor. In the name of safety, of course, of patients, the Rivers community has issued a notice to inform patients about the suspension of service at the ER. The Rivers hospital itself will stay open for other services. We do know, of course, that there are services available in the surrounding communities, and we're very proud that not 30 minutes away we've seen great success at the Brandon Health Centre with their recruitment with ER doctors. We're going to continue with the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority to work on that recruitment.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, from her answer I am assuming that she wants to close all rural hospitals and keep Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, phase 2 in Rivers is the clinic, and that's \$500,000 raised privately. They have been waiting for this government to make a decision on that phase 2 for over a year. The minister should examine her own record closely. It's under her watch that 13 rural hospitals, or rural emergency rooms, have closed. A fully staffed ER should be the norm, not the exception.

Can the minister tell the House when she will reopen the ERs in Rivers, in Wawanesa, in Erickson, and all of the 13 communities where there is no ER, or is she planning to keep the ERs closed permanently?

Ms. Oswald: As I said in my previous answer, the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority along with Manitoba Health is going to continue to work very aggressively to recruit doctors. I'll note, Mr. Speaker, that in the past the Rivers ER did have a suspension of service, and it was our government that was able to work with the region to reopen it. So it's not unprecedented for us to reopen ERs.

Further, I'm perfectly willing, of course, to listen to ideas of other people. For example, I could cast my eye to Election 2007 and the opposition strategy on doctors. How many doctors was it again that the opposition promised during the election? I believe the clinical name for it, Mr. Speaker, is diddly-squat.

Mrs. Rowat: I know my communities, Rivers and Wawanesa, will love the *Hansard* on that one, Madam Minister. You're so professional.

There is a movement happening with over 50 communities trying to get some answers from this government, Mr. Speaker. The minister clearly has no plan to keep the Rivers ER open, or any of the ERs open under her watch. The minister is moving backwards when it comes to rural health care. The minister has ignored rural Manitoba when it comes to just news releases and press ops.

Rural Manitobans deserve to know why is the minister putting their health at risk? Why has she failed to develop a plan to restore ER services in our communities, Mr. Speaker?

*(14:10)

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that the recruitment and retention of doctors is a challenge. It's even more challenging in rural and

northern Manitoba, and that's why, in addition to the 235 doctors that we have in Manitoba in comparison to 1999, we've committed to adding 100 more doctors.

We've committed to ensuring that we bring care closer to home. That's why we took the first MRI out of Winnipeg to Brandon. That's why we have CT scans all across Manitoba. That's why we built the Brandon hospital, a hospital that members opposite crowded seven times that they would build and couldn't quite get around to it. That's why we're continuing to build health care in Manitoba.

We know that that recruitment is a challenge. That's why we're training more doctors, not cutting spaces in medical school, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite—

Regional Health Authorities Rural Manitoba

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's regional health authority system is deeply flawed. We need sweeping reform. The present system encourages one RHA to offload costs and services onto another RHA, for example, North Eastman onto Winnipeg. The result is that RHAs like North Eastman get poor service, and Winnipeg is overburdened with longer waiting lists and higher costs.

Two weeks ago, when I was in Pine Falls and Sagkeeng, I heard horror stories of the poor health-care quality services provided locally which are literally forcing people to go to Winnipeg.

I ask the Premier: When will he bring an end to this charade?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that we have moved a considerable amount of surgeries actually outside of Winnipeg to Steinbach, more news apparently coming on decisions to move the Winkler-Morden hospital. We've also moved surgeries to that hospital. We have moved the pediatric surgeries to Beausejour, and we've moved a considerable amount of investment to Beausejour. We have moved diagnostic equipment to The Pas—the CAT scan that didn't exist in The Pas. There was no CAT scan at Thompson. There was no CAT scan in Selkirk. There was no CAT scan in Steinbach. We have moved an MRI machine to Brandon.

So, we are attempting, in every case, to put more equipment and more services across Manitoba.

The example, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Beausejour Hospital is an excellent hospital in northeast Manitoba. We invested money in palliative care in Pinawa. So, I think the member should get catch up on some of the decisions that have been made.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I think many residents of Pine Falls will confirm the fact that there are a lot more people now coming to Winnipeg than before because of the poor quality of services locally. Such offloading by the North Eastman RHA onto Winnipeg may be wonderful in terms of a cost-saving measure for North Eastman, but it's really bad for the residents in Pine Falls and area. It's unacceptable for Winnipeg to have to compensate for the deficiencies of other RHAs when there are already long waiting lists for funding and for services here in Winnipeg. The bad RHA system is one reason for the high quality, low-cost system that the Premier's responsible for.

I ask the Premier: When will he stop these RHA shenanigans?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the people of northeast Manitoba that they do everything they can, and the staff, the doctors on the front lines, the front-line nurses and diagnostic staff and public health people are doing as much as they can for patient care. The trend, actually, is the other way. We're trying to get more diagnostic services, as I said, generally outside of Winnipeg. There're patients that now will go to the CAT scan at Steinbach. There are people who get operations in eastern Manitoba in Steinbach. The operating rooms at Steinbach are taxed and we're looking at opportunities to expand the Steinbach hospital.

I noted that there was a comment about the Ste. Anne Hospital. We're putting more resources into the Ste. Anne Hospital. We govern for everyone. I know the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) can't handle that, but we do govern for everybody.

Mr. Speaker, if there is a specific—the member goes off in platitudes, negative platitudes on Pinawa and Pine Falls. At Pinawa, I mentioned the palliative care.

If he has a specific example in Pine Falls, please provide it to us. I'm sure that he has some specific example. And Sagkeeng, certainly we would support investments in health in First Nations communities, as we have supported the original health care plan which included \$400 million in 2004 with the

predecessor prime minister. It's unfortunate not one dollar flowed.

Wellington (Constituency) Chief of Staff's Role in Nomination

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, the '99 Monnin report stated, in regard to the code of ethics, that it be strictly adhered to. Our code of ethics states very clearly: Party leaders, which would include the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province, and candidates undertake to actively promote compliance with this code.

Mr. Speaker, one could challenge whether or not this Premier has had the ability or demonstrated his willingness to enforce that code.

The question I have for the Premier is very specific. With the respect to the last election, did the Premier's chief of staff play any role in the nomination or appointment of a candidate in Wellington?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, we've been subjected in this Chamber to a litany of fearmongering and smearing by the Member for Inkster, who stated in this House, on an allegation that he made in this House, if he was proved wrong, he would resign. He said it in this House and he said it in the hallway.

Today he stands up again and makes another spurious allegation as if his comments mean nothing. Does the member not recognize that as someone in this Chamber not to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the—

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader is trying to impute motives. I would table the document that clearly shows that Mr. Balagus was, in fact, involved in the Wellington nomination.

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

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the document or the issue has nothing to do with the fact that the member

opposite alleged something and said he would resign, and when he was found to be wrong, did not live up to his word and did not resign.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member does not have a point of order. It's clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Attorney General still has the floor.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we are judged by our words in this Chamber. I ask the member to go back over *Hansard* and look at what he said before, what he said he'd do, and what he said he failed to do, and to be more careful in the kinds of allegations he throws around, both in this Chamber and in the hallway.

I recommend he does that. I told him to do that before and he was proved wrong. He ought to follow that advice.

Neurosurgery Government's Initiatives

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): The government has been working diligently on recruitment and retention efforts concerning doctors and specialists in Manitoba. Can the Minister of Health update the House on Manitoba's leadership in the field of neurosurgery?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, recruitment and retention of doctors is very challenging, certainly has been thus across Canada and internationally, but I'm very pleased to say that regarding neurosurgery here in Manitoba, we have been able to recruit a top-notch team of neurosurgeons as a result of the hard work of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, of Manitoba Health and the Manitoba government's investments in technology, the first province in Canada to purchase a gamma knife, the first province in Canada to announce the Siemens Artiste, the CyberKnife, as you will, the first province in Canada that will have, in combination, the Gamma Knife, the CyberKnife and the cyclotron and an intra-operative MRI. This is technology that's drawing neurosurgeons to Manitoba, and we're very proud of that.

* (14:20)

Emergency Room Closures Rural Manitoba

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): The government of Manitoba has failed to keep rural ERs open. Rural Manitobans are forced to travel further and further, sometimes as much as an hour to get to ER services. There is a severe shortage of EMS personnel in rural Manitoba. What assurances can the minister give to rural Manitobans that they will have timely EMS services?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that we continue to work on recruitment and retention efforts. We know that we have made investments over time in rural Manitoba which has helped us with that recruitment and retention effort, and we certainly do continue to work on that. That's why we promised 100 doctors in stark contrast to the members opposite who didn't promise a one.

On the subject of Emergency Medical Services, I was very pleased, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Oswald: I can't really blame them for not wanting me to remind people about their record either, but in any event, we announced last week a primary care paramedics program in partnership with Red River College that's going to work to assist us in building our complement of first-class trained paramedics in rural and northern Manitoba.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent of the House to return to Tabling of Reports in order to permit some reports and information to be tabled to the House that we inadvertently passed through earlier.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House, unanimous consent, to revert to Tabling of Reports? [*Agreed*]

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the 2006-2007 Annual Report for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I'd like to table the following annual reports for Manitoba Finance, the Manitoba Employees Pensions and Other Costs, and Vital Statistics.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Women's History Month

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to acknowledge that today marks the beginning of Women's History Month. This year's theme is celebrating immigrant women in Canada with the goal of recognizing their significant past and present contributions to Canadian society.

The important work done by immigrant women is noticeably absent from the Canadian history books, but it is certainly an integral part of Canadian heritage. Immigrant women have been brought to Canada for over a century to work as domestic servants and child care workers. Such work played a pivotal yet an acknowledged role in the development of our nation.

Even today the federal Live-In Caregiver Program recruits female immigrants to work as live-in nannies for Canadian families. Such programs allow Canadians to pursue their careers because cheap and reliable child care, elderly care and household help is made available to them. Clearly, the work of immigrant women past and present is undervalued in Canada. This injustice is a symptom of the historical marginalization of women in our society which is sadly ongoing.

Immigrant women are faced with additional hardships and discrimination because of different languages, cultures, religion or skin colour but, owing to their persistence and qualifications, many immigrant women today have overcome many challenges and barriers and are now able to participate in the socioeconomic well-being of our country.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is extremely important to celebrate the significant contributions made by immigrant women to this wonderfully culturally diverse province. Women's History Month provides an excellent vehicle to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the members of the House to join me in acknowledging all of the women who have helped to shape this great province and all of those women who make a difference in our lives each and every day. Thank you.

Seniors and Elders Month

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day of Older Persons and October has been named Seniors and Elders Month in Manitoba. On behalf of our Progressive Conservative caucus, I would like to recognize seniors whose contributions have been invaluable to the quality of life we all enjoy in Manitoba. Older Manitobans deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We need to make a commitment in this House to do better for Manitoba seniors.

With soaring crime rates, seniors fear for their safety. We have personally heard from seniors who are afraid to leave their homes or walk in their own neighbourhoods, Mr. Speaker, and that is heartbreaking. Home is meant to be a refuge, not a concern. Mismanagement of Manitoba Housing has been a growing problem both for the safety issues and the quality of housing. We've learned more today in the House regarding inappropriate or mismanagement of that department.

We support the right of seniors to live in their homes as long as possible, but when it comes time for them to move into personal care, they face long waiting lists. This is a danger to their personal health and the well-being of not only themselves but their families. Personal care homes are understaffed and, at times, have vacancies which cannot be filled within those homes because of short staff. So, it's a two-edged sword, Mr. Speaker.

Even though Manitoba has experienced a period of recent economic prosperity due to a general upswing in the Canadian economy, our seniors are feeling the burden of increased cost of living. Rising Pharmacare deductibles have forced seniors to choose between milk and medicine, Mr. Speaker. They've been forced to make decisions no one should have to make.

Many seniors are needlessly suffering from lengthy wait lists. Just to name one, the mobility and quality of life for seniors waiting for orthopedic surgery is almost criminal, Mr. Speaker. I can't even name the number of calls that I get from individuals who have indicated they're waiting for up to two years to get in to see a specialist.

Mr. Speaker, these grave concerns must be addressed. With Manitoba's aging population, the problems will only get worse and affect more people. The mismanagement by this NDP government needs

to stop. Manitoba's seniors deserve and demand better. Thank you.

Jim Holland

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, this past June, Jim Holland was recognized for his ongoing, outstanding support for the work of our armed forces. Retired Chief Warrant Officer Holland has a distinguished career with the armed forces and has been an active and valuable member of the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess. To celebrate his commitment to the armed forces, the Upper Lounge was renamed the Holland Room in his honour.

Jim Holland was born in Amherst, Nova Scotia, and served in England during the Second World War. After returning to Canada in 1947, he was posted to several locations, including Halifax, Moncton, and Ottawa. He was then deployed to Korea in 1952 where he travelled all over the world. It was on a trip to Germany that he met his loving wife, Hannelor.

Jim was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer and, after 26 years at that post, retired from the armed forces in 1978. Since retirement, Jim has served as Worshipful Master of the St. James Lodge and three terms as president of the St. James Legion, Branch No. 4. He is the only lifetime member of the 17 Wing Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess; however, it is through Jim's dedication to his community and his comrades-in-arms that he is most well-known. He is always looking to improve the quality of life for the membership of the Mess. His efforts to improve his community have had a meaningful and lasting impact on people all around him. He is an asset to my riding of St. James and to the entire armed forces.

Mr. Speaker, it was only fitting that Jim was chosen to receive the proclamation granting the Freedom of the Province to the veterans of Manitoba. Jim received this honour from the Premier (Mr. Doer) on behalf of all veterans in our province at a ceremony to honour the Year of the Veteran. Please join with me in congratulating Jim Holland for his exemplary service to his country and his community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(14:30)

National Police and Peace Officers' Day

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to stand with all

Manitobans and indeed all Canadians in memory of those law enforcement officers and peace officers who have fallen in the course of their duty.

The last Sunday of every September is National Police and Peace Officers' Day and recognized as Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day in Manitoba.

As time goes by and society changes, the forms of danger faced by police and peace officers have evolved, but the fundamental willingness to stand up to these perils and to risk their own lives in defending others remains unaltered. Since 1890, Manitoba police, conservation and peace officers have made the ultimate sacrifice, courageously carrying out their duties. Fallen officers such as Constable Dennis Strongquill, who was killed while on duty outside of Russell, Manitoba, is one of the nearly 50 police and peace officers in Canada who will never be forgotten.

At the core of this unselfish willingness to sacrifice is a profound belief in the values of our province and our country. These police and peace officers we remember acted with great resolve and determination to protect our safety and preserve our freedom.

In the act of commemorating our fallen police and peace officers we stand together to recognize their ultimate sacrifice. It was made for the benefit of our families and for our communities. We extend our deepest sympathy and heartfelt gratitude to their families in respect for their service and their legacy. We must continually work to make Manitoba and Canada a stronger, safer and better place to be and to live.

Thank you.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to draw our attention to the conference of the Canadian region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which was held here in Winnipeg this last July. Both government and opposition MLAs had the privilege of attending this event. The conference was a resounding success and provided delegates with an informative forum in which to discuss ideas and issues related to the parliamentary process.

The first day of the conference was dedicated to a meeting of the Canadian section of the

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, where we heard from Myrna Phillips, former Speaker of the Manitoba Legislature, and Susan Thompson, former mayor of Winnipeg.

Daily sessions addressed topics like Relations with the Media, on which the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) spoke, Standards of Care in Inner Cities and Women in Politics, a topic on which I was privileged to present.

Additionally, the conference dealt with issues promoting the strengthening of democracy, like how to encourage greater youth participation in politics. The members for St. James and Charleswood were able chairs of various sessions.

Delegates also had the wonderful opportunity to visit various historical and cultural sites around Manitoba on Explore Manitoba Day. In particular, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my appreciation of the great learning experience it was for new MLAs to meet with and hear from elected members from all over Canada and the world.

On behalf of all members, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Legislature, including the Clerk's office, *Hansard*, and you, Mr. Speaker, for hosting the conference and doing such a wonderful job of organizing the program and events that allowed us to show off Manitoba's diverse cultures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances. No Grievances? Okay, we'll move on to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if we might resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker and their respective Chairs, please proceed to the respective rooms you will be chairing.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

JUSTICE

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

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

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I reviewed the 2007 annual report called *Organized Crime in Canada*, and I'm sure that the Minister of Justice has probably perused, if not read entirely, the report. In the report, it indicates the Canadian criminal intelligence community identified about 950 organized crime groups in 2007 compared to 800 groups in 2006, so the number of groups has actually gone up substantially. They made the comment as well that they were found to operate in all communities from major urban centres to rural areas. Wherever there's a profit to be made, organized crime can be found.

My question to the minister is, how many of those 950 organized crime groups that were identified by the Canadian criminal intelligence community in 2007, how many of them, of that 950, have been identified in Manitoba?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I think I referred the member to that report when I was commenting on Thursday. I think it does give regional breakdowns, although I might add that I'm sceptical of using the specific numbers of the regional breakdowns for two reasons: one, that there is more substantive internal information that I'm aware of; secondly, that because the street gangs are notoriously malleable, the movement in and out of the street gangs is very fluid, and so it's very hard to get a take on the actual numbers. When I gave the general numbers to the member I was doing it, I think, from memory, and from my memory of the last report.

In public statements I tend to outline to the public—they were talking about thousands of people that are both in and outside of Winnipeg. The most significant growing problem has now been identified in rural and northern Manitoba, a loose-knit but

organized activity. And the specific numbers, again, it's provided in the report, and there is much more substantive information that is provided to intelligence services, et cetera, that deals with some of these issues. The report itself, while very informative, provides only broad strokes of a very serious problem.

Mr. Hawranik: Recently, in fact, over the past several years—and I'm sure the minister would agree—a number of people including those in the financial community, the legal community, and in fact other people who have e-mail to a great extent have been solicited by groups from countries in Africa, notably Nigeria, and other countries around the world, solicited by e-mail, soliciting money from individuals who, for example, I think the latest one I got promising inheritances in return, but they needed money first before they would receive their inheritance.

My question to the minister is: Has the department or the RCMP been tabulating the number of complaints that they've received as a result of those solicitations?

Mr. Chomiak: Certainly, the RCMP and the City of Winnipeg police periodically provide updates and notification to the public of particular scams going on. With respect to the Internet, I do know that there has been a tremendous effort made in terms of sexual exploitation and investigations in that regard as a priority. With respect to soliciting by fraudulent schemes and scams on the Internet, I will provide some information to the member on that.

When I attended the organized crime seminar organized by the federal minister, the Solicitor General and Justice in Ottawa, the bulk of the activity was directed toward drug and drug-related crime and matters of that kind as well as large-scale commercial crime with respect to money laundering, which is right out of the ballpark in terms of information that is provided to us in terms of volume. But I will endeavour to find out the specifics on the issue of the scams—I would call scams—on the Internet.

Mr. Hawranik: In addition to that, I wonder if I could ask the minister, first of all, whether there's any—he may not have that information today, but if he can undertake to provide me—if there's any record kept of the number of people in Manitoba who have been duped by these kinds of schemes and the amount of money that's fraudulently taken by Manitobans in this way. He may not have that

answer today, but if he could undertake to provide that to us.

Mr. Chomiak: We're just having a constitutional debate here with respect to jurisdiction and I will endeavour to get that information which is available, because of the cross-border nature of it, from the federal portion of the RCMP.

Mr. Hawranik: The other issue with respect to that problem is, I'm wondering whether the minister could fill me in in terms of whether there is any strategy at this point being discussed to combat this problem on a province-wide basis, or whether he's taking the position that really it's a federal issue, and if so, has he discussed that with the federal minister of Justice.

Mr. Chomiak: Firstly, we don't actually—notwithstanding that the question of jurisdiction, they all affect every Manitoban so we do take an interest. As I indicated in my response on Thursday, that we've made a significant representation to the federal government with respect to Criminal Code changes affecting matters of organized crime.

I can also indicate in the most recent discussions that I had with ministers of Justice of western Canada, most recently last week, the issue of Internet-based crime and Internet-based activities was a subject we discussed extensively with respect to matters of jurisdiction and matters of application of laws to deal with matters of that kind.

The RCMP are aware of the nature of this and do have a strategy in this regard, and I believe, if memory serves me correctly, that the federal government has indicated that they are taking a look at some legislation with regard to matters affecting EEE identity and e-commerce.

Mr. Hawranik: The minister may be aware that the MLA for Morris has introduced identity theft legislation as a private member's bill. It's a bill that was drafted in consultation with privacy law experts with legal consultation. We will likely be debating that bill in private members' hour next week, I would suspect, given the schedule of private members' bills. Is this something the government will support and if not, why not?

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, last Thursday, when I asked the member if he gave me any advice in terms of some of the legislation that would be coming forth, the member said to me, well, when he has a chance to review it, he will provide my advice. I think, similarly, I want opportunity to review and

reflect and have the matters considered prior to outlining a definitive position. Suffice to say that it has certainly been our position that we are prepared to take any measures or any advice from anyone that will help improve the lives and safety of any Manitobans.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Chair, right up to that front, I would indicate that for a number of years I've been sitting on a justice committee. It's known as the Keewatin Maples youth justice committee and, currently, I'm the chair of the committee.

I have a series of questions that I want to ask in regard to justice committees. To start it off, if the minister could give indication as to what is the current status of justice committees, more specifically, how many justice committees do we have in the province of Manitoba?

* (15:00)

Mr. Chomiak: I'll just give a brief overview to the member, anticipating some of the issues that he may be dealing with. I think there are 61 committees operating in Manitoba, and since the most recent amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act and some of the ramifications of that, the activities of justice committees have changed in terms of matters that are referred to them; most specifically, the actions taken by the police are to less divert with respect to justice committees and more deal directly in terms of court matters related to younger offenders.

There has been concern expressed by youth justice committees with respect to the complexity and the seriousness of charges and the type of activities we're seeing in the community, and we have had discussion with youth justice committees which, obviously, we consider very valuable in terms of utilizing their expertise. But the nature and the type of offences that we've been seeing most recently have resulted in less activity for diversions to youth justice activities, and consequently their involvement has been less than it was in the past or even less than it was anticipated. One of the discussions we've had internally with respect to them is to advocate further activity, to become more preventative in nature and more promotional in terms of community justice as it relates to youth offenders in particular. The nature and the type of offence have changed significantly. The type of activity diverted has changed. That has resulted in less activity for youth justice committees.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can the minister indicate in terms of how many justice committees there would be based in the city of Winnipeg and overall province-wide back in '99, when he would have taken office?

Mr. Chomiak: I think there are eight in the city of Winnipeg; there are 61 operating now. We don't have the figures back to '99 with us.

Mr. Lamoureux: My understanding is, in regard to the joint chairs committee, that it's in the process of no longer existing or it no longer exists currently. I'm not too sure. I wonder if the minister can indicate what he knows about the joint chairs committee.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Justice, and prior to his answer, if you could introduce any new staff that have joined us.

Mr. Chomiak: Jeff Schnoor has joined us. He wasn't here last time. Anyone else here that wasn't here last time? [*interjection*] Oh, yes, Dave Brickwood joined us; so also wasn't here last time.

Louis Goulet, aussi, est venu ici aujourd'hui. [*Louis Goulet has also come today.*]

As I understand it, the joint chairs, because they're essentially community-based and community-organized and -operated, they are in a state of reorganization as we speak.

Mr. Lamoureux: How would the minister describe—and I'm going to just keep my references to the city of Winnipeg because it's the area that I know best. Madam Chairperson, I wonder if the minister can describe what he believes is the current state of justice committees in the city of Winnipeg—those eight committees.

Mr. Chomiak: I don't think it's much different than I indicated in my previous response. The nature of the offences and the nature of activities that are occurring under the Youth Criminal Justice Act have been such that diversions have decreased, and we internally, obviously, want to utilize—the best way to prevent crime is by having a strong community. We've looked and we're looking at options with respect to utilizing youth justice committees both as originally intended and in, perhaps, some other fashions. I expect that that's where the evolution will occur in the future with respect to their functioning. There's been a perceptible difference in terms of reception, in some ways, of the public with respect to restorative and community-based justice that I think has to be re-invigorated in terms of community and

community response as it relates to present views on crime and crime activity as it occurs in urban centres.

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the minister support if Johnny steals something from Wal-Mart, and Johnny is 14 years old, Johnny would be obligated to go to a youth justice committee if it's his first-time offence?

Mr. Chomiak: The way that I understand it now is that previously, if Johnny had done something at Wal-Mart, under previous legislation there would have been an option of charge or no charge and a diversion would have been available, whereas now there's a sanction in the form of a caution under the Youth Criminal Justice Act that's applied in more cases than not.

Mr. Lamoureux: Just so that I'm clear, are we saying, then, the Province of Manitoba has no ability to ensure that Johnny could be deferred to a justice committee?

Mr. Chomiak: Just as with the Young Offenders Act and the pendulums swing and the pendulums swing back on the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the application and the imposition of measures and sanctions sometimes has unintended consequences or consequences that aren't anticipated necessarily by legislators.

In the case that the member's cited, it is possible that the individual could be referred to a youth justice committee, but the utilization of cautions which amount to a form of sanction under the Youth Criminal Justice Act is being more predominantly utilized by all jurisdictions.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, I'm glad to hear the answer from the Minister of Justice, but I would suggest that both his and my constituents, indeed all Manitobans, would like to see more justice done in terms of individuals at that level that are committing some of these crimes and that just a word of caution doesn't cut it. The government does need to look at going further than that. It does have the ability, from what I understand, to be able to do so.

The next question that I would have, and the minister can comment on that, is that if a school principal has an incident that occurs at a school, does the minister believe that a youth justice committee could, in fact, play a role in that sort of a situation, where a principal can decide to refer something to a justice committee?

Mr. Chomiak: I am loath in terms of specific legal situations to deal with a hypothetical. It's just

because under legal circumstances I want to be careful, but, in terms of practice and in terms of the composition of the community and involving the community, I don't think there's a problem with a principal referring a matter to a youth justice committee.

* (15:10)

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the minister believe that offenders that violate our laws that are under the age of 12 could go before youth justice committees?

Mr. Chomiak: I just wanted to put a comment on. Frankly, it would be good if the individual refer—I mean we'd consider it a step in terms of justice in Manitoba if the offender was actually in school in the first place. That, in fact, is one of the fundamental issues. If the offender in the member's hypothetical case is actually in the school system, that's a plus, never mind referring the offender to a youth justice committee, because being part of the school community would then provide that individual with a number of options and alternatives to criminal behaviour and being out of the system. So the luxury of that person being in the school system, it would be a benefit if then, the principal could refer to a youth justice committee.

With respect to children under 12, we are the only jurisdiction that has a specific program that individuals are referred to which is the Turnabout program, which I indicated earlier in the Estimates has had about a thousand references, 850 to 1,000, if memory serves me correctly, referenced to it, which is a program that is utilized for those that are under the age of 12 to be referred to and there's been a— from what I understand—a very high success rate with respect to the intervention on that program. That program is broader in the sense that it provides not only supports to offenders, but to their families and related individuals.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can the minister indicate how does the Turnabout program incorporate the use of volunteers or community-minded individuals to administer justice to youth under the age of 12?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can you tell me how?

Mr. Chomiak: By having volunteers participate, that actually does occur.

Mr. Lamoureux: So is the Turnabout program a quasi-judicial group of volunteers then, that meet with young offenders under the age of 12, or is it just

through the civil service that ultimately determines some sort of a measure to be taken for a youth that commits a crime?

Mr. Chomiak: Utilization of the term "quasi-judicial" is not, I think—I don't think it's an appropriate term in this case, so we won't use that term. If the member is suggesting that youth justice committees can and should be used more for individuals under 12, and can or should be used more in working in the Turnabout program, I think that makes sense. To the extent that that can be communicated, I think that message is one that we will incorporate in terms of dealing with our youth justice committees.

Mr. Lamoureux: I look forward to the directives coming from the department and ultimately, hopefully, we'll see some of the justice committees get a workload that would be more fitting for justice committees to be able to have a real impact. I do believe that at one point in time they had more of an impact in the community, and that has been somewhat marginalized over the last number of years.

The other very short couple of questions in regard to justice committees: Is the government seriously looking at implementing anything with regard to over-the-age-of-18 offences being committed to come before justice committees?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, I understand that's already occurring.

Mr. Lamoureux: Could the minister indicate or provide some sense in terms of what sort of numbers? I know to the very best of my knowledge that our justice committee hasn't received anything with respect to that.

Are there justice committees in Winnipeg that have actually received cases?

Mr. Chomiak: I think in Winnipeg we're talking about a handful of cases. Again, if the member is recommending that the justice committees be utilized in a more robust fashion, I agree with the member. The role and function of that utilization may be different than had originally been utilized earlier on with respect to justice committees just by virtue of the nature of changes to both the Youth Justice Act and the Criminal Code and the nature and type of activity that we are seeing with respect to crimes and the criminal element that appear before the court.

It has changed significantly in the last period of time with reference to the fact that I had alluded to earlier, that organized crime is a much more prevalent activity in terms of matters we see before us now than we had previous.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, I wanted to move on to another area, but the last thought would be that we should do what we can to encourage the expanding roles of justice committees. I believe it's healthy for victims, for communities, for the volunteers that often go around and talk about the importance of justice and ultimately to the individual that has violated the law. So I look to the minister in hopes that he will agree with me that we do underutilize our justice committees and we need to expand their roles.

Having said that, I have an individual that visits me on a regular basis to talk to me about a house in the community. I was amazed one day, he brings a log and he says here's the date, here's another date, here's licence plates and goes through these lists, and he is absolutely convinced that this is a house where there are some illegal activities, implying drugs, at that house.

Now, I've indicated to him that he should contact Safer Communities. He tells me that he has contacted Safer Communities, and his drive to try to get this issue addressed is very strong, yet there doesn't seem to be anything happening with regard to this house. It has been going on now for well over a year. I suspect there might even be a chance that some of your departmental staff might even be aware of the individual's name, but I'm not going to state names here other than the fact that he's a constituent of mine.

I wonder if the minister would provide a recommendation or advice as to how does one best deal with someone that you believe could have a drug house or where you believe a drug house could be.

Mr. Chomiak: I think that there is no representative probably for the most part that hasn't encountered these matters on a regular basis. Thank heavens that the previous minister put in place an act called The Safer Communities Act that has resulted in the shutdown of over 200 centres like this.

Now, the member must appreciate that as a provincial government we have no jurisdiction over Criminal Code offences. We do not have jurisdiction over making criminal law. The Province has

jurisdiction over property and civil rights under the Constitution, which always makes it difficult and which some observers don't realize sounds like an excuse, but is, in fact, a reality, that there are things we cannot do, that could be found unconstitutional or inappropriate under provincial jurisdiction.

* (15:20)

So we have the ability under property and civil rights to undertake aspects, providing it doesn't look like or act in the colour of Criminal Code violations, because that is another jurisdiction of the federal government.

In the United States, the states make criminal law. In Australia, the states make criminal law. In Canada, the federal government makes criminal law; the Province is assigned the administration and enforcement function; and the Province can make laws with respect to property in civil rights under the Constitution. Hence, I would love to make all kinds of laws with respect to criminal activities, but they would be found to be ineffective because we cannot make those laws.

The Safer Communities Act was put in place by the previous minister, very wisely, I say. It sounds like bragging, but that was a terrific bill because not only does it shut down 200 places in Manitoba, but it's been now copied in almost all jurisdictions of the country, most recently Alberta, who've adopted the act in order to shut down illegal activities and premises.

Now, the issue with The Safer Communities Act, and I want to be careful how I portray it, is that one must have evidence of wrongdoing, and one must provide that evidence of wrongdoing, and then one must persuade the owner of that particular property that in light of these activities, the owner ought to not have tenants or not engage in those activities because those activities could be perceived as criminal or other activities. Generally, the evidence has to be placed, provided to that owner, in order to have the owner discourage the activity. Usually, it results in the owner kicking out the tenants.

Evidence of criminal activity, of course, can be provided to the police, and the police will engage accordingly, but The Safer Communities Act requires a fair amount of evidentiary information in order to provide that information to the particular owner who then discourages the activity and eliminates the problem. If the matter has been referred to the Safer Communities program, this

budget that we're discussing has enhanced resources, the Safer Communities program, and will result in faster and appropriate responses to matters of these kinds.

I wish, I wish a lot of things, but I wish that we had some additional powers constitutionally under the Criminal Code to undertake activities, but we cannot, so we have to utilize different means to discourage non-civil and property-related activities occurring in our jurisdiction.

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister makes reference to the 200 shutdowns, and he's done that quite often where I've heard, you know, the wonderful, positive impact of the legislation brought forward was that 200. Under the 200, what roughly would be of tenants versus owners?

Mr. Chomiak: It's over 250. I think the typical case, from my understanding, is that it's a house; it's being utilized by tenants inappropriately. It's observed. The evidence is provided to the owner. The owner then asks the tenant to move out.

Mr. Lamoureux: Why it's an important point is that, when you say we've shut down X number of dope houses, you give the public the impression that you've actually done something that's very tangible to rectify a problem that's very real in our society when, in fact, in reality, there's a better chance, and when I say a better chance, you know, I'm guesstimating here, probably 90 percent or higher, that all you've really done is you've managed to relocate the issue to some other community. Is that not a fair comment?

Mr. Chomiak: It does sound like a, quote, Liberal interpretation, but the fact is I've been in a crack house. I've pulled kids out of crack houses. I know what goes on in there, and I know how sickening it can be. I've seen the people that come out of there, and I'd just as soon see the people that are operating that behind bars and out of the streets. The fact is that most of the people in there are a type of victim: victim of addiction, victim of mental health, victim of other activities.

Move them out of the neighbourhood. Yes. They'd go to another neighbourhood. Yes, but short of providing treatment, which we do provide, and short of putting the perpetrators in jail, which we do—and we have the highest rate of incarceration other than Saskatchewan in the country—I look for suggestions from the member as to how to deal with this issue otherwise.

Mr. Lamoureux: I wonder if the minister could give indication in terms of grow ops in Manitoba. Again, what I'm really looking for is just the overall number. Does the department maintain how many expected or what they believe to be a number of grow ops in operation in the province in any given year? Is any sort of statistical information kept on that? Not how many busts there are, but how many they believe are in the province?

Mr. Chomiak: Interestingly enough, I had that same question with an investigator, in terms of our crime unit, and asked that very question about indications and numbers, et cetera, and was advised that one of the local police officers had a grow op down the street from his house and wasn't aware of it. That, in fact, suggests that I can't tell you a definitive number. We do keep track. I think we've closed more grow ops and other types of operations than we have shut down places with respect to The Safer Communities Act.

Disruption is a valid objective in criminal activities. If you arrest and put in jail some gang thugs, you disrupt the activities. It's true that other thugs replace them for a while, but if you disrupt, it works. If you disrupt the particular house and get the activities out of there, some cases they move on, some cases you can get them into treatment, and some cases they get arrested. But it's a legitimate commitment to the community that you disrupt.

We'll try to get what information we can to the number with respect to numbers regarding grow ops.

Mr. Lamoureux: Whatever information can be provided would be very much appreciated, keeping in mind that I understand that there is the Web site on the police service that provides which houses had grow ops in them. But whatever the minister can provide would be great.

The last area that I want to ask some questions on was in regard to the ankle bracelets. I have, for years, talked about how they do have a role to play in the province. Ankle bracelets, right off hand, are not meant to prevent crimes from happening, per se, directly, but they are a good way of monitoring and ensuring that people are adhering to curfews or whatever else might be put onto them when they're outside of custody.

The simple question I have for the minister is, in the spring budget he indicated, or the government indicated, that it would have ankle bracelets in place for September. Has he accomplished that?

Mr. Chomiak: Again, a Liberal interpretation of wording. I don't think we ever said they would be in place by September. I believe we said the fall. Ankle bracelets are quite popular with the public. They're popular because they've been shown on crime shows, et cetera. They're utilized fairly frequently in some jurisdictions, the United States. I think we've always been cautious with respect to IT solutions. We never will forget the SmartHealth initiative, where \$100 million was sucked down the toilet for saving \$200 million, which was supposed to be a be-all and end-all IT solution to everything.

* (15:30)

When we had the opportunity to partner with a jurisdiction like Nova Scotia, whom we partnered with on numerous issues, Nova Scotia, particularly, because they have the same type of auto theft problem that we have, keeping in mind that auto theft is a different problem around the country. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have more of the thrill-seeking auto theft. Large urban centres have more of the chop-shop auto thefts, so it's a different issue.

When we had the opportunity to not re-invent the bracelet and not develop our own but actually tie on with what Nova Scotia was doing, we took advantage of it and said we'd pilot and test it. I indicated the fall of this year would be our target date for that.

Mr. Hawranik: Money laundering and re-investment of those proceeds in legitimate companies can undermine our real economy here in Manitoba, and it involves the use of a range of financial services such as banks, currency exchanges, securities traders, insurance companies and so on. Often specialized expertise is necessary and individuals in professions such as lawyers, accountants and investment brokers sometimes assist in that laundering process—in fact, likely all of the time—unwittingly. One way to limit the laundering of cash is to restrict the amount of cash taken by certain professionals such as lawyers, accountants and investment brokers.

I'm aware of the fact, of course, that the Law Society of Manitoba has a limit in terms of the amount of cash that can be taken in by lawyers in any transaction, and I believe that leaving it up to the professional organizations of lawyers, accountants, and investment brokers may be wrong.

So I'm wondering what plans the government has to standardize that limit to curtail money laundering in Manitoba. Do you have any plans or are you going to leave it up to those professional organizations that license their practitioners? Are you going to leave it up to them to determine what standard to follow?

Mr. Chomiak: When last I was aware of it, money laundering amounts to a \$50-billion industry in the country. There is a specific organization under the auspices of the federal government that tracks these issues, and they do track financial transactions relating to banks and other agencies. There are certain limits over which they keep track of the numbers. In fact, when I met with them, they were quite open about some of their processes.

It's an interesting issue because I raised the issue of mortgages and the type of activity that occurs in your classic grow op where highly mortgaged properties are purchased, and then the farmers are brought in to deal with the crops, and when it gets busted, the organized activity just walks away from it. I suspect, in that regard, the issue of trusts as they relate to trust accounts held by lawyers would relate to the figure of money that's moved in trust from bank account to bank account.

Now, I'd have to check into how that affects trust accounts. There are normal financial transactions. The utilization of, quote, "trust accounts" is an interesting one, and I think is in discussion. I'm not certain that we have the legislative authority. I know we have legislative authority with respect to—some financial transactions, we don't. We have been in discussions with the federal government. We do have commercial crime units locally and nationally that follow this.

If the member has a specific suggestion, I'd be happy to pass it on, but I do know that some aspects of financial transactions at a certain money level are automatically monitored.

Mr. Hawranik: It's just that many of these organizations, like lawyers, accountants, investment brokers, are licensed and regulated provincially to a great extent. I think the opportunity is there not to necessarily leave it to the professional organizations themselves, not to leave it to the licensing bodies to determine how much they can take in as cash in trust accounts and other transactions, but I think there's an opportunity for the Province to perhaps regulate and

standardize the amount that can be taken in as cash no matter what the profession is in Manitoba.

Is that something that the Province would look at as possible in terms of legislation or—because of the fact that these organizations, a lot of them, lawyers are licensed provincially, accountants are as well. Is there any plan to standardize it throughout the province?

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Chomiak: I'm just trying to conceptualize if the member is saying in professional legislation we should have some kind of provision that in a certain amount of trust transaction is the limit on trust transactions after which there must be disclosure to the federal body that now looks at disclosure in terms of all banking cash transaction. I just conceptually can't see how we could necessarily do that, although perhaps it's my own inability. I'm trying to determine how one gets into a trust account—and it doesn't kick in, because most trust accounts are held in some kind of a financial institution which falls under the purview of the body that monitors it anyway.

We don't keep trust accounts in anything other than some kind of investment device so I just don't know precisely how the member suggests that we could legislate that, aside from the issue of client-solicitor privilege, which I think can be pierced in this particular case if one can demonstrate intent; but, just conceptualizing how a mortgage transaction takes place on a sale, I can't see what rules would apply.

Mr. Hawranik: I'm not concerned about the cheque transactions or so on because it does go through a legitimate bank and so on and they have controls in place, federal legislation in place to control that kind of situation, but my concern is when an individual comes into a lawyer, for instance, and drops down \$20,000 worth of cash. There are rules applicable by the Law Society to prohibit that kind of thing from happening.

I believe the limit at this point that the Law Society does allow is \$7,500 in cash. I think that's the limit. But my concern is that not all professional organizations are necessarily following those kind of rules in terms of the amounts of cash, first of all, that can come into an account, and accountants are in the same position. So are investment brokers.

I'm wondering whether or not it would be worthwhile for the Province to try to work with those professional organizations to come up with some

kind of a standard province-wide, no matter whether it's an accountant, whether it's a lawyer, whether it's an investment broker and so on. The banks, as I say—and I think the minister is well aware—are controlled by the federal government in terms of that kind of thing.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chomiak: I'm prepared to look at it. I used the example of a mortgage to try to conceptualize the flow of cash, and I think it's worth looking into in terms of individual or individual professions that may be utilized inappropriately to funnel cash through their offices in order to launder the money to further the activities of organized crime. I'm having some trouble conceptualizing, but I'm willing to look at the various professions. I could see it more likely happening in your friendly card game; it's high-stake poker that might take place around and in other kinds of activities and inter-provincial activities in terms of international matters. In terms of professions, I'm willing to take a look at it.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that answer. One of the areas, I think, that fraud is possible and where the province has exposure to a great extent is Land Titles Office fraud. I could tell the minister—well, I've been practising for 28 years in the province of Manitoba and I do a fair amount of real estate in my dealings with clients. It seems that's something that the minister should be alerted to. I see it in certain situations, particularly in rural areas.

Take as an example, an individual has a vacant piece of land—and sometimes people have vacant pieces of land and never see it for years on end; all they do is continue to pay the property taxes, and so on. But it would be quite easy for an individual to create a transfer of land into their own name and forge someone's signature as a witness to it and process it through the Land Titles Office, particularly when titles now are not really required to be produced. They aren't produced anymore, for the last seven or eight years, to process that transfer and then to resell that vacant piece of land because nobody's there watching it, very easily market it, resell it, and take off with the money well before the next property tax bill comes out by the municipality. That's when the old owner would certainly be alerted that there may be something wrong, that they didn't get a property tax bill.

I think that the procedures that are there now in the Land Titles Office are really—the way things are going in the Land Titles Office, and I think with the

way crimes have been committed and becoming more and more sophisticated, I think it's something that the minister should be looking at in terms of trying to prevent fraud from happening and curtailing fraud in the Land Titles Office.

The government has an exposure there because, of course, the government guarantees title to property, and certainly if a fraud occurred and a third-party buyer purchased that land and took title to the land, he certainly would have a claim possibly against the government because government guarantees title. It's something that I think that the minister should be looking at. I know other jurisdictions, such as British Columbia and other jurisdictions, require all transfers actually to go through lawyers' offices as opposed to allowing even members of the public to transfer land. I think the potential is enormous there, and I'd like to see, in any event, some kind of—someone, the minister or someone look at the land titles procedure as to possibly curtail that kind of fraud that could happen in Manitoba.

Mr. Chomiak: The nature of the Torrens system is such that the government always backs up the validity of titles. So I'll pass it on to the minister responsible for Land Titles. Certainly, those of us who studied property law are aware of the various ramifications. I'll pass that on as advice worth looking at.

Mr. Hawranik: Counterfeit goods are becoming more and more of an issue, I think, in Manitoba and, in fact, across the country. Some counterfeit products, such as counterfeit pharmaceutical products, can cause serious health and safety risks because they may not even have labelling, and they're not regulated in terms of the content; they may closely resemble legitimate drugs. These, sometimes, as I say, because they're not regulated in terms of dosages or the ingredients, they could be contaminated. It could cause a serious health risk to Manitobans.

Is the minister looking at action being taken? Is there any action being contemplated to limit or to curtail counterfeit pharmaceutical products in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: I'm tempted to answer that probably the biggest problem we face is counterfeit pharmaceutical products in the form of illicit drugs as a major problem in a major network. I mean, hundreds of millions of illicit drugs enter this province, and, I daresay, tens or hundreds of millions

leave this province on a regular basis with respect to illicit drug trade. I'd also suggest that the utilization of victims in terms of caring and being trafficked is a severe problem.

With respect to the monitoring of pharmaceuticals and the authentication of pharmaceuticals, et cetera, it's from my experience in former portfolios, I think, there are certain procedures that are already in place with respect to both the pharmacists and with physicians: pharmacists who dispense, and physicians who prescribe, and others who prescribe, in order to limit the impact of inappropriate drugs being transferred.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the opportunity to ask the minister about a couple of constituency issues facing Portage la Prairie. One is an outstanding Waterhen First Nations issue which the minister is probably aware of, that former residents of Waterhen First Nations were moved to Portage la Prairie some 10 years ago because there was a significant upheaval within the Waterhen, now known as Skownan First Nations. The court case against the dissidents that were located in Portage la Prairie made its way through the Supreme Court of Canada some four years ago, and the ruling was made in regard that there was then a decision required by Manitoba as to whether to retry or to dismiss the charges against the individuals named. In fact, some of the individuals did spend time in the Dauphin correctional facility, and this issue was still outstanding.

Many of the Waterhen First Nations residents are looking to get on with their lives, but this is hanging over their heads as to whether the Province is going to retry or whether the Province is going to settle with the individuals that effectively had their lives disrupted and were incarcerated for related charges that the Supreme Court found were not clearly defined and essentially dismissed them.

Mr. Chomiak: Can I interpret the member's question to be that he wants to know if and when the Province is going to appeal or going to implement? I'm not sure I understand. I'm aware of the issues, but the specifics the member is asking me, I'm not clear on.

* (15:50)

Mr. Faurshou: Basically, the Supreme Court of Canada set aside the judgment that was made in the conviction of some 13 members of the former Waterhen First Nations people, and so it was left

then with the Province to either re-initiate the charges and the trial process from the get-go again, or whether the Province was going to effectively settle for wrongful incarceration. Both have not yet been resolved. I'm looking to the Province. I know the minister is new to this portfolio, but I just want to emphasize that this is going on 10 years, and for anyone waiting with this issue hanging over their heads, I think, is extraordinary.

Mr. Chomiak: Obviously, this matter would be dealt with by the independent Prosecutions branch of the department, which I do not and cannot influence. Suffice to say that there've been issues with respect to First Nations that go back about 150 years that have not been dealt with. I would certainly advocate, in general, that we try to resolve as many First Nations outstanding issues as we can sooner rather than later.

Mr. Faurshou: I appreciate the minister's understanding, but these are charges that came from Crown attorneys.

So I would like, then, to move on to the women's correctional facility. I asked the minister of government services. He said his progress is very much deemed upon your department's order. He was unaware of the timing of the opening of the new women's correctional facility to be located at Headingley, but I also want to ask the minister, in consideration of the current overcrowding at the Remand Centre, whether the facilities at Portage la Prairie could be potentially considered for a central regional centre remanding those individuals that are facing charges out of the central region as it would then alleviate the overcrowding in Winnipeg here and potentially still make use of that facility which has been updated. It's not as nice as the new correctional facilities go, but, certainly, it is workable and could fill a substantive need from the department.

Mr. Chomiak: I know that we're proceeding to continue the development of the women's correctional facility in Headingley. If memory serves me correctly, I think we're talking about approximately two, two and a half years from now, fall of '09, but, on those kinds of dates, having done this a few times in other departments, those are only targets. Insofar as part of the issue with respect to the Portage women's centre's matters that have been brought by various agencies and entities with respect to how one treats people in custody, I'm not certain that a conversion of the Portage facility to remand

would be in order. I suppose it could be. I actually thought of it in terms of my practical side, but we'd have to review it in terms of officials and whether or not it could even pass the standards ratio given the time of its construction and the nature of the facility.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Faurichou: I appreciate the minister's practical side, and that's why I make the suggestion on the basis that, if one were to look at the logistics of movement of those persons in custody, it makes a heck of a lot of sense to have a central regional remand centre.

Two other points that the government made in their original announcement about the relocation of the women's correctional facility to Headingley was that there would be a pending announcement regarding the women's transitional centre, as well as an Aboriginal healing centre. These were both items of note in the committee's report to the government, which the government endorsed and was very supportive of publicly.

I wonder whether there is going to be a pending announcement as both of these issues, First Nations have been very proactive in letting the minister know that they are interested in participating in the development of these two centres.

Mr. Chomiak: I'll give the member the same answer I gave to the local chief who attended in Ottawa with us a week and a half ago when he queried me about the very same issues. In all honesty, that we're still in discussions.

Mr. Faurichou: I will confess, we're talking to the same person, but it is in my purview as MLA to promote the development of these two centres which are in the report, where Portage was looked very favourably upon for their location.

Further to Portage la Prairie, I will stress, as I have done in debate in the House, that we are very concerned about the delay between the initial contact with the police to actually the individuals being dealt with in the courts. We have seen individuals that have racked up multiple charges in the interim as they are waiting for a disposition of their initial charge. I speak specifically of auto theft where individuals have been caught, charged, out on bail, they re-offend, re-offend and re-offend again before the first charge is dealt with in the courts. If it was timely dealt with in the courts, big chances are they won't be out on the streets doing the two, three and fourth subsequent charges.

What I would like to leave with the minister is that the department is well aware of congested areas, court time and Crown attorney allocation throughout the province. Perhaps, it could be considered that resources are moved around the province to effectively deal with the hotspots, if you will, and to bring down the delay in those that have come in conflict with the law being dealt with in the court system.

Mr. Chomiak: I couldn't agree more with the member. The member's aware that, under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, virtually a first offender on an auto theft cannot be held in custody—cannot be held in custody. In fact, both the Young Offenders Act and the Supreme Court have said that you cannot use deterrence, i.e., custody, as a consideration in either interim judicial release or subsequently in sentencing. Ergo, that is one of the reasons for our request to amend the Criminal Code and the youth justice offenders act.

The second issue is in relation to the use of the words "sentence" and "sentences." Under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, you can't be breached unless you have more than once breached the conditions of your bail. Consequently, individuals can have charges disposed of in a bundle and they're only recorded as having dealt with one offence, or they're released, they do a string of offences and they only come back and are charged with breach of one bail condition and, consequently, can't be held in custody. So the use of the plural of sentence and sentences is another change we've asked for in the Youth Justice Act.

Thirdly, the fact that you can't hold someone on interim judicial release or provide for serious consequences in terms of sentencings is related to the fact of the indictable offence, that it being of a serious nature also not delineated. We've also made that request in the Criminal Justice Act.

* (16:00)

So we are full-heartedly in agreement that it is, by law, difficult sometimes, to hold offenders in custody when, in fact, we believe, particularly as it relates to auto theft, that it's a serious offence and ought to be dealt with in a tougher fashion. So we're on the same page with respect to the amendments that are required.

It's also quite clear that we have a lot of people on remand. Part of it is the conditions that are now applied in terms of remand are the two-for-one ratio,

and we have long advocated against that. That was another aspect of the Criminal Code amendments that we asked of the federal government. Now, specifically because of judicial and constitutional rights and Charter rights, you can't take away that wholly. But we've asked that it be prescribed to a narrower definition of one to one or one to 1.5 in terms of remand status so that it acts as a deterrent rather than the situation now where a lot of offenders will not even seek bail and stay in remand in order to do the two for one. In Alberta recently, a provincial court judge gave three for one, which I pointed out to the Minister of Justice in Alberta, smugly, but he's a friend of mine, but, smugly, when we were discussing the difficulties we were having with youth justice offenders and the difficulty being, if it starts going up to three to one or four to one, as it did in Ontario at one point, it becomes farcical with respect to sentencing provisions.

So we've asked for those amendments to the Criminal Code. We cannot judicially or provincially on our own determine that. We are bound by the legislation that's before us, but we certainly have been of the same mind with the member with respect to toughening up consequences and to ensuring that the amendments are made.

Mr. Faurshou: I want to concentrate on the timeliness of it. Even though we can't perhaps charge or incarcerate an individual or prevent him from bail, but if they're timely dealt with in the courts, it will get onto the record and then a second offence, rather than not having dealt with the first offence. These other three or more multiple occurrences take place and they're all dealt with as a first offence because the first offence hasn't yet hit the books.

But I want to also stress when a person is on remand, the judicial system does not have the opportunity to effectively program or author programs for the individuals that have come in conflict with the law and, again, the whole process of rehabilitation does not take place. In remand none of those programs are available. We're seeing persons that once they get through the remand—the two for one, three for one, which the minister has referred to—once you get to a correctional facility, the length of time that they're going to stay there offers the correctional facilities no time whatsoever to put in place any program that will address the reasons or rationale that put the individual in conflict with the law in the first place. So we've got to get a more timely address to charges and get the individuals into

our correctional facility in order to put these programs that are so vitally needed into play.

I want to then leave the minister with the thought that has been addressed in Brandon and in Winnipeg, as a recognition that they—the individuals that the police are having to deal with—are not all residents of those communities. People migrate to the city of Winnipeg; they migrate to the city of Brandon, but they also migrate to the city of Portage la Prairie. Many individuals that come in conflict with the law are residents of elsewhere. Yet the citizens of Portage la Prairie, as in Brandon and Winnipeg, have to bear the brunt of supporting the police officers that are engaged in trying to protect the rights and freedoms of law-abiding citizens.

So I leave with the minister consideration that you look to Portage la Prairie, as you have in Brandon and Winnipeg, and look to supporting a number of police officers, perhaps indicative of the relationship to the number of individuals that perpetrate a crime in Portage la Prairie that are actually not a resident of Portage la Prairie, because it cannot continue that the citizens of Portage la Prairie bear the tax burden to provide the police resources to effectively deal with non-home-grown talent, as far as criminal activity goes.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Madam Chairperson. I will take the advice of the member. I've already had some preliminary advice from municipal officials and related officials in the member's region and surrounding area.

Just generally, in the regions that are outside of Winnipeg, it appears that the average wait time for a non-domestic violent charge, youth charge, is about 45 days. Now, having said that, I have to tell you that when I looked at some stats, I also found that it was indicating that half of people charged were not even applying for bail. That suggests to me either people are very, very slow to understand what their rights are or, I daresay, they might be thinking that perhaps they're better off spending more time in remand because they're getting two for one, than to go to trial and disposition and have to do time at places where programs are offered. I'm not saying that offenders necessarily do that, but I strongly suspect they do.

Mr. Hawranik: The Canadian Police Information Centre maintains records respecting stolen or missing firearms and, according to their records, there's about 85,000 firearms that are either stolen or missing in Canada, of which 44,000 are restricted firearms like hand guns. So I ask the minister, out of

those 85,000 firearms recorded in the system as missing or stolen in Canada how many of those firearms would be from Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: I can't give a definitive answer to that. I can indicate that both the stolen and illegal use of stolen firearms is an issue. I suspect that the transportation, importation and smuggling of firearms is even more difficult and a graver issue than that of stolen firearms, notwithstanding the figures of 45,000 with respect to restricted firearms. It certainly is a major issue in smuggling and in cross-border discussions. In my discussions with the police when we did the firearms amnesty, something that's done on a regular basis and has helped keep and deal with guns, et cetera, it's quite clear that the Uzis and the AK-47s and all of those are not held by collectors; they come in via the smuggling market and continue to do so.

Mr. Hawranik: I note that the minister says that he's not aware of how many firearms are actually from Manitoba that are stolen or missing. However, if the information is available, I would ask that minister provide that information to me as well as, if it's available, how many of these stolen or missing firearms are recovered each year and how many firearms are reported or missing stolen in Manitoba, say on a yearly basis, whether it be 2006, 2005, and so on, approximately. I wonder, if that information is available, whether he could provide that to me.

Mr. Chomiak: We will provide that information, to the extent that we have it, to the member.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that commitment. With respect to combating auto theft, can the minister indicate how many bait cars are now in Manitoba?

* (16:10)

Mr. Chomiak: I do know that bait cars had been made available to the police services, and I don't know of any bait cars that are utilized now. I do know that we're very pleased with the preliminary numbers in the reduction of auto thefts this year compared to last year, this month compared to this time last year. It's down significantly: I believe 24 percent. We think the doubling of the police unit. We think that the impact of the federally-sanctioned immobilizer program and our provincial-assisted immobilizer program is a factor. We think that the good police work and follow-up on the monitoring of offenders and the intensive resources that have gone

into supervising offenders has made a significant difference.

The bait-car issue I queried. Apparently, bait cars are available. They're not utilized significantly in Manitoba. They're more successful in other jurisdictions like B.C. where the crime and the approach to crime is different, I'm advised.

The good news is that we're down something like 24 percent. That's fairly significant in this jurisdiction. I think it's actually beyond what had been originally anticipated when the initial program was announced, and it speaks well of the future.

Mr. Hawranik: The minister indicates that auto theft is down 24 percent. From what year to what year and for what period of time to what period of time?

Mr. Chomiak: It's year over year. The first nine months of this year versus the first nine months of last year.

Mr. Hawranik: So it's not a complete year at this point. We're not comparing complete year to complete year?

Mr. Chomiak: It's one of the reasons why I'm a little loath to—I mean, those numbers come out regularly. You could look at the crime stats and see that those numbers are there. I think the city of Winnipeg crime stat will indicate that it's down 20-somewhat percent. I actually wouldn't feel confident in making a huge public exclamation out of those numbers until we saw that over a longer period of time to see that if, in fact, it's a trend that's continuing. But it's been down virtually every month of this year over last year, and it cumulatively is down over last year. So the early indications are that the strategy is relatively successful. I think I'd like to see what happens in the next year, year and a half, in order to announce that we've really turned the corner with respect to auto theft and auto theft issues.

Mr. Hawranik: I agree with the minister in that we need to compare 12 months versus another 12 months because the reality is that the numbers could have been drastically down the last three months of last year and they could be drastically high this year. We really don't know the year over year numbers, but I look forward to hearing what those numbers are.

But my question to the minister is: How many bait cars, at this point—and I know British Columbia does use bait cars as a significant part of their

strategy to reduce auto theft. Exactly how many bait cars are now available in Manitoba to combat auto theft?

Mr. Chomiak: When I last asked, I don't think we were using bait cars in our auto theft strategy in Winnipeg right now.

Mr. Hawranik: Is the minister's answer that we don't have any available bait cars in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: I answered it, as indicated earlier, that bait cars had been offered as part of the solution, but I leave the policing and the investigation and the prosecution decisions to people who are in a better position to determine these issues than necessarily ourselves. I'm following their advice. They meet bi-monthly to compare statistics and data. They monitor car theft and auto theft on a daily basis. They categorize it on a daily basis. They track it on a regular basis. They make their policing and investigation and probation decisions based on hard data. We've been following that. It looks like we've made a significant impact. There's clearly more to do in terms of the Criminal Code, youth justice offenders act side, but that would be helpful. We'll just follow the directives of the police and police services and the investigators who are expert in this field.

Mr. Hawranik: I note the minister's careful choice of words when he said bait cars had been offered and used. Can the minister indicate when the bait cars were discontinued as part of the strategy to combat auto theft?

Mr. Chomiak: I'll provide what information is available to the member.

Mr. Hawranik: Does the minister know how many bait cars were used in the province to combat auto theft when they were being used?

Mr. Chomiak: I'll determine what information is available and provide it to the member. Is the member suggesting that there is a defect in the strategy offered by the police in not utilizing bait cars today? Is that what the member's suggesting?

Mr. Hawranik: I'm simply trying to determine what the strategy is in terms of how we're following through on the auto theft problem we have here in Manitoba.

In addition to that, can I ask the minister to provide me with information—obviously there were bait cars available at one time and they were being used as part of the strategy. Where those bait cars are

today, whether they're still available and also whether they are still operational, if he could provide me with that information as well, I'd appreciate that.

Mr. Chomiak: I should indicate to the member that in relation to decoys and matters of that kind, those require an ongoing maintenance upgrade and changing, because in an environment, say Winnipeg, where you have identified roughly 200 individuals who are involved in auto theft, and then even though you have what's called the newbies coming, they quickly know what is and isn't in the system.

So I'll endeavour to find out what information is available with respect to that.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that and for providing me with that information. In addition to that, I think what I probably should have included in my previous question, as well, is that if he could also provide me with respect to those bait cars what kinds of vehicles were used at the time and the year, make and model of those vehicles as well. That would be appreciated, as well, if he has that information.

Mr. Chomiak: I'm not certain as to the extent to which police authorities agree. You know, identifying make, model and year of a bait car and a decoy car in a public forum, if we're going to utilize that decoy car, is probably not a good idea. But to the extent that I can provide the member with information, I will provide the member with information.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that. Of course, I'm not sure why he would be hesitant to give me that information when they're not even using bait cars anymore, but this obviously was one of the strategies at one time dealing with stolen autos.

The question I do have, though, in terms of changing direction a bit, I note from election materials given out during the last election by the NDP that there was a commitment to put 100 more police officers on the street. My question to the minister is, exactly what does he mean by that? Does he mean 100 full-time officers, and if he can also elaborate in terms of how this particular election promise will be measured?

* (16:20)

Mr. Chomiak: It's quite clear that we have more police in this province than at any other time in our history. We have more police in the city of Winnipeg than at any other time in our history, and, on a per-capita basis, Winnipeg has the second highest

number of police of any jurisdiction in the country. That's from national data. From the information, we've also provided the equivalent of, and I'm going from memory, 155 additional police positions since we've been in office. In that regard, we promise over the next four years to provide additional resources equivalent to that, and that is real positions and real funding to positions; that's what we indicated in the election campaign.

There was quite a discussion in the election campaign about these issues that I found was very interesting. I was at the door in a lot of places, and I think people understood that, firstly, we had done as much or more of any government in the country with respect to criminal justice issues. Secondly, they actually, the public, understood the inaccurate statements made by the official opposition with respect to their ability to arrest and detain individuals as a result of their "Hughie will do" slogan and campaign. So we dealt with it. We've lived up to our commitments, and we will live up to our commitments in this regard.

I think, if you were to canvass—I had a chance to speak to the members of the RCMP or the Winnipeg Police Services, as I did yesterday at the ceremony—you would find pretty good support for what the government has done. In fact, that was expressed by the police chiefs that we visited when we visited Ottawa; both municipal and police officials were very appreciative of the additional resources that had been provided to enhance and expand policing services in Manitoba.

Mr. Hawranik: Getting back to that election promise of 100 more police on the street. Will that be 100 full-time equivalents or will that simply be 100 positions?

Mr. Chomiak: The commitment was for 100 more police. But I should add that I had a discussion on this with the member's—I don't know if they're the same party, because one's a Conservative Party, one's a Progressive Conservative Party. But, having said that, I had the same discussion and a very useful one with the Minister of Public Safety, Honourable Stockwell Day, in this regard with respect to the federal commitment for 2,500 municipal officers and 1,000 RCMP on the street. I had a lengthy discussion with them in terms of my own experience and my own suggestion. Now, our commitment was for 100 police officers; that would be 100 full-time equivalents, et cetera.

But I do want to point out that, in my experience, putting resources and intelligence resources into the police department can be as effective or more effective in terms of reducing crime. Some of the big busts that we've had in Manitoba have been a result of behind-the-scenes, good old-fashioned investigative police work, and I reminded the Minister of Public Safety that, from my brief experience in this portfolio, the resources that can be spent and utilized on intelligence and intelligence gathering is almost incalculable, from the evidence that I've been provided from my discussions with police and investigative officials.

Having said that, our commitment was for 100 police; it will be 100 police.

Mr. Hawranik: From the minister's response, then, he appears to be making a commitment that will be 100 full-time equivalents. My question goes again to how will we measure that promise whether that's fulfilled. From what level will it start, and when will we know that that promise is actually fulfilled?

Mr. Chomiak: I guess the best way to view that would be in terms of the funding and the actual results as we move through our mandate. We said we would expand police resources in '99. We've expanded it. We know that we have the highest ratios that we've ever had in this province, and we're going to continue to do that. So, best measured in actual observations and results.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate how many full-time equivalent police officer positions we had when that promise was made, so that at least when we get 100 full-time equivalents higher than that, I'll know that it's been fulfilled? Can he give me a number in terms of full-time equivalents at the time of the election?

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, we will certainly utilize statistics and numbers to show the results of our investments. I don't have any problem with providing information that actually shows both the commitment and the actual result.

Mr. Hawranik: Prior to announcing the result, would the minister then commit to providing me with the full-time equivalent numbers as it existed when that promise was made?

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, I'll provide the member—I think there are yearly stats that are put out by Stats Canada that monitors and looks at that that are available to both the member and to myself. We're not necessarily the employing agency with

respect to police services. In fact, we're once or twice removed in almost all cases. What we've done is we've targeted and provided funding to the employing agencies or in the case where we contract with those resources. So we've met those commitments; we'll continue to meet those commitments.

Mr. Hawranik: I agree with the minister. He's not the employing agency, but you did make a commitment for 100 more full-time equivalents on the street. So I would like to know the number from which you're going to increase in order to determine whether the 100 full-time equivalents are going to be there, and I thank the minister for providing me with that so we can measure objectively whether or not that promise is fulfilled.

My next question to the minister is: At what point will the officers be counted within that hundred more police officer promise? Will it include recruits or officers in training?

Mr. Chomiak: Obviously, the issues are issues in flux and issues in terms of changing targets, changing roles, changing functions. It could and should be a variety of functions. It's not dissimilar to the fact that we said the previous government had fired a thousand nurses and we would hire back, and the stats show from the nurse stats that in fact the number of nurses in Manitoba between '99 and the election in 2007 had gone up by—I think it was something like 1,200 to 1,500. That was the number of enrolments in terms of the registered nurses, so it's not dissimilar from the stats that the member has seen in terms of the increase in police officers and will see in the future in terms of the allocation and determination of police officers and the—I'm just very pleased that every time we talk to police officials and representatives, they speak very positively about what this government has done to provide resources to police and officials and to provide assistance to them in this regard.

Mr. Hawranik: Certainly, I think police would be very pleased if they knew from what number we're going to count the initial 100 police officers as well so that could be objectively measured, but I clearly wasn't asking about nurses, but the minister—he used to be the Minister of Health, of course, at one time. He's obviously aware that we went from nurses being employed in hospitals to being employed by regional health authorities. As I understand it, in fact, what happened there was that nurses were let go one day and rehired the next, and that's not any different, I

don't think, from what happened in Boundary Trails hospital where you fired a couple hundred nurses and then rehired them the next day. So that's the reality, I think, but the question is, and you brought up the health nurses, not me. In any event, I'd like to know from the minister how many more officers are going to be hired this year to partially fulfil that 100 new police officers, and does he have a plan for subsequent years? Is there a plan to hire, say, 25 a year? Or will that depend, I guess, upon the graduates and the recruiting that takes place?

* (16:30)

Mr. Chomiak: The commitment was to hire an additional 100 over the next four-year period. We may hire more. Certainly, we said that we would not hire less. We're in the process of working on next year's Estimates in this period of time.

I just wanted to provide a reference point, because, if you go look at the registered college of nurses and look at the number of registered nurses in Manitoba in '99 and then look in 2006, the numbers are significantly different. You cannot work as a nurse in Manitoba, whether you're at Boundary Trails or Mink Creek, unless you're registered as a nurse.

I don't want to get into it. I love the political reconstruction that is done. That dog won't hunt. We went through, you know, in '99, we went through an election. In 2003 we went through an election; 2007, we went through an election, and now you're going back and saying: Oh, no, that really didn't happen. People do remember; people do remember. People do know, and I suggest that's one of the reasons why we picked up seats in 2003 and 2007. People remember what happened in the 1990s, be it crime prevention, be it the number of police, be it the dealing with health care, be it dealing with environmental issues; people know that we promised to make a difference; we promised to improve, and we have.

As the Premier (Mr. Doer) often says, we're not perfect, but people know that we're moving in that direction, and that we have made significant progress.

Madam Chairperson: At this point, I just wanted to remind all honourable members that their remarks should be kept relevant to the matter before the committee. As our rule 75(3) states: "Speeches at a Committee of the Whole House must be strictly relevant to the item or clause under discussion."

Further, as it is noted on page 523 of Marleau and Montpetit, the requirement of relevance is necessary in order that the House might exercise its rights to reach a decision and to exclude from debate any discussion which does not contribute to that process.

In the consideration of current department, however, a global discussion has been agreed to allowing for some latitude in the scope of questions and answers. Within the context of this agreement, I would ask all members to focus their comments on the matters before this committee. I respectfully ask for your co-operation on this matter.

Mr. Hawranik: Thank you for reminding the minister this is Justice Estimates, not Health, but, in any event, I think it's probably something that he's very passionate about.

Getting back to the schedule of hires for which I've asked, and I still don't have an answer, but is there any schedule in terms of fulfilling that commitment over the next four years? Obviously, 25-year would be a reasonable commitment, or does he have another plan in terms of trying to fulfil that promise?

Mr. Chomiak: There are various municipal agreements. There are municipalities that employ police. There are various tripartite agreements. There are various agreements with the federal government. There are various training facilities that all deal with the issue of hiring, maintaining and continuing police services. The pledge in the election was to increase the complement by 100. That was the pledge over four years, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr. Hawranik: Another commitment made by the minister during the election was to add 20 Crown prosecutors. Can the minister provide me with some information in terms of what the plan is for increasing the number of prosecutors? I notice that there is, I believe it's, if memory serves me correctly, there might be another three that look like they're going to be hired this year, according to the Estimates.

Can you tell me over what level we're going to increase the number of prosecutors to add 20 prosecutors to the system? Is it going to be from the full-time equivalent level from last year's Estimates or how are we going to measure that?

Mr. Chomiak: The commitment was for 20 prosecutors. That's what we intend to do over the four-year period. The member should know that

there're different classifications of prosecutors and there's different specialization of prosecutors and different locations of prosecutors.

We intend to live up to our commitment which I think saw a 40 percent increase of prosecutors from '99 until now by this government, which is unprecedented in the province.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the minister to commit to an absolute level of 20 new prosecutors, not necessarily replacing people who leave, but I'd like to hear his commitment in terms of not replacing prosecutors who leave but 20 additional new prosecutors over 2006 levels.

Is he committing to that or from what level are we going to be increasing the numbers of prosecutors in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: I think if you look at the overall commitments at the end of period 2011, you'll see that the number of prosecutors has increased over 20. That will be something that will be apparent in the expenditure or the budgetary statements with respect to 2011.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I appreciate the opportunity that my colleague from Lac du Bonnet is allowing me to ask a few questions. I thought at one point I'd have more questions that I'd be able to ask of the Minister of Justice but things change, so I would like to put forward a few specific questions in the time that I'm allowed.

Could the minister indicate whether or not those who are entering incarceration as a result of a sentence in Manitoba undergo some type of a drug assessment to determine whether or not they have a drug addiction or a substance abuse problem before they enter the facility?

Mr. Chomiak: Just to clarify, is the member asking if everyone who's arrested or everyone who's sentenced goes through drug testing to determine whether or not they are addicted or have some illicit drugs? *[interjection]* Okay.

I am advised that it's part of risk assessment that's done on every individual that's sentenced, but it's not done in every case.

Mr. Goertzen: Just for clarification, the minister said it's done as part of risk assessment on every person who's sentenced, but it's not done on every case. So some determination is made in terms of who will get that portion of the risk assessment before they get incarcerated?

Mr. Chomiak: An assessment is made of an individual. A test is not made of every individual.

* (16:40)

Mr. Goertzen: I see. The reason I raise the issue, and the minister may know, I had the opportunity earlier in the year to visit an institution in the United States, Sheridan institution, which I would certainly commend. I know members of his staff probably get around to other places enough, but, certainly, if you haven't already had the opportunity to visit the institution, it's the largest drug therapy institution in the United States for those who are in medium security in their classification in Illinois.

One of the things I learned there was that they have a significant assessment in Illinois of those who are going into the prison system so they can see the nature of the incarceration and those that they have and how they should be treated when they are in incarceration. Sheridan is different, perhaps, than Headingley and probably most other institutions in Canada in that it's a therapeutic community. Everybody who is in the institution is dealing with a drug addiction. They have a specific rationale and courses that they go through as a result of that drug addiction as a therapeutic community.

I know I had raised this publicly with the minister, or maybe his spokesperson at the time indicated that probably wouldn't work in Manitoba because of the incarceration numbers, although, respectfully, I would suggest that with the overcrowding that we have currently, and so the deficiency in a capacity within the prison system and also the high number of drug cases you might find if you are doing a more thorough assessment, then this is something that should be looked at.

So I ask the minister whether or not he's willing to conduct that research or have staff in his department conduct that research to see if a therapeutic drug prison might be workable in Manitoba.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, I don't begrudge the member's suggestion that a therapeutic program be offered. I would actually wish that we could make intervention far earlier in the cycle of an individual before they're involved in criminal activity. It almost seems, in a lot of respects, we're at the end of the cycle when their person enters the criminal justice system. I would much sooner that we catch it at the front-end of the system and provide treatment because what happens is the criminal

justice system becomes the server of last resort in all areas, but the point of providing drug treatment is a very legitimate one. I think anecdotally most individuals who are involved in criminal law matters will tell you that they would probably say, I used to say, the vast majority of individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system are either involved with addiction issues or mental health issues.

Mr. Goertzen: While I echo the sentiments of the minister that the earlier the intervention an individual could have in relation to addiction, the more successful we'd be in reducing crime, I think it's a two-pronged component. Obviously, we need drug addiction treatment to be there on the streets or in the communities. A person shouldn't have to go to prison to get drug treatment, of course, but the fact that individuals are going to prison as a result of their drug addiction, either because they committed a crime for drugs or on drugs or perhaps both, it does I think speak to the need of individuals who have those particular addictions. I think a therapeutic community prison is certainly one thing that could be looked at, and I would ask that the minister do so. If any of his staff need any contacts or any information regarding Sheridan I would be happy to provide that in a non-partisan, bi-partisan fashion.

I wonder if the minister, on the same theme, could indicate whether or not there have been recent studies done on the recidivism rate of those who are leaving Headingley and might find their way back into the criminal system, generally, but also more specifically, into that institution.

Mr. Chomiak: I'm just speaking quickly. We will provide the member with that information, and secondly, we will take the member up on his advice. I do know that the planning of the women's correctional centre will incorporate a much more therapeutic environment with respect to offenders, both structurally and program-wise than is presently in place in the correction system. So I think there is a question of both structure and evolution of programming that needs to be applied to the system.

Mr. Goertzen: Final questions, and I'm sorry they're unrelated to each other. They're also unrelated to the previous line of questioning. Just in the time that I have, though, I did receive, when I was operating as the justice critic, correspondence, and I have received correspondence like this before about individuals who are under an order to pay

maintenance enforcement and then their arrangements have changed. For example, the spouse who was receiving the payment who had the children decides to give up the children to the paying spouse, and the paying spouse continues to have to pay because they can't get a revised order in place. In this particular case, it was somebody in northern Manitoba. There were very few courts sitting and they couldn't get the revision in place. So you had the situation where the spouse that had the children was paying child support to the former spouse who didn't have the children. Of course, that's opposite of what the intention of child support is.

So this particular concern was raised about how can we ensure that when there's a change of circumstance, that there isn't sort of a long delay until a new order is in place and Maintenance Enforcement isn't enforcing to the detriment of the children.

Mr. Chomiak: I am familiar with that situation. Part of the issue of the pilot project we're having with the federal government regarding recalculation as an automatic procedure, vis-à-vis going court order I think is included in solving that process, but I will get specific information back to the member on that matter.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the minister's undertaking on that issue. I mean, I certainly think it's one that's important and not just in the individual situation, but more generally.

Last question, then, for the minister on an unrelated topic. Again, I apologize to staff for moving around to different fields of the department. During the election campaign, the NDP announced that there would be additional RCMP officers funded in the province. I'd like to know—and I apologize because this has been asked by my colleague—but how it is that those positions will be assigned? As part of that, of course, I'd like to lobby for the Steinbach rural detachment which, because of increased population in that particular region finds itself, while they're at full complement—find their complement numbers to be low compared to the, not only the distance, but the number of people that they are in fact policing at this time.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, I'm not sure I caught the exact question, but it's probably the same question I asked Stockwell Day about the 2,500 officers. There's no question that every municipality and community in Manitoba wants additional officers. There's no question that in some cases,

those needs are more acute than in other locations. We generally look towards the—and the RCMP have been generally objective in terms of providing the resources that are necessary to the specific regions. I don't know if I can answer it any more specifically than that.

Mr. Hawranik: I noticed also during the election, the NDP promised to fund the electronic monitoring of repeat auto theft offenders. I ask the minister what the schedule is and what he has in mind in order to fulfill that particular promise.

Mr. Chomiak: As I indicated earlier, this issue has been out there for some time. When the opportunity arose to partner with Nova Scotia on this matter, we took advantage of it. I indicated publicly that we planned to have 20 auto offenders under electronic monitoring by the fall of this year. That was the commitment that was made.

I should point out that I keep getting articles put across my desk about electronic monitoring failing, which was one of the issues in the first instance that made one wary of the technological solution as it's an evolving trend. Having said that, latching on—no pun intended—to the Nova Scotia model was part of our way to try to mitigate the risks associated with electronic monitoring and surveillance. Keeping in mind that regardless of how one monitors, there still has to be a physical person at the end of the day to breach the individual on probation and take them into custody.

* (16:50)

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate how much this particular program will cost on an annual basis?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, we'll track that down. If the member wants, while we—the member could ask another question. I'll see if I can do two things at once.

Mr. Hawranik: If I could also find out from the minister what the cost of those 20—I assume they're going to be ankle bracelets—what the cost of those 20 ankle bracelets are versus the cost of maintaining and monitoring that system? I take it from the minister's response that there's going to be at least one person in charge of monitoring. Of course, the police will be following up, I take it, in terms of whether or not the individual is where they should be. But in terms of monitoring, I believe the minister indicated there was one person involved only with that.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, I will provide actually a short briefing note to the member outlining how the system works and what the intentions are and what the costs are associated with that. The point I was actually trying to make was that at the end of the day, whether one breaches a court order and doesn't answer the telephone or goes out of the residence or whether one does it electronically in terms of the breach, they still will have to be apprehended and taken into custody by an officer, notwithstanding GPS, which can be removed.

Having said that, I will provide an outline for the member of the system and how it works and the costs associated with it.

Mr. Hawranik: I also note in the election promise during the last election and getting back to the 100 more police on the streets that it was indicated in that same release that 30 additional police officers full-time equivalents would be for the RCMP to serve rural Manitoba. I know that the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) just lobbied you for more police presence in his community. Certainly, I think, in fact, it's my duty to lobby the minister for more police presence in Beausejour, particularly since it's a small rural community but it's growing as well. But the fact that there really is no one on active duty between about midnight and 6 o'clock in the morning every day of the week, that's of concern to many residents who find that there's a lot more—it seems that the criminal element seems to know that there are no police on the streets at that particular time. We're finding that there's more vandalism between midnight and 6 a.m. and that's creating an issue, I think, in our community. So, having said that, I, too, would of course lobby for more RCMP within our community.

Having said that, the smaller communities are, in fact, going without 24-hour policing. Are there any plans to expand, particularly in the Beausejour area, expand police presence, particularly between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m.?

Mr. Chomiak: Overall in terms of rural policing, we do rely upon the list of priorities that's provided to us by the RCMP and lobby accordingly. That's followed up by each province lobbying accordingly to the federal government. We were concerned that the new initiative would see police only go to large urban areas where they're having significant problems, Edmonton in particular, Calgary lately, Toronto, and that rural and northern areas of Canada and Manitoba in particular would be overlooked. But we do rely on

the RCMP in terms of their prioritization in this regard.

Mr. Goertzen: Just one last question. I've already broken my promise not to ask any more questions.

Can the minister indicate whether or not those who are in institutions under provincial jurisdiction such as Headingley, whether or not they receive expedited health-care service, whether it's MRIs or other sort of diagnostic treatment that they might need under the course of an incarceration, or are they simply on the normal list of waiting for services?

Mr. Chomiak: I would surmise that the same rules apply as to any other Manitoban, that is that the access to service is based on the acuteness and the level of illness or treatment that is required. I wouldn't see it being any different within that population as it is in any other population.

Mr. Hawranik: Given the fact that we will be concluding Estimates in Justice at 5 o'clock, I'd like now to proceed to a line-by-line analysis of the Estimates.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$115,673,500 for Justice, Criminal Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,317,900 for Justice, Civil Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$123,615,600 for Justice, Corrections, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$45,948,200 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,346,800 for Justice, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for Estimates of this department is item 4.1(a) Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 4.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Hawranik: I'd just like to express my appreciation to staff for attending the Estimates and, certainly, providing us with the information that we received today and on Thursday. Of course, I look forward to further information as indicated by the minister during the Estimates process and, hopefully, it will be provided within a timely basis.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes. I, too, want to thank the staff, and I want to thank the member and all of the members of the House for making this an expeditious process. We'll try to provide the information as soon as possible. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,655,400 for Justice, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Justice.

The time being 5 p.m., committee rise.

**AGRICULTURE, FOOD
AND RURAL INITIATIVES**

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a general manner with the resolutions to be passed once all questioning is completed with the exception of resolution 3.2 which will be passed once questioning on that section of the department is completed. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I believe I would like to pick up where we left off, but before we do that, I would ask that—unfortunately, as much fun as we're having and due to time constraints, I have been asked to wrap it up today so the time lines, if we could have some type of notice and enough time to

pass the line by line before 5 o'clock, that would be appreciated, so I don't get in trouble with my House leader any more than I already am. I do thank you for that.

I would like to go back to the educational tax that we had asked on Thursday evening before adjourning. I believe, if my notes serve me correctly, the minister and her staff had outlined the amount of money that was refunded. We only had 2005 available, and they have up to three years to apply, and there was \$34,103 that's been applied for, of which \$33,930 is paid out.

My question, if I remember correctly—I don't have it in front of me—was the outstanding amount of money that is still owing to producers based on 2005 and also if there are any figures available for 2006.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Chairperson, it would appear that most of the people that were going to apply in 2005 have applied, so there shouldn't be that many more, although there could be a few more. They have till the end of the year to apply.

We budgeted \$20.4 million and we have already paid out \$20.9 million for 2005. For 2006-07, the number of applicants is down from what it was in '05, but that's reasonable. They still have time to make their application and we budgeted for \$24.6 million. To date, we've paid out \$21.8 million.

Mr. Eichler: On the way the formula has been set where the farmer pays his taxes and applies for it back, in the times which we find in agriculture, very tough in the past four years, we've seen a lot of hardship. Will the minister or her staff tell the committee whether or not they're looking at a different mechanism of which we can just eliminate the 60 percent that's being paid for by the government rather than have the farmers apply for it back?

Ms. Wowchuk: The amount that's being paid back this year is 65 percent and, no, we are not looking to change it.

Mr. Eichler: Based on the numbers that the minister's provided, could she outline for the committee the amount—do we have any idea of the amount of money that has not been claimed or will not be claimed by the number of producers?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's hard to give an accurate number of the amount that may not be claimed because the applicants for the calendar year property tax for '04

can still apply up to December of this year. We can't give you a final number, but if you look at what we've budgeted for, we're close to it. But the final number on what may not be applied for is not available for that year. Of course, for this year, it won't be either because they have three years, again, to apply.

Mr. Eichler: I would like to move on to another issue that I know the minister and I have a bit of a disagreement on and that has to do with the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. We did just pull off the financial statement ending December 31, 2006, based on 277 days of revenues and expenditures. The first line that is there, the revenues came to \$627,705. Does that include the share by the provincial government or is that actually the amount of contribution that was paid in by the producers on the \$2-per-head levy?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chair, the levy of 627 was the producer contribution, the producer's share or the producer's levy.

Mr. Eichler: So, for the benefit of the statement, the way it's been presented, that grant of \$375,000, is that a portion of the matching dollars? I know the amount of money that was supposed to go in was dollar for dollar for those dollars that were actually left in the levy. So when will we see that money flow, or will the 375 be a part of a clawback, or is the 375 on top of the \$2-per-head levy that will actually stay in the council?

* (14:50)

Ms. Wowchuk: The 375 that the member refers to is a grant. It is part of the million dollars that we said that we would put in to get the Enhancement Council started. So that was the amount that was put in for the '06 year. Then there would be a matching amount. After April of this year we match what the producer is paying in, but, of course, we match after the refunds. We do not match prior to refunds being taken out. So the member through his activities has reduced the amount of money that we will have to match toward going to the council.

Mr. Eichler: So the amount of refund according to the financial statement for December 31 was just under \$170,000 so they would have been in a deficit if it wouldn't have been for the grant coming in to December 31 of '06. The chair of the committee, a Mr. Uruski—who is one of the NDP, minister of agriculture—has run expenses in excess of \$16,000 in the first 277 days. Is this standard from most

councils that the minister has seen in the past? It seems quite high, given the fact that they really didn't begin work until September when the money started actually coming in. But \$16,000 is an awful lot of money.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the council would not have been in debt in the first year because we made it a commitment, recognizing that when you start a council like this, there are operating costs and start-up costs. That's why we made the commitment to put a grant in place for the operating, and we'll do the same this year.

With regard to the reimbursements from the council members and, in particular, Mr. Uruski, I really want to thank Mr. Uruski for taking on this role to establish this council. It was one that producers had asked us for, but these are not normal costs. When you're starting up a council, there are some additional costs, and certainly in this kind of situation, there was a lot of legal work that had to be done. The investment advisory council had to be established and I would give Mr. Uruski credit for being so thorough in ensuring that all of the legal work was done properly and that the council would not run into trouble for not doing everything as diligently as had been done. But in reality, a first year would always be a little bit higher costs than the ongoing operation.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for her comments. The executive director's salary, what does that fall under? Is that a subcontract wage that's been paid to her and what is her base salary?

Ms. Wowchuk: The executive director is hired under contract by the council. They were responsible for hiring her. It is a professional services contract that has been signed, and she was responsible for doing a lot of the work to set up the council. She is a lawyer by background and was able to help the council set up. As I had said to the member earlier, that this was setting up the council and doing all of the legal work and the ensuring that it was handled properly. Her annual salary is \$103,500.

Mr. Eichler: On that position, is it considered a part-time or full-time position, and are there a number of hours that the executive director is required to work?

An Honourable Member: Three hours a day, four days a week, five on bad days.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the contract called for a base work week of 15 hours per week at a rate of \$150 to \$225 per week. That makes up 46 weeks, and that makes up the annual salary of \$103,500.

Mr. Eichler: The council's by-laws and marketing plan regulations state that they have to have an annual general meeting. Can the minister tell the committee if they did have that meeting and, if so, when and where?

Ms. Wowchuk: My understanding is that, yes, they did hold an annual meeting. I don't have the details as to when it was held, but I will endeavour to get that information for the member.

Mr. Eichler: I was wondering if the minister could also provide us with a list of who attended if it was a public meeting. There must have been a record kept, so if we could get a copy of that as well, it would certainly be appreciated.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, it was the council's meeting. If the council retained a list of the attendees, we will endeavour to acquire it, but we do not have that information here today.

* (15:00)

Mr. Eichler: With respect to the refund application deadline, the minister and I have had discussions about this before with the notice of which was being advertised in the rural papers or on radio.

Could the minister or her staff highlight for the committee why the deadlines were not advertised? If so, where were they advertised and how much money did they spend on those advertisements?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the information about the refund was posted at all of the points of sale. There were trade shows at MCPA where this information was available. It is on their Web site. The auction marts also put out information to let people know where, the dates, and how to get their refund. Council members also work closely with people involved in the industry.

So, there were no newspaper ads, but it was posted at all of the sites. I know that in some of the auction marts, there in fact was an insert put into their envelopes with their cheques making it known about how and when to apply for your refund. As I said, the Web site and information at trade shows were also ways that the council got their information out to their producers. If I look at the level of refunds and I know the level of support that was there for the industry for this checkoff, I think that people were

well aware of the information that was required to apply for a refund.

Mr. Eichler: Does the minister or her staff have any indication how much money has been applied for, to date, from the last opportunity where producers were allowed to pull their money out?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, from September 1 to December 31, '06, there was about 27 percent refund of \$169,433; from January 1 to June 30, to date there's been a refund of \$270,958, but there still could be some outstanding because there is a period after that date where they can still apply.

Mr. Eichler: So, out of the \$270,000, or almost \$271,000, that's been applied for back, what were the contributions for that same period where the \$271,000 has been applied for for refund?

Ms. Wowchuk: The total amount between January 1 and June 30 was \$679,209, slightly higher than it was for the period of September 1 to December 31 when it was \$627,705.

Mr. Eichler: Based on the financial statements to December 31, the budget of approximately half a million dollars, is the budget very close to the same for a per year basis, or will that be increased substantially to reflect 365 days instead of that of 277?

Ms. Wowchuk: Can the member indicate if he is referring to a 2007 budget?

Mr. Eichler: That is correct.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the expenditures are expected to be slightly lower than they were in 2006 because in 2006 there were a lot of start-up costs.

Mr. Eichler: With respect to the MCEC investing in slaughter facilities within the province I know there've been several proposals that have been brought forward to the committee. Unfortunately we haven't seen any of those that the committee has seen where they want to invest their money. Any of this money that's been raised by the \$2 levy, will the minister or her staff have a comment in regard to investing outside the province of Manitoba? Will any of that money be allowed to flow for investments in slaughter capacity, whether it's increased outside the province?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, decisions on investments are made by the council and I'm sure that if the council was making a decision, as the

member is referring to, it would be based on a benefit for Manitoba producers.

Mr. Eichler: So just to clarify for MCEC, if they did decide to invest outside the province would that be just inventory or would it be investing in the facility itself, because we know that there's a number of producers that have money invested in other plants within the province of Manitoba and some of those producers haven't been paid, so we're very concerned whether or not this will go to offsetting any of those debt costs.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the council cannot invest in bricks and mortar in another province. They can't do that, but they can, if there was some unique situation where there might be an opportunity that Manitoba producers were asking them for, the council could consider that. But ultimately this is about investing in Manitoba and increasing slaughter capacity or processing in this province. If you're asking about investing in bricks and mortar in construction outside the province, no, they can't do that.

Mr. Eichler: So the amount of money that's in this council and the \$10 million that the minister has committed to see that slaughter capacity be increased within the province of Manitoba, which is, you know, a fair amount of money that's going to be going in to trying to see that increase, what do her staff and the minister suggest that these investments do in order to try to increase that capacity within the province of Manitoba?

* (15:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, when people were looking at increasing capacity in this province, one of the challenges that they were facing was how to raise the capital. It has been very difficult for some to raise the capital, and that is the purpose of this fund, to put in place a support that would allow for the capital when some entrepreneur comes along and wants to increase slaughter or processing capacity in this province. It could be expansion of an existing facility. It could be a start-up of a new one. It could be someone who is looking to further value-add into our industry here in this province.

So there are many opportunities and there have been people who have come to council and applications have been reviewed. They will continue to work with people in the industry.

Mr. Eichler: I was wondering if the minister could outline for the committee if there are proposals that they are serious about moving forward at this point in time, and if not, is it time for the minister to re-evaluate whether or not the MCEC is actually going to be bringing something of an opportunity within the province of Manitoba or if it's just a committee that has failed from the beginning and should be disbanded.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the proposals did not come to me or to the department. The proposals go to the council and they go there in confidence. I cannot share with the member details of proposals because these issues come forward in confidence. It does take time to review and I know that the council is actively working.

The member talks about ending this equity fund but that just fits in line with what I've heard from opposition members. They do not believe that there is any need for slaughter capacity in this province. I know his predecessor, who was my critic prior to him said that there was enough slaughter capacity in this country, and, in fact, there was a shortage of livestock going to the facilities in Alberta. I'm more interested in increasing slaughter capacity in this province and working with producers, and we will continue in that endeavour to try to increase it in whatever opportunity we can.

We would certainly like to see federally inspected plants in this province, but if existing producers want to make changes to their facilities or move to further value-added, then we are there to support them.

Mr. Eichler: I have to agree with the minister in regard to increasing slaughter capacity. One of the ways we can do that is with the SRMs. That has been a significant increased cost for the packing plants. In fact, one of our processors in the Interlake, Interlake Packers, has been quoted in the paper that his are anywhere from \$10,000 to \$12,000 a month, and the program that was brought out by the federal-provincial government put a deadline of December 31 on that time line which won't give the plants much of an opportunity to get those business plans in order, in order to make that become a reality.

So that's one way that we could certainly see that. Is the minister prepared to extend that deadline or at least make some type of a change to it to allow for the packing plants to increase their SRM cost by extending the deadline?

Ms. Wowchuk: The deadline that the member refers to is a federal government deadline of March 31, 2008. We have indicated to the federal government that we do not believe all this money can be spent by that time and have asked for an extension. The federal government tells us that that date is firm.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): In answering the questions regarding proposed projects that might be before the committee, Mr. Chair, the minister was very vague in terms of whether there are any projects in front of the committee. Can the minister tell the committee whether or not any projects have been approved, how much they've been approved for in dollars or whether there are any that are being considered by the committee right now?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the information that the member is asking for is confidential information because the proponents go to council in confidence. However, proponents tell us that there are some that are before the council right now. I cannot give the member the number of applications or the dollar amount, but I can indicate that the member asked if anybody had received money. There was an approval for Ranchers Choice for funding, but that project did not succeed. According to proponents, there are others who have made application to council now.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I don't recall in either of our questions that we asked for any names of applicants that had come forward. We just asked how many applications were before the council. The council has spent a half-million dollars plus, and what have they got to show for it?

The question is—and you know what, if this was a positive initiative, I'm sure the minister would be crowing from the top of buildings about how successful this committee is, but in fact she can't even give us an indication of any initiatives that have been proposed or have been put forward by this committee and whether there has even been one of those, other than Ranchers Choice, initiatives move forward.

We're not asking for names. We're simply saying: How many projects have been approved? How many projects are in the hopper? The minister, surely, has to know those numbers.

* (15:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: We believe that there are five projects that have been submitted. One was approved, as I indicated. That was Ranchers Choice,

but they then withdrew that money. The Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has indicated that he's familiar with one of the projects that has an application in.

What happens in some of these cases is that some of these people look at moving toward a federal plant, and then they find out what the requirements are for a federal plant, and they are pretty stringent. Some of them are going back and reconsidering their plan as to how they can expand their business without going to the level of a federal plant. There are applications and the council is working with proponents on how they might increase slaughter capacity.

The member also refers to the amount of money that was spent in the first year. Again, I'll say to him, in the first year, as with any organization, the start-up costs are significant and the legal costs to make sure that all is being done right are also significant. We do not anticipate those as higher costs this year.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chairman, we have a slaughter industry in our province that's in trouble. We don't have one. It's non-existent, except for a few little abattoirs around the country.

The minister put this in place with the great fanfare that the mandatory \$2 tax on farm cattle was going to be reinvested, along with her money, into the development of new facilities and the expansion of facilities. Yet, to date, she can't give us a single plant that has taken advantage of any of the opportunities that she so boldly put forward. It seems to me that this council, the only thing they have done is been able to pay themselves fairly handsomely and create half a million dollars of expense, but no tangible project can be announced, or has been announced, or can be put forward by the minister at this time.

I ask the minister: Is this the kind of success rate that she is comfortable with and that she's proud of in terms of an industry in this province that really needs to have some attention paid to it and should be moving posthaste, rather than dithering with the money and the project and people's lives, Mr. Chair?

Ms. Wowchuk: I would put the question to the member who was part of government in the '90s, and I would ask him if he's proud of his record when his government let the slaughter industry collapse in this province. I would ask the member, because I can easily pull the numbers, and the member knows full well that there was an opportunity when the

slaughter industry needed support, whether it be Burns or Canada Packers. Certainly, the facility of Brandon could have used some help, but the member was part of a government that chose not to work with them, and now, yes, our slaughter industry is in a very difficult situation in this province.

I want to give credit to those people who are doing slaughter in this province to meet some of Manitoba's needs, but there is much more work that has to be done. Producers came to us and said they wanted to be part of the solution. Producers came to us and said they wanted to do checkoff. We listened to producers, and that's why the checkoff is in place.

It's unfortunate that the members opposite aren't as supportive of the cattle industry and are telling people that they should pull their money out rather than being part of a team that says we have a problem here. It's been a long-time problem. We have an opportunity to build slaughter capacity. And producers want to be part of the solution, but we have not had the support from opposition on this one.

Mr. Chairman, I hope, as I said, I know that there are applications that council is looking at, and I'm hopeful that soon there will be a project that producers will see that it is worthwhile to put their funds in this because it creates new opportunities for them.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, before the minister flies off at the mouth and puts statements on the record that are absolutely false, she should perhaps check with her staff who are much more professional in terms of giving her advice before she speaks.

The cattle industry in this province was lost under the now chair of this council, Mr. Bill Uruski, and I happened to be in the House at that time, Mr. Chair, when Mr. Uruski was the one who sent this industry south. We lost Canada Packers. We lost Swift. We lost all of our entire processing industry in this province under an NDP government and under a minister whose name is Bill Uruski. That is the fact. So maybe the minister should consult with her staff. They would probably give her more accurate information than what she's spewing on the record right now.

Mr. Chairperson, I simply asked a few straight-forward questions. I asked the minister whether she's satisfied with the success of this council given that, after a year of operation, they have not been able to support one single project. They have spent half a million dollars in administration, have not been able

to produce one positive enhancement of the slaughter industry that the minister can point to. Now, if she can point to some successes, great. Let's get on with the job. But right now she hasn't got the ability to do that because there just aren't any.

Ms. Wowchuk: I just want to add one comment to the other issue. I will bring the chart for the member to the House just to remind him and present him with what happened to slaughter capacity in the '90s, and that'll be the end of it.

Mr. Chairperson, with regard to this fund, this is producers' dollars that are going in, and we have a responsibility to producers to be sure that wise investments are being made. It takes a lot of time to build a processing facility. We know that other facilities have been built since BSE, and there are plants that have run into problems as well. So we have to be very careful.

We recognize that markets have to be developed as well. It's one thing to slaughter, but you also have to have a market to put that product into. When you're competing with some of the large-scale plants, you have to think through this very carefully and be sure that we are targeting and getting into the right market. That's what people who are looking to expand their facilities right now are looking at. They're looking at where the opportunities are. What are the special markets that they can fill that might not be filled as easily by some of the larger facilities? So we continue to work with them, and the council continues to review applications. I am confident; I am hopeful, I should say, that we will see results from this and that the council will make a wise investment of producers' money.

Mr. Eichler: With what the minister has just put on the record in regard to analysis, has the provincial government or the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council done analysis on whether or not the province of Manitoba would be competitive in the marketplace with a processing plant, and if so, what type of market will the department be recommending that the increase in slaughter capacity go towards? Is it—

An Honourable Member: Ranchers Choice.

Mr. Eichler: Ranchers Choice is the one that was brought forward. We put a lot of money into that, and we still have some equipment that has not been sold; it's collecting dust and so forth within the storage. We don't have any indication whether or not the minister has even sold that equipment. So those

are the things that we have to have a look at within the parameters of the department.

* (15:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, you know, the member refers to the equipment. I would remind him that it was a group of producers that made the decision to purchase that equipment because they thought it was an opportunity. I'm surprised that the member would speak so disparagingly of producers who were trying very hard to purchase equipment. I would tell the member that they moved quickly and then they came to us for support. We supported them. The equipment still belongs to the producers. The member says we should sell the equipment; it's not ours to sell until the producers complete their business at the Ranchers Choice Co-op.

With regard to studies, the department did do a generic feasibility study on what we could do here in this province, and the generic feasibility study said we should be focussing on niche markets. That's where they felt the opportunities were for the producers, but each entrepreneur will make their own decisions. They will develop a market, they will look at what marketing plans have to be developed, they will be looking—and we have supported them. We've supported them in their feasibility studies as they develop these plans, and we will continue to work with them when they look at opportunities just as we do with many other sectors that look at opportunities to add value to agriculture products in this province.

Mr. Eichler: I believe it was the minister's, one of her appointments, Frieda Krpan that actually took a cheque down to the border for the equipment as it came across the border. So, is the minister saying that this equipment belongs to the ranchers that invested money in it and the money that they get, if they sell this equipment, will then go to the producers? Because they've already been paid back their investment, so this will actually be a money-maker for their investment is what the minister is trying to say.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the cheque that the member refers to that Frieda Krpan took to the border was actually her own personal cheque. She took her own personal cheque to free up that equipment so that she could—at the time we could see that equipment move. That was a decision that was made by Ms. Krpan and by council.

The member talks about whether the council—the Ranchers Choice board could sell the equipment. If

they were to sell the equipment, they have debts. The province is one of the creditors, so there's no way there could be a windfall because if there are bills to pay they have to work on those. My understanding is that the fees and the money that were collected from producers by Ranchers Choice, their contributions have been reimbursed, but there are still outstanding issues that the council has to deal with, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Eichler: So the minister's saying that Frieda Krpan took a personal cheque for a million and a half dollars down to the border to pay for equipment, equipment that would belong to somebody else, not her, so theoretically the province has not reimbursed her for that money and that equipment then would belong to Ranchers Choice board. Is that what the minister is saying?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the member asked about an individual taking a cheque to the border and, in fact, Ms. Krpan did take a cheque down to cover some of the duties that would hold up the equipment. She did not want that equipment to be held at the border. She put her own money, and then the board reimbursed her, but at the time she put the money in so that the equipment could be moved and, yes, she put her money in, then it was reimbursed by Ranchers Choice.

Mr. Eichler: So the ownership of the equipment then does belong to Ranchers Choice, the minister has said. Could the minister indicate how much money was paid out by this individual, and this was approved by the Securities Commission for the way the business transaction took place?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member asked if Ranchers Choice owns the equipment. Yes, they do. With regard to the process of paying that duty that we were discussing, my understanding is that it was done with the knowledge of the Ranchers lawyer and they would have been aware of commitments of funds that were made and obviously, I would assume, their lawyer would have approved this or it wouldn't have happened.

* (15:40)

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Chairman, the first question that I have for the minister is: The St. Pierre vet board, along with a lot of other vet boards, have had a difficult time attracting veterinarians. In the interim of that, some of the supporting municipalities have decided to pull out, as you may well know. In the process, they did not pay their

dues. The board, apparently, has contacted your office, and you agreed to send these people a letter.

That letter, Ms. Minister, I have to say, was very well appreciated by the board because all of the municipalities paid up. The board was terribly happy about that, however, they were terribly disappointed when the Department of Agriculture failed to pay their share to match what the municipalities had paid.

So could you explain to us why that didn't take place?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, I'm advised that the vet district is taking us to court over this issue, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Minister, why would the board be forced to take you to court?

Ms. Wowchuk: Because it's before the courts, it's inappropriate for me to comment on that.

Mr. Graydon: Will the minister confirm that she's not closing offices in rural Manitoba and is actively seeking to fill vacancies?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, we are not closing offices and, yes, we are actively moving on filling vacancies.

Mr. Graydon: I'm certainly pleased that she's indicated that that's what she's doing. We're more than happy about that. What we would also wonder is why she doesn't wish to instruct government services to enter into any long-term lease agreements in the R.M. of Franklin and why the vacancy has been for over six months for the half-time position?

Ms. Wowchuk: With regard to the long-term leases, we continue to evaluate opportunities whenever leases come up and look at where we might partner, where we might be able to get the best location. There is not always the desire to get into long-term leases because there could be other opportunities.

With regard to the position that the member refers to, this area of the province is served by a GO team. There are services, and as I said the other day, there are no boundaries. People provide services throughout the region. It's quite seamless and many people are in the fields. With the technology that we have right now, especially cellphones, people can be reached just about anywhere.

Specifically, the position that the member is referring to, this position is on our priorities of positions and will be filled as positions are prioritized, but at this moment it is not being filled.

Mr. Graydon: The continuity is terribly important and it's terribly important to rural Manitoba as well. In the situation in the R.M. of Franklin, it has been a month-by-month lease for the last three years. I would suggest that that was more than ample time to make any changes if there were changes to be made, and as you've indicated, you certainly wouldn't want to move anybody. I think, for the budgeting purposes of different people that do lease office spaces, that the uncertainty of this type of arrangement, as you can well agree, is difficult for them to budget.

When you make mention to the cell-phone service, it may well exist in this part of the country, but it's non-existent along the border for 120 miles except for in the village of Vita that just now got cell service. Up until then, we don't have that. So, Madam Minister, I think it's important that we continue with some reasonable length leases and more especially with them after a three-year period.

However, Mr. Chairman, I would like to go on to another avenue, and it has to deal with the CAIS program. I have had the opportunity to deal with a constituent's personal file. It's very confusing and I'm going to give you just a little bit of the history, and then perhaps your department can tell me how this works.

* (15:50)

August 16, the individual was told that there was an underpayment for the year of 2003. That underpayment was a total of \$4,200 and change. A letter and a cheque issued on August 22, six days later, a cheque was issued for \$1,194. No explanation, explanation to follow.

On, roughly, we're going to say somewhere around the 7th of September, no the 10th of September, this individual called the CAIS program to see what the discrepancy was, from the \$4,200 to the \$1,194, and was told that this individual had an overpayment, a bill that hadn't been paid from the CAIS program in 2003. Upon inquiring, asked when that bill may have been issued because they had not seen it. They said, yes, they could tell him when it was issued, however, after extensive search on their computer couldn't find that. They couldn't find that, so they said to this individual, we'll get back to you, but we have good news for you: we have just cut a cheque for you for \$14,823. So the individual's pretty happy; he'd lost three, but he'd gained 14 with paper to follow for the explanation. The explanation came. He was really owed \$39,000 and change. However, there was only a 50 percent payment of \$19,000

minus another overpayment for 2003 of 48, which left him with a cheque of 14.

Now this has happened in 30 days. So, this morning, Madam Minister, his accountant called me and said, I have just talked to the CAIS program, and he is now in a deficit of \$19,000.

Can you or your staff explain because you administer this? Someone administers this in this province. When the accountant called back, they said, if you want an explanation, you have to apply in writing. The front-line people, the people that are on the phones do not know what's happening in the program. If you're a partner in that program, you must know.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, this sounds like a real nightmare for this individual, and it is a very challenging situation. I would say to the member that it's the federal government that administers the program for the province of Manitoba, but I would ask him to speak to this individual and if this individual will give us the authority to look into it, we can do that for him. We have done this for many individuals who have run into difficulty like this. So I would encourage him to go back and talk to his constituents. If he is prepared to share that information with my office, then we will definitely follow up for him and try to clarify this. It's not fair to have these kinds of situations arise.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Minister, we know that the hog industry in the province of Manitoba is in dire straits. The beef industry is in dire straits. When these types of issues come up, we can understand why there's still \$60-some million owed on the cash advances. If we are a partner in this province in this federal program, do we have no input at all?

Ms. Wowchuk: Of course, we have input. We make a contribution and we have input into the design of the program, but the member is raising a very specific case without us having the details. So it's very difficult to comment on what the problems would be. I have said that we would be quite prepared to look into this case as we do into others. As we review these cases, this gives us an opportunity to look at where the shortfalls of the program are, where changes might be made and what kind of improvements. Again, I would encourage the member to talk to his constituent and see whether he is willing to share the information, give us the authority to investigate, and we're quite prepared to do that.

Mr. Graydon: I will take that forward to the individual, and I'll pass that along to him, Madam Minister. I have one question going back to the St. Pierre vet clinic. Because it's before the courts as you say, I also realize that it has not gone to the court of discovery. If I understand correctly and my information is correct, that board has approached you for mediation. Are you open to mediation in this situation, Madam Minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, this is a money matter, and we've received advice from legal counsel on how we should deal with it. I'm not aware of any requests for mediation, but now that it's started the legal process I don't think we have the opportunity to revert. So we have to continue on the path that we're on. It's unfortunate that these situations arise, but when they do we have to respect the courts and not make very many comments on the issue.

Mr. Graydon: It's unfortunate these do arise. Madam Minister, I have no idea how it could have possibly led to this, other than the fact that, maybe, there was no one from your department at the board level when the decisions were made. I can only assume that, and it's too bad that it happened, but I think you need to take the right step forward. Spending money on lawyers and ruining vet boards is not in the best interest of the province of Manitoba nor rural Manitoba.

Ms. Wowchuk: I thank the member for that advice.

Mr. Eichler: We'd like to move onto the hog industry and the moratorium that was placed on the hog industry by the minister some time back. We will be interested to know of an update on the CEC in regard to the hearings that have taken place, and whether or not we will be meeting the deadline that has been set by the minister. I know she said that she wouldn't force them to make a recommendation to her, but she did set a deadline of November 31, of which she had hoped to be able to have a decision made. Could we, in fact, see the moratorium lifted at the end of November?

* (16:00)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, this is a CEC process and there is a very clearly spelled out path on how CEC will operate. They've certainly done their public hearings and collected a lot of information. I understand that a report is being written, but that report will not come to me. That report will come to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers).

Mr. Eichler: So does the minister have any indication of whether or not the deadline will be met that she's publicly stated? The 30th of November would be—a decision would be made on whether or not to continue with a moratorium or not.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, when the Clean Environment Commission was called in to do a review of the hog industry, the Premier (Mr. Doer) indicated in his comments that he would like a report within the year, and I anticipate that there will be a report within a year.

Again, I say that this is not my report. It is the Clean Environment Commission's report and they are a quasi-judicial body and operate independently of government.

Mr. Eichler: As the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) pointed out, the livestock industry is under a large amount of stress, as we know, and the hog industry is one of those that are in deep trouble right now. Does the government have any type of a plan or see how this is going to play out over the next few months?

Ms. Wowchuk: Indeed, this is a very challenging time for the producers. Particularly the pork industry is facing a high dollar which impacts on their returns. The grain producers are finally getting some higher prices, but when the grain producers get higher prices that means higher feed costs. Certainly, there are more demands for feed right now for various sources.

But that's why we have the safety net program. The CAIS program is there to help with adjustments when there are declining margins, and, in fact, under CAIS there is a targeted advance program which was used by the cattle industry when they had their severe declines in income. The pork industry has written and asked us to initiate the discussions to get the targeted advance program in place for the pork industry, so that they can get more of their money up front. I have contacted the federal Minister of Agriculture and asked him to consider that.

Mr. Eichler: Because of the time lines that are involved, do we have an indication from the committee, or from the staff, how long this targeted advance program takes in order to kick in for the cash to start flowing to these producers? I know I have a letter from an individual that is quite a ways away.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the targeted advance program is a way of advancing cash during

a time of low incomes, and once it's agreed upon, we hope that the money could flow within 90 days.

Mr. Eichler: Well, we're still on the hog industry. I know the hog processing plant that was proposed within the city of Winnipeg. There's still a desire and, I believe, a need within the province of Manitoba to proceed with a new processing plant within the province. Has the minister had any discussions with any of these organizations in order to meet the infrastructure needs as far as the province is concerned, and where does she see this industry going within the next short time?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, I have had discussions with people on further processing of hogs in this province.

Mr. Eichler: I would like to move on to the country-of-origin labelling. The minister and I have both had talks on the other side of the border with respect to the U.S. positions. The position of the provincial government and their discussion with the federal counterparts, could the minister outline where this NDP government is going with respect to COOL?

Ms. Wowchuk: The 2002 U.S. farm bill that created the mandatory country-of-origin labelling has caused us great concern. I've raised this with my counterparts in the United States, as the member indicated.

Manitoba has been very clear in opposing the USDA's proposed mandatory COOL program, based on concerns such as: What will it do to trade? It will be very expensive to comply with. It will be administratively very burdensome, and it will be very difficult, maybe impossible, to enforce.

We have a lot of trade between our two countries and movement of animals. Certainly, there has been opposition by the industry, at all levels, whether it be on the U.S. side and the Canadian side where packers in the U.S. and processors are concerned, as well, about what the impact will be with them.

The member asked whether or not I have raised this with the federal government. Yes, we have, and they have been a little slow to work on this issue. So the four western provinces are working together putting a letter to the new federal Minister of Agriculture asking him to become active in this file because there's been very little activity at the federal level in it.

* (16:10)

Mr. Eichler: So the western provinces have banded together and they are all opposed to the COOL, and

that's a stand that's been taken by your counterparts in the other provinces, just so I understand where the minister's going with the COOL.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, yes. All of the western provinces are very concerned about this, as are the industries, and our position has been very clear that we think they will not be able to implement COOL without having a devastating effect, not only on our industry, but on their processing industry. So Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta have been working the strongest on this. B.C. is supporting us on it, but it doesn't affect them nearly as much. Ontario is also active on this, but right now they are in a provincial election, so they cannot be part of this letter-writing campaign that I referred to.

We have been active in this right from the beginning when the United States said that they were going to implement COOL. Probably, by their plan, it would have been implemented some time ago, but it has run into several delays. Every time they've brought forward their legislation, we've commented on it. We put written comments in on COOL in 2002. We had written comments on the preliminary COOL regulations in October, 2002. We had written comments on the proposed final rule in February, 2004. Most recently, we wrote on the proposed rule in August, 2007. That was our most recent contact, but it seemed to be dying down a little bit. Unfortunately, it looks like there's more activity on this, and that is why we're drafting a joint letter to the federal government asking them to take immediate action on the latest developments.

Mr. Eichler: My colleague from Russell has been waiting patiently for his opportunity to ask some questions, but I do have one more before I turn it over for rural development again.

The dead stock disposal sites, could the minister update the House with respect to those sites, and whether or not they are going to be expanded to help the farmers in regard to disposal of their dead stock?

Ms. Wowchuk: I wonder if the member could clarify: Is he referring to routine disposal or is he referring to a disposal site if there was a huge disaster with many animals having to be put down?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, the first part of her comment with the local.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, waste disposal sites are the responsibility of municipalities and we work closely with them, but this is not a new story. When you look at waste disposal sites and where you might

put dead stock, there's a lot of discussion and many times it's, yeah, it's a good idea, but it's not in my backyard. Some of you who are involved in municipal councils will remember that this has been going on for some time now. However, we continue to work with municipalities, and there are some regional landfill sites that are able to accept dead stock. There is the new issue of SRMs and how they are going to be disposed of, and there are some funds that are now available. We are working with several municipalities to look at how we can do some regional disposal, but there are regulations that regulate waste disposal sites and sometimes a municipality would just refuse to accept dead stock.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Minister, I just want to flip back to COOL for a minute, and assuming that COOL comes in the U.S.—and the U.S. seems very determined to make it happen—and in spite of all the administrative problems that it presents and all the rest, we're going to have short-term pain, intense pain in the hog and cattle sectors in Manitoba, Canada.

Has this government got a long-term plan as to what they would do when COOL comes in, how it would affect the industry and how we could go forward from there?

* (16:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: Indeed, if this would proceed, there would be a short-term pain because there are many people who are very closely tied, whether it be pork or the beef industry, very closely tied. There are a lot of questions that have to be asked. I have talked to my counterparts in the United States. We've talked about when a Canadian weanling becomes a U.S. pig for slaughter, and when a Canadian calf that goes to a feedlot in the U.S. becomes a U.S. one, or does it get labelled as a Canadian animal? So those are the issues. This is not one that doesn't go without a lot of discussion. The pork industry is working on it.

I can tell you that we believe that, if the U.S. moves on this issue, there will be challenges because they are violating trade rules that are in place, whether it be WTO or other rules. So there would be challenges. On one hand, we talk about an integrated North American market, and we talked about that during BSE, that we had to have an integrated North American market. You cannot have an integrated market and then have some arbitrary labelling issues that would be worked as a trade barrier or for the advantage of the U.S. producers. So, if we are going to work on a North American integrated market, then

we have to look at how some of these barriers can be put aside.

On the other hand, we have to look at what the opportunities are for Canadian products and for Manitoba products. That's why we have to continue to—as part of our long-term plan, how do we utilize Canadian slaughter capacity, rather than having to depend on U.S. slaughter capacity? Then, if we have that Canadian slaughter capacity, we can market our Canadian high-quality meats into the U.S. market with a Canadian brand on it. That would be worthwhile. That's why we continue to look at slaughter capacity, both for the pork and for the beef industry, because that would mean we're keeping jobs at home. We would be getting the value-added. So you talk about a long-term plan. There are a lot of things that are going on, and I want to say that the industries are very active on this issue as well.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I guess I'm a little concerned about the answer because it really says that the minister does not have any kind of a strategic plan in this. *[interjection]* Although she said, I just said it; she said nothing because all she did is indicate that the industry is working on it. But what she has done really says nothing.

I'd like to move on to the Food Commercialization section of the department's Estimates. I want to ask the minister, in the area of the staff for the Food Commercialization, there are 10 and a half staff in total.

Could she identify for me who the managerial staff is at the head of this section, please?

Ms. Wowchuk: The director of the Food Commercialization branch is Randy Stoyko.

Mr. Derkach: Is this position housed at the Portage Food Development Centre?

Ms. Wowchuk: When that position was first filled the position was in the provincial building in Portage la Prairie. We are presently in the process of transitioning these jobs to the Food Development Centre.

Mr. Derkach: Are the professional and technical positions that are identified in the food commercialization and marketing section, are those all found at the Portage Food Development Centre?

Ms. Wowchuk: There are a couple of vacancies in this department for now, but those that are filled are in Portage la Prairie. One of them is at the Food Development Centre. The others are at the provincial

building and our intent is to move them to the Food Development Centre.

Mr. Derkach: Is the minister telling me that there are two vacancies only in the professional technical area?

Ms. Wowchuk: There were three vacancies and just last week one of the people took the position as general manager for the Food Development Centre so that creates another vacancy. There is advertising going forward to start filling those.

Mr. Derkach: Outside the individual who was successful in obtaining the management position, can the minister tell me how long these vacancies have existed?

* (16:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: These are new positions that were created with the Growing Opportunities and the move towards food commercialization. We have been working with staff, but being sensitive to staff, too, because they have a three-year period where they could make changes. Some are unable to move right off the start so we have begun recruiting, and we have vacancies for food products and meat, business development specialists for domestic markets, a business development specialist for market intelligence, and the food products for functional foods and nutraceuticals is the job that just was vacant last week. We are working towards filling them, but it takes some time to work with existing staff and allow those people who are willing to move into these new positions to adjust. That's why we have a three-year transition period.

Mr. Derkach: The minister says that these are new positions, but, in fact, in 2006, there were nine and a half positions. There are eight and a half, so the department has actually scaled back by one position. Can the minister explain how it is that they're putting an emphasis on this area and how it is that these are all new positions when, in fact, there were nine and a half positions there a year ago?

Ms. Wowchuk: When I was speaking, I was saying they're new positions. They're reprofiled positions. I was inaccurate when I made that first comment. That's why it takes a little bit of time as people make adjustments to where they're going to work. As this unit was being set up, there was need, the staff found that there was need, for administration support, and that's why there's a change. If you look at the total number, the total number of people is the same as it was last year.

Mr. Derkach: The minister is saying these are re-profiled positions. Can she tell me what those positions were previously and what they're being re-profiled from and to?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, when we did our consultation with the industry, this is where the industry, particularly food processors, identified a weakness, and the result was Food Commercialization and Marketing branch. The core group of staff was involved in domestic marketing activities, farm business management. There are also some generalist positions that were taken there, some home economist positions and engineering positions, but just trying to bring them in line with what the needs of the industry were.

This group works as a bridge between the Food Development Centre and the GO Teams. They also work very closely with the chefs and the food processing industry, and it's our goal to have a group of people like this that can help us move along to further commercialization of Manitoba products.

Mr. Derkach: So the minister's telling me that these were engineering–food engineers, home economists, that were working in the department before, or were working in government before, and are now being transitioned into a food commercialization unit that is going to be the bridge between the Food Development Centre and producers?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, these were department positions that were re-profiled to meet the needs that were identified through consultation with the food processing industry and others involved where they had identified that there were some gaps and advised us and suggested to us that there was a better way and that we should re-profile some of the jobs. And indeed that's what we have done, is re-profile some of the jobs that people were doing before so that we could work better with the food processing industry. There are sometimes producers that want to get involved in the food processing industry there and, yes, these people will also help link food processors to the Food Development Centre and help them take new products to commercialization.

Mr. Derkach: The minister's telling me that these were re-profiled positions? They were not staff people; they were positions? Now is she also telling me that those re-profiled positions have been advertised? Because there are vacancies there, and can she tell me what happened to the people who were in those positions before?

* (16:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: This is part of the whole transition and reorganization of the department. Some of the positions were real people and some of them were vacancies. Some people chose to stay and some chose to take different jobs in the department. That's why it's taking a little bit of time because you have to make adjustments to the position, to find the right position.

The position of the director was an open competition, and we were very pleased to have somebody from the industry come to us as a director for this Food Commercialization. But others are, as I say, have stayed. Some have chosen to continue to work in these new positions, and others have been accommodated within the other jobs in the department. That's why we have a transition period of up to three years to allow, in fairness for staff to make the adjustments that they have to make. It is taking time, but we are filling the positions.

Mr. Derkach: Just a comment. Eight positions, three years, Madam Minister, that's a little ridiculous—eight and a half. You said that it would take three years to transition them, the nine and a half to the eight and a half—

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Derkach: Well, then, I misunderstood; I'm sorry.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister if she could give us an outline of what the new positions are in terms of the skill set that is required in a professional/technical area.

Ms. Wowchuk: The people that are filling these positions are business development specialists with expertise in marketing, in trade, in industry development. So that's what we would be looking for. We are specializing in three areas: in organics, and that position has been filled; nutraceuticals and functional foods, that's the position that just became vacant; and in meat processing. So that's the area that we are working on, and those are the kinds of skills that we look for. The positions are filled through open competition.

Mr. Derkach: Could I ask the minister—this is a new unit of the department and certainly one that I think the industry supports. I would ask the minister whether or not the industry was consulted in terms of the types of people—not people, the skill sets—that the department should be seeking in filling these

positions. Or is that something that is coming right out of the department?

Ms. Wowchuk: I would say that it comes from the leadership of staff in the department and from the industry. We did an industry consultation. We have a steering committee where the Manitoba Food Processors are involved, so they have input. We work together with Manitoba Trade to ensure that we're not overlapping what they're doing. It's important in government to ensure that every department knows what the other is doing, and in this particular case we work very closely with Trade.

I want to inform the member that we have co-located an office here in Winnipeg with the Manitoba Food Processors just in recognition of how important this is and how closely we have to work together. It's called the urban GO Centre. I could say to the member that two of the positions that have been filled come from industry. So definitely, there is a very close working relationship with the industry and input from them to ensure that we are going in the right direction with this branch.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I want to ask the minister: What level of expertise is she expecting within these positions? Or are these all junior positions? I ask this question because I've attended a couple of events, one in particular, where there have been people from the department who, in my view, exhibit a very entry level type of experience or expertise in this industry which is somewhat disappointing because when people in the industry blink their eyes at comments that are being made by someone from a department who's supposed to know these issues, it becomes a bit of a—I think a bit of an integrity issue for the department.

* (16:50)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry that the member had that kind of experience. If there is a particular issue he would like to talk to me about after and share with me, certainly, we would look to rectify it. But people come to us, enter the civil service with different levels. Certainly, some are at the entry level, but if you look at our director, our director has more than 20 years of working in the food industry. The individual in the organic industry has seven or eight years of experience and came with a broad range of knowledge.

There are a variety of levels. There are some with master's degrees and there are some that are out of university. As a department, we certainly

encourage younger people because we have to do a transition. We have to think about who is going to be working in these jobs in the next few years, the next 10 years, and we have to give them the opportunity to prepare to run the ship, so to speak.

So there are a variety of levels, lots of expertise in some areas, some with not very much, but we hope with the mentorship program that we have, that would be very helpful, and we continue to work with them to upgrade their skills.

Mr. Derkach: I won't pursue that topic anymore except to say that in this industry, I think it's very important to ensure that we have people who are capable of dealing with food commercialization because that is such an important and growing field. You can't have entry level people walking in and calling themselves specialists when the industry people know far more than what the department people know. It causes a bit of an integrity issue.

That's just a comment. I'm not asking for a response to that. I say that because I have lots of hope for this section of the department in terms of the future of Manitoba, and I do believe that the right decisions are being made in terms of moving in this direction. When I look at the salary scales for these professional technical people I think that's in itself an issue, but I leave that with the minister.

I do also think that most of this action is happening outside of the city and therefore locating those positions in the city may be okay here, but I think your individual that's here probably would be better utilized in the country.

I have to move from this area Madam Minister because—[interjection]

Ms. Wowchuk: All of these positions are in Portage la Prairie. There is an urban GO centre where there is a link with the food processors, but all of the staff in this division are in Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I certainly do want to move on to one more section that I need to ask a question on but just a final comment. Secondments work very well with the industry I think from time to time, and if there is an opportunity here, I think that's an opportunity for both government and the industry that should be looked at. Certainly, I will be watching this because I've got a keen interest in this area, not just a personal interest but in terms of what's happening in the province.

I need to move on to the Infrastructure Development Grants. I just have one question there. I think that's all I'm allowed. The question is, can the minister either today or in writing provide for me—the grant assistance program, there is \$3.1 million, I think, in that area. Can she identify for me, not today but perhaps in writing where these grants are going, what they're intended for and how they're being utilized.

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member wants to hear them now I can give them, or if the member would like, I can give them to him in writing.

Mr. Eichler: I think in light of the closing time that we have to meet here within the next five minutes, we should move on to the line by line.

Before we do that, I do want to take this opportunity to thank the staff for their patience and indulgence in making sure that we got through the Estimates process. I know there's a number of areas we didn't get to cover, but I know the minister has assured us in the past that she certainly would make those staff available to us to cover some of those issues.

So we do want to thank the staff for their patience and we are prepared to move on, line by line.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. As Chair of this particular section of the committee of the whole, I'd also like to thank everyone who's participated from all sides.

If we're prepared to move forward with the resolutions.

An Honourable Member: We're prepared.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$129,128,300 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$24,654,400 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Industry Development and Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$41,318,900 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Food and Rural Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$628,600 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Consideration of the Minister's Salary, last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 3.1(a) Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 3.1.

Were there any questions on this item?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Very well.

Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,944,900 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Policy and Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

The time being 4:58 p.m., what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Thus said, committee rise.

ABORIGINAL AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

* (14:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Daryl Reid): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will consider the Estimates of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, I have some opening remarks to make.

Today, it's my privilege to introduce the '07-08 Estimates for Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. My department strives to enhance living conditions and opportunities for rural and northern Manitobans. We advocate for improvements in municipal infrastructure, safe water supplies, housing, health care, and economic opportunities. We act as partners with the communities and other agencies, Aboriginal organizations, other provincial departments, and other levels of government. We are committed to co-operating with First Nations and other Aboriginal people across Manitoba. We believe in the power of education and sustainable community economic development to provide opportunities for all Manitobans to be productive and participate in our provincial economy.

Madam Chairperson, Bonnie Korzeniowski, in the Chair

My department's budget estimate for the '07-08 fiscal year is \$38.4 million compared to a budget of \$17.5 million in '98-99. For the benefit of members present, I will begin by providing information to support the local government development division portion of my department's budget estimate and finish with highlights that represent the portion of the budget Estimates for Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat.

Local government development divisions serve 50 designated northern Aboriginal communities by providing consulting and advisory services related to a municipal administration, environmental services, public works, community and resource development, protective services, recreation, and capital project planning and delivery. In addition to the existing funding to support those services and infrastructure in the designated communities, this budget provides for an increase in allocation for fuel costs of \$89,600 in light of increases to the consumer price index for gasoline. This is the first increase in funding for fuel since 1998. An increase in honorarium paid to mayors and council members totalling \$65,900 to better align with the municipal sector and in recognition of increasing demands placed on elective representatives. An increase of \$42,400 in water treatment plant operation and maintenance related to water treatment facility upgrades.

As a result of the continuing professional development of community administrative personnel with accounting and administrative support provided by the municipal development consultants, 36 of 38 communities, which is 95 percent, received clear audits, which represents a 16 percent improvement

over last year. The remaining two communities have minor issues of recordkeeping, and staff are working with them to resolve this.

I'm also pleased to report that two more communities have committed to the incorporation process, and we expect to see them make that transition during the '07-08 fiscal year.

Anticipating new legislation for drinking water quality and water protection, we launched a review of community water and waste water facilities and began upgrading facilities several years ago. To date, we have upgraded 16 of 38 water treatment plants, 11 of 26 waste water treatment facilities. In '07-08, we are doing three water treatment plants and three waste water treatment facilities. We've been able to accelerate the upgrades or replacement by leveraging additional funds through the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Program and the Canada-Manitoba Rural Infrastructure Fund. The strategy is to upgrade or replace the water and sewer infrastructure based on need and to maintain existing plants to ensure safe water and sewer services.

We continue to provide training to community employees and elected officials on the workplace, health, and safety regulations. A training program was developed with Red River community college, and it consists of components such as hazard assessment, workplace hazardous materials information system, first aid, and confined space entry. Where required, workplace health and safety equipment has been purchased with delivery that started in March 2007 and is expected to be completed this fiscal year. Public works employees will have the opportunity to come together this fiscal year in Thompson and Dauphin for a refresher course reviewing the new regulations and other professional development training.

Aboriginal and Northern Affairs spearheaded a proposal to train four community development officers. The community development officers have been hired in Norway House, Camperville, and Seymourville. Cross Lake is waiting to enter into a partnership agreement with Norway House to cost-share the community development officer program.

Other programs focus on economic development projects such as development of local co-operatives. Aboriginal and Northern Affairs completed its fire program review in partnership with the Office of the Fire Commissioner. New categories of service based on a risk assessment have been established. Improvements to the fire program including training

opportunities, upgrading of fire trucks and turnout gear. Aboriginal and Northern Affairs provides the funds to support training, co-ordinate community-based course delivery with the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and ensures that the necessary equipment and personal protective gear is available to support the training.

In the past two years, nine training sessions were delivered to 11 communities with 73 volunteer firefighters achieving firefighting level 1 practical, of which 60 were also accredited with hazardous material awareness and 41 accredited with national NFPA 1001 level standards. Six communities are scheduled to be trained in '07-08. In the past two years, six fire trucks were delivered to communities, with another five slated this year.

Based on a review of the constable program in co-operation with Justice and the RCMP, recommendations were implemented in '06-07. These included assignment of roles and responsibilities among the partners, better communication, enhanced training for community constables, and upgrades to equipment, including vehicles. The constable program has been extended to Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei as new programming. This brings it to 11 communities.

Five community constables completed their training in '06. This fiscal year, three community constables completed their training in Portage la Prairie. This training program is a result of a partnership between Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, RCMP, Aboriginal Policing Directorate, and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. To date, nine new constable vehicles were delivered. All vehicles are fully equipped for provisions for maintaining radio contact with the RCMP.

Aboriginal and Northern Affairs also partners with Education, Training, and Youth by funding the RCMP summer youth employment program. Five First Nations and three Aboriginal and Northern Affairs communities participated this year.

*(14:50)

Northern Links is an annual professional development workshop primarily for recreation directors, but it increasingly attracts others working in the area of community health and wellness. Participants come from Northern Affairs and First Nations communities. We've expanded our training for a northern recreation director with the addition of a Northern Links workshop in Thompson to reach

more northerly communities. Department sponsorship also provides training to three recreation directors in a pilot project with the University College of the North, who is offering a recreation leadership certificate program in its satellite campus in Norway House and Cross Lake. Over an 18-month period, students attend full-time classes one week per month. Training will be completed in March of '08.

Summer leadership workshops were held throughout some of the Northern Affairs communities. Community participants come from the various communities like Meadow Portage, Rock Ridge, Camperville, Waterhen, Seymourville and so on. To date, there have been 51 participants in this initiative.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is very supportive of programming for youth, either by direct support or partnership with other agencies or departments.

A northern water safety program called the WaterSmart initiative is one where Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; Healthy Child Manitoba; Culture, Heritage and Tourism; Conservation and Education and Training with the Lifesaving Society - Manitoba deliver a water safety education program across northern Manitoba. In '07-08, there were 525 Swim to Survive participants and 86 BOAT trainees; 141 people took the emergency first aid and CPR training, with a total of 11 communities. So the additional funding of \$125,000 enabled the expansion of this program—

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. The minister's time is up. Thank you for your statement.

Does the honourable Member for Minnedosa have any opening statements?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): My comments will be very brief. I want to get into the Estimates process and determine from the minister what work has been done through his department over the past year in the area of providing better access to services and opportunities for Aboriginals and northerners in this province. So I will leave my comments to questions through this process, and I look forward to the responses from this minister. The accountability of his portfolio will be based on how he responds to the questions that are being served. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate of the Minister's Salary traditionally is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration

of line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Would the minister please introduce his staff?

Mr. Lathlin: I'd like to introduce to the Chamber the deputy minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Harvey Bostrom; our executive director of local government division out of Thompson, Freda Albert; our executive director of Aboriginal Affairs secretariat, Joe Morrisseau; and our director of Finance, Rene Gagnon.

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

Mrs. Rowat: Global discussion, please.

Madam Chairperson: Sorry.

Mrs. Rowat: Global.

Madam Chairperson: Do we agree we'll have global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Chairperson: It is agreed. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: Madam Chair, my questions will start in general housekeeping. Can the minister please provide me a list of all political staff, including name, position and the FTE attached to those positions and names?

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, Madam Chair, we can provide that in writing.

Mrs. Rowat: I will list other areas that I would like the minister's office to provide details on. A specific list of all staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office. If he could provide that to me right now, that would be most helpful.

In gesturing from the minister, I will ask a number of questions for information, and I'll just ask that the minister provide it to me tomorrow when we continue with Estimates, if that's possible.

Mr. Lathlin: Yes.

Mrs. Rowat: As I indicated, a list of all staff in the minister's and deputy minister's office; the number of staff currently employed within the department; the name of staff that have been hired in 2000 and 2008,

including whether they were hired through competition or appointment; a description of any position that has been reclassified; a listing of all vacant positions; if all the staff years are currently filled; details of how many and what type of contracts are being awarded directly and what is happening and how many contracts are going to tender; how many positions have been relocated in 2007 and 2008, relocating from rural and northern Manitoba into Winnipeg or relocating around the province, and the reasons why; the status update of any new departmental initiatives announced and undertaken in 2007 and 2008; any travel by the Premier (Mr. Doer) or a delegate led by the Premier that was paid for by the department and, if so, the pertinent details of that travel, including location, purpose, dates, costs and who all went; ministerial travel, how many out-of-province trips the minister has taken in the past year and pertinent details of these trips, such as purposes, dates, who went, who paid and what were the costs.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, is that the complete list?

Mrs. Rowat: For now, yes.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, we can endeavour to compile all that information together and make it available to the member, but I'm doubtful as to whether I can have it all done by tomorrow. Certainly, in the immediate future, we can provide that information to the member.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, and I appreciate that. As I was going through my list, I realized that it was probably a fairly extensive list. So as soon as possible from the minister would be appreciated.

My line of questioning will start with treaty land entitlements. On June 28, the Premier announced a commitment to expedite the provincial work on the long-standing Treaty Land Entitlement agreement, including the transfer of 1.2 million acres originally identified as TLE land within the next four years. The agreement was signed in '97 under the Progressive Conservative government. It appears that the challenge of implementation is something that I would like to focus my questions on today.

* (15:00)

What resources are being provided on the provincial side to facilitate this transfer, Madam Chair?

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, I can indicate to the member that the Manitoba Framework Agreement was signed in

1997. It was signed in The Pas. I was there to witness it. However, not very much happened during the ensuing years. When we got into government in 1999 I believe there were something like 60,000 acres of land that were made available to Canada, and something like 6,000 acres had been made into reserve land, when in fact the total acreage of land that was owed to Manitoba First Nations, as per the Framework Agreement, was close to a million acres. Now, when we got into government in 1999, we made the Treaty Land Entitlement our priority. As the member knows, there have been announcements that have been made in the past with respect to working on ways and means to fast-track the Treaty Land Entitlement process.

The member will appreciate that Manitoba is not the only partner in this equation. There's Canada. It started out with, I believe, 22 First Nations in Manitoba. So far, since our fast-tracking initiative, we've been able to transfer approximately 409,000 acres to Canada. When I say made available to Canada, that means as soon as we make the land available to Canada, it's then up to Canada to convert that land to reserve land. Also, the federal minister has made commitments to—or at least the previous federal minister—I met with the current federal minister of Indian Affairs recently, and he also indicated to us that he would carry out the previous minister's commitments. That is that Canada would convert 150,000 acres per year for the next four years of land that's made available to them by Manitoba into reserve land.

So I think from '99 on, we've certainly come a long ways. Like I said, we've made available some 409,000 acres. We've got about 500,000 acres to go. We're quite confident that we can reach that goal according to the Premier's (Mr. Doer) schedule.

Mrs. Rowat: While the number of acres transferred is applied by government as a measurement of progress, the Treaty Land Entitlement Commission Manitoba and MKO assert that the most relevant indicator is the total amount of parcels of land transferred and converted to reserves. I guess, for an example, out of 450 parcels of land currently selected under the TLE Framework Agreement, at least 280 selections, or more than 60 percent of all the selections, continue to be delayed due to disputes regarding eligibility issues, the resolution and competing and third-party interests, et cetera—and the determination, I guess, of easements, et cetera.

My question would be to the minister: What is the process for determining the order by which First Nations entitled to TLE settlement land receive land? There are so many outstanding variables. What is the process of determining the order by which First Nations entitled to TLE settlement land receive land?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I can try to answer that. I'm not sure if I'll be able to cover all steps in the process; it's quite a long process. But I will say that once land has been identified by the First Nation as being potential entitlement land, needless to say, there are a lot of meetings that take place, firstly, at the local level, at the band level, the chief and council level, and then the band will identify the land that they wish to select to the province and to Canada. Assessments are done, environment considerations are taken, third-party interest, any potential easements, all of these factors are taken into consideration. Finally, further meetings are held with the chief and council and if they're agreeable to selecting that land, then it goes to community level debate, at the end of which a vote is taken as to whether the membership of that particular band will allow their chief and council to select that land.

Then, of course, once everything is done, everything is agreed to, the acreage, location, and so on, then there's another ratification vote that has to take place at the band level, and then the band can come back to government and say, here's the land we've selected.

Manitoba, by this time, will have looked after all of the issues that come along with the Treaty Land Entitlement, like the things I mentioned, you know, third-party interest, environmental concerns. Then, after having done that, Manitoba will then make available that land to Canada and then Canada will do the survey. Then they will turn it into reserve land through Order-in-Council.

Mrs. Rowat: I appreciate the minister's interpretation. I have several questions in regard to process that we'll cover down the road here. What TLE settlement land has been determined for the four Island Lake First Nations? Can the minister share to me what TLE settlement lands have been determined for those communities?

Mr. Lathlin: For the Island Lake bands consisting of Garden Hill, Red Sucker Lake, St. Theresa Point, and Wasagamack, the entitlement acres were 102,257 acres and they selected 100,474. Then the amount of land that was transferred to Canada was

100,379 and acres that had been set aside as reserve is 90,794 acres. That, by the way, is outside of the framework agreement.

Mrs. Rowat: In Manitoba, shortfalls of land have been determined for 28 First Nations. Most of these First Nations signed the 1997 Treaty Land Entitlement, our framework agreement, which established the shortfall of land and compensation owing to each First Nation. This requires consultation with municipalities before land can be transferred for reserve land. So the minister had earlier shared his interpretation of process.

Roseau signed an individual agreement in '96, which does not contain the provision of consultation with municipalities. This technicality is the Province's jurisdiction for transferring the land without ensuring that proper consultation took place between the R.M. of Rosser and Roseau River.

On May 25, three days after the provincial election, a provincial Order-in-Council, 167,207 was approved. Under the OIC, 74.8 acres of Manitoba Crown land were transferred to Her Majesty the Queen to be set aside for Roseau River First Nation. The land became a reserve in mid-June by prime ministerial order.

* (15:10)

INAC has confirmed that the pace that this settlement is moving is historic. No other land claim has been resolved faster from the initial purchase of land to transfer the land to reserve. What input did you have regarding the transfer of this piece of land?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chairperson, I can indicate to the member that for land entitlement activity that I could maybe categorize as straightforward is that where Manitoba is required to make available unoccupied Crown land to Canada. That's what I would call pretty straight forward, but, nevertheless, complex and cumbersome because it has to go through many steps.

There's another way that First Nations acquire land through the land entitlement process. That is where there is no available, unoccupied Crown land, First Nations are allocated funds from the federal government for the purpose of acquiring land from willing sellers. Once a willing seller is found and a deal is consummated, we really don't have much input as far as the Manitoba government is concerned. Where we have the most input is where we're required to make available unoccupied Crown land.

In the case of Roseau River, that agreement had been—or Roseau River First Nation had purchased the land—I don't know how many years back, quite a few years back—and the federal government, in my opinion, took quite a long time to convert that land to reserve status. So the federal government came to us early in the year, I guess, and we provided the information that they required, and the land was made into a reserve through the federal Order in Council.

Mrs. Rowat: My understanding is that land transferred quickly from the Province—or the 74.8 acres were purchased from a private land owner, transferred from the Province to the feds in record time, Madam Chair. It wasn't several years. It was maybe a couple of weeks.

So I'm wondering if the minister can clarify his points, because my understanding is that it transferred in record time. This has been confirmed by many partners within the process. So I guess I'd like you to comment further on what you have for background regarding the transfer process, and if you have any comments regarding the lack of communication with the municipality on this.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I can indicate to the member that, you know, when a First Nation is allocated funds from the federal government to acquire land in order for Canada to fulfil its treaty obligation with respect to land, and when the First Nation finds a willing seller of land, the Province really has very little to do with that process afterwards, because then the business becomes, you know, an activity between the First Nation and the said willing seller. So they negotiate back and forth. Then, when things are settled, it's the federal government that has to convert the land to reserve status. In some cases, the federal government takes quite a long time to do that, and that's when First Nations get frustrated.

Mrs. Rowat: The whole process took less than a year, which I feel and which a number of people have indicated is rather historic. So I guess I'm going to get back to point of the consultation with the municipalities before the land can be transferred for land reserve status or for reserve land.

Can the minister comment on the statement that the Province has a responsibility to ensure that there is a line of communication between the municipality and the First Nations, and, I guess, all stakeholders when the process is occurring? Is there not a

responsibility for the Province to take in ensuring that there is consultation?

Mr. Lathlin: Well, I don't really understand where the member is getting her information from. As far as I can remember and as far as I know, and I'm getting staff to confirm the number of years ago that Roseau River purchased that land that the member is alluding to, but I understand it was several years, and it was taking the federal government all that time to convert the land to reserve status. When we were asked by the federal government to give our information, the only other requirement that remained was to deal with any residual legal requirements that may be there, such as mineral rights and so on. So we did that and then the federal government was able to convert the land to reserve status.

Mrs. Rowat: The land was sold to Roseau on June 15, 2006. Reserve status was received from the feds on June 13, 2007. So I'd like to put that into the record, Madam Chairperson, that this is historic and the process of transfers is going to be expedited. It was a commitment from this government. We support the process, but we believe that consultation and discussions with all stakeholders is important. So I will leave that at that. The implementation of the TLEs is historic and is important, but we have to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the process.

The Cabinet committee on Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. This is a committee that was struck to deal with issues and concerns with regard to Aboriginal and northern communities. We've heard from AMC that they have never been asked to meet with this committee. I understand that there is a Cabinet committee, and this committee needs to provide feedback and support to the people of the north. So I just wanted to know if the minister can give me the status of this committee and if and when they have met, because I believe that it was scheduled to meet every two weeks. I just want to know if that is occurring.

* (15:20)

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, I can indicate to the member that the committee of Cabinet was struck for the purpose of dealing with issues that affect the Aboriginal people of this province. It was felt by many of us. I certainly felt it when I was chief at OCN, that Aboriginal issues were never really dealt with in a serious way. So, when we struck a committee of Cabinet, that was the intent, that was the goal: to

make sure that we dealt with Aboriginal issues at the committee level from departments and then forward our recommendations to Cabinet.

Initially, we were meeting twice a week subject to requirements. You know, if there was a lot of items, we would meet every two weeks. If there weren't that many items, we would hold it over to the next meeting.

Right now, I also indicate to the member that we're reviewing the Cabinet committee structure. Also, we're reviewing its original intent with a view to improving it. So right now we've made a decision that we are going to be meeting once a month for now until we have completed the review, at which time we may revert back to the bi-weekly meeting, but, for now, we're meeting once a month.

Mrs. Rowat: When was your last meeting?

Mr. Lathlin: Excuse me, Madam Chair, our last meeting was right before the last election, in April.

Mrs. Rowat: How many times did you meet in the last six months?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I don't have the numbers here, but I am advised it's about three times.

Mrs. Rowat: Madam Chair, when I got asked through a FIPPA how many meeting days you've had over the last five years, I was denied that information. I'm still not getting a clear answer on that, so I guess I'm going to ask the minister: Has this committee been successful in getting feedback and input from the Aboriginal and northern people in Manitoba?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I believe the committee has been effective in that it deals with issues that are important to Aboriginal people.

We have not met the Aboriginal groups in the committee itself, but we have, for example, the Minister of Justice at the time and I went to meet with the Southern Chiefs Organization. We gave them a report on the items that they had listed for us. We gave a report, a status report on those issues. We've certainly indicated over the months that we meet, maybe not as a committee, but we meet with First Nations' representatives on a regular basis. By example, this week we're going to be meeting with Chief Mercredi from Grand Rapids. So we meet with the chiefs all the time—MKO, Keewatin Tribal Council, Swampy Creek, AMC. We also include them in our preparatory meetings that we hold whenever there are important Aboriginal summits

that take place, like, for example, in Vancouver, the Aboriginal Health Summit that was held this June. There was an Aboriginal women's summit in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland. There are a lot of meetings that take place all the time with Aboriginal people.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm getting a sense that there really is no formal agenda or mandate to this committee. If you're not meeting with the Aboriginal leaders as a Cabinet committee, if AMC has indicated they have concerns that they haven't been asked or invited to attend a Cabinet committee on Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, my understanding is that MKO and the southern chiefs have also not been formally invited or have attended a meeting to get feedback and input.

My next question is: Has NACC been invited to provide, you know, input on any initiatives that the Cabinet committee of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs may have put forward?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, again, I can indicate to the member that, you know, meetings always take place between our government and Aboriginal people. The member will remember because they were pretty vocal in their criticism of our partnership that we completed with, or the agreement that we did with AMC with regards to the First Peoples economic development fund. That initiative took about a little over two years to complete. As I said, there were meetings all the time. Then, at the end of a little over two years, we have an agreement whereby AMC will be receiving funds from the Manitoba government for economic development purposes for their people.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm getting a sense that this committee does not have any type of mandate to have Aboriginal stakeholders come to the committee in a formal way to provide feedback or input to Cabinet. I'm very much looking forward to just hearing what the minister has to say down the road with regard to this Cabinet committee of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs mandate. He's saying they're going to meet once a month. I would strongly recommend that he invite the Aboriginal stakeholders, NACC, AMC, MMF, others within the communities that he represents to be a part of this. Otherwise, this committee really shows little purpose other than to say that you have one.

My next question is with regard to the 2007 accord that was signed in April of 2007. Again, this is a process that has been ongoing. I'd like the

minister to comment on what process took place between the development of draft 22 and April 2007. I'm wanting to know if the minister could elaborate on this agreement for me, please.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, perhaps I can ask the member what agreement she is referring to.

Mrs. Rowat: It was a government-to-government accord on the east side of Lake Winnipeg signed between the Province and the First Nations. It was in April of 2007. It was an agreement that was to set principles and guidelines for the Province and the First Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

I just want to know if the minister would be kind enough to explain the process that took place between the development of draft 22 and the final agreement that was signed, or the accord that was signed in 2007? If he could elaborate on the process.

* (15:30)

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I will give comments on the WNO east side of Lake Winnipeg initiative. The lead department for that process, as the member knows, is the Department of Conservation. But I will indicate to her the information that I have. This process started—what is it?—three, four years ago. I was the Minister of Conservation at the time when we started the process. The whole idea was to get a consultative process going with people residing on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, because, as the member knows previously or may not know, previously whenever development would go on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, or for any part of the northern part of Manitoba, for that matter, a development will come in and there was absolutely no consultation with the people living in the area, least of all the Aboriginal people who are usually exist right next door to development. Hydro development is a good example where Hydro would come in and dig the ground, divert channels from the river and hire local people as labourers temporarily. Once the plant was installed, the labourers, mostly Aboriginal people, will be sent home to continue living on welfare. Then, of course, people from down south would be ferried back and forth to go and operate these hydro stations, most of them situated up north.

Well, when we came into government, we thought we would conduct business with the Aboriginal people in a different way. That is through partnerships, consultation, agreements and so on. So for the east side of Lake Winnipeg what we

attempted to do was to carry on that consultation. The whole idea was to come up with an agreement whereby any development that would go into that area government would go and consult with the people and make sure the people understood what the development was all about and that they would agree to the development that was being proposed. This is a new process. We've just come to an agreement, as the member indicated. I know that it will probably have some growing pains. But our hope is that down the road there will be a meaningful consultation carried out, either by government or by industry, with the people who have been indigenous in that area for thousands of years. Who better to review those kinds of developments and how it's going to impact the local people than the ones who are living there, who have lived there for a long time? They live off the land and they know what impacts such development might have on their livelihood and their health and so forth. So that was the whole reason why we carried out that initiative. Like I said, it's just getting started. The agreement has been finished and we're implementing it starting right now

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I appreciate the minister's comments in respect to the east side initiative. I had the opportunity to visit Thompson and God's Lake about a year and a half ago. This was in conjunction with the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force. So I certainly had an opportunity to witness first-hand some of the issues that are before us in the First Nations communities, some of the challenges that are before us. We had the opportunity to meet with the community there to get a sense of what issues they felt needed to be brought forward to enhance their lives.

One of the issues was in terms of economic development, what could be done to enhance the economies of that particular region and provide employment to the people of that region. I think we all want to strive for that so we can have our First Nations communities working and whatever economics might be available for them so they can move forward.

I just want to get a sense from the minister here, just so I have it clear in my mind, how this whole east side planning initiative developed over the last few years. I know there's a report put forward back in September of 2004. I'm assuming that was a result of discussions that First Nations communities had had with government over a period of time before that. If the minister could just give me kind of a time frame

of what happened prior to the 2004 report, and then just what's happened following the release of that 2004 report. Again, the name of that report was: "Promises to Keep Towards a Broad Area Plan for the East Side of Lake Winnipeg."

Mr. Lathlin: I'm not sure if I understood the member's question, but let me start off by saying that, in 1999, when we came into power in Manitoba, the previous government had already worked on a study. I think it was a national undertaking, but each province was required to carry out a consultative process. The name of the report, I believe, was called COSDI report, Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation. I believe that's what the report was called. So, when we came along, we accepted the report. One of the recommendations that it contained was that there be some broad-area planning and that the local people be consulted, namely, the Aboriginal people. So we took that report. We started to implement it, and that's where this initiative actually came from, the east side initiative.

Like I said earlier, the whole idea was to get a process going whereby, eventually, we would come to an agreement as to how we would consult with the people indigenous to that area anytime any development came along.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's response. I'm just kind of curious how things developed once this particular report was brought forward to the Minister of Conservation in 2004. Once those recommendations were tabled, what process took place from there? Because, in the report itself, they talk about developing a memorandum of understanding, going forward. Was there any such document put forward? What was the process that took place from there?

* (15:40)

Mr. Lathlin: Again, let me go back a little bit just to give some background. When we accepted the COSDI report and we decided to work on the broad area planning initiative, as well as consulting with the people indigenous in that area, of course, at that time, when the report came out, we had a group called, I forget the name of it, but it was a round table on the—I think it was called Round Table for Sustainable Development. It was a Manitoba group comprised of academics, laypeople and even people living in the east side area. Aboriginal people were involved. Then from there, when we started to really get serious about the east side initiative, from that group was formed the First Nations Council, that

consisted of chiefs who were in the area. They were really a creation of the Manitoba Round Table, a subgroup really. The Round Table and the east side initiative were chaired by Phil Fontaine. From there we eventually worked toward the development of a memorandum of understanding. If that's what the member is referring to that was the MOU that was finally signed after so many drafts, the Member for Minnedosa says draft 22.

Mr. Cullen: Just to take it to the next step, Mr. Minister, there was a draft 22, as the Member for Minnedosa alluded to. Now, I'm assuming, and the minister will hopefully correct this, this draft 22 was never signed. From the draft 22, then, was the next step in the process the, I guess, the signing of an accord with the WNO First Nations government and the province? Is that the follow-up document that we're referring to, the actual document that came in place as a result of the East Side Planning Initiative?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chairperson, I was having difficulty hearing the member, so I'm not sure if I got the entire question, but I'm advised by staff that the draft 22 that the member is referring to from there it evolved to developing a protocol for the way we do business in the east side area. That's the protocol agreement that was signed, I believe, recently.

I would also like to mention here, Madam Chair, that I'm not the lead minister on the east side. The Minister of Conservation probably has more detailed information on the subject. I'm not trying to get away from answering the question, but what general information, general knowledge I have I'll gladly pass on to the member.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for that response. Certainly, we will be following up with the Minister of Conservation in terms of some of the east side initiatives as well. I'm just wondering, though, if the minister in his role, what he sees as the next step going forward now that we have this accord, if you will, signed, I believe just this past April. I think we're now talking on the same page on the same document.

There has been some money set aside for consultation going forward. I'm just wondering if the minister knows if there's a plan in the future in terms of how this dialogue will move forward now that we have this accord, this framework in place. Does the minister have an idea of how this undertaking will move forward from here?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chairperson, I can indicate to the member that, yes, there have been funds that have been allocated for the purpose of—the communities would have to apply for those funds, the WNO communities. The purpose of those funds, as far as I understand, would be for the individual communities to, you know, do their own discussions. Then, from there, they also want to do some community planning on their own, community by community. Eventually, the goal is to have every one of those communities develop a plan for their communities as to what is there now and also to identify future developments so that they can work in conjunction with the provincial government and vice versa.

Once the government knows and is aware of what plans have been developed and approved and to be implemented, well, hopefully, the provincial government and those communities will work together. As far as the next steps go, yes, it is our intent to implement the accord, and that is to abide by the principles that were reached whereby before any development coming into effect those communities would be consulted and that their input would be incorporated into whatever development plans would be done.

The whole idea is to make sure that the local people are involved in the decision-making process.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Chairperson, I appreciate the minister's response. Just in terms of hydro development, hydro development was certainly talked about in terms of the East Side Planning Initiative. I would just like to get the minister's comments in terms of his view, in terms of the consultation that has been taken place to date with First Nations communities, both on the east side and the west side. How do you feel those discussions have gone to date?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chairperson, I'd be more than willing to discuss the consultation process that our government has initiated. I'm not going to give numbers, but there have been many meetings that have taken place. Was it two years ago that we carried out quite an extensive consultation initiative with communities from the east side? Even the Premier (Mr. Doer), I believe, attended meetings with the two communities.

But what we did was, several ministers were dispatched to the communities on the east side.

I went to Little Black River. I also went to God's Lake Narrows. Other ministers went to other communities, like God's River, Bloodvein, so on and so forth.

* (15:50)

But, at the end of that consultation process, I came away with a clear understanding that the people who we talked to, and these were chiefs and councillors, elders and some grass-roots people who attended the meetings, I came away with the clear understanding that there weren't a whole lot of people who wanted the transmission line to come down the east side. A lot of concerns were expressed with respect to traplines and hunting, particularly from the elders, even such things as burial grounds and so on.

People generally felt that the transmission line, if it came down the east side, would provide very little economic opportunities for the people living there. In fact, it would do more harm than good. It's the message that I got from the people, and I think other ministers got a similar message from the other communities that they visited.

You know, I've been hanging around here for a little over 17 years now, and I mostly drive from The Pas to here. I usually come in on Sundays and I go back Thursday or Friday. That's a lot of driving No. 6 highway beside the transmission line that goes by there. Those people who say that this line, if it ever came down the east side would provide a lot of economic opportunities, I would have to respectfully disagree with that notion, because the transmission line along No. 6 highway, I never see anybody working there. Maybe every five years I'll see a helicopter from Winnipeg with non-Aboriginal people, pilots, inspectors, probably for Hydro, flying up and down the transmission line doing their work.

I also think that the people who promote the idea of having a private transmission line down the east side, would your government agree to a private hydro transmission line down the east side? I don't know. We're certainly not looking at that option right now, but, I think, for me, I heard those people. I was in their band offices, and I talked with them at the airport buildings, some individually, but most of them in a formal meeting in a band office or community hall, and all of them told us that they did not want a transmission line coming down the east side of Lake Winnipeg. That's who I would listen to. I would not listen to consultants who are promoting the idea of a private transmission line coming down

the east side and allegedly earning millions and millions of dollars for those First Nations in that area. I think it's probably impossible to do that.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you to the minister for his comments.

He did talk quite a bit about First Nations communities on the east side. I'm curious to hear what kind of comments your government heard from First Nations communities on the west side and some of the areas that might be impacted by a west-side line. There has the potential to be quite a few, I believe, up to eight First Nations communities where that particular line might come through, given the west-side route. So I'm just kind of curious if you found the same reaction to the people on that side of the province as well.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I want to tell the member that he and I listened to the Premier (Mr. Doer) here, I don't know when, today, yesterday, in Question Period, talking about the transmission line and the processes that our government would have to go through before a transmission line is constructed along the west side. There would have to be all kinds of regulatory process that Manitoba Hydro would have to go through, and, undoubtedly, part of that regulatory consultative process would be to consult with not just Aboriginal people, but other people living along the west-side transmission lines.

Now, I'm not an engineer, but I just want to say that, if a west-side transmission line were to be considered, and, again, in my layman's opinion, there's already a lot of disruption that has occurred on the west side. There are all kinds of highways; there are all kinds of transmission lines; there's a lot of development on the west side of Lake Winnipeg. So for people to say that there would be a lot of disruption, especially in the southern part of Manitoba around the Interlake, there are farms there. Where wouldn't there be disruption? I don't know because as you go further north, the right of way has already been cut. As a layperson, I don't know how much additional land would be required to accommodate another line to come down that way. Again, in my layman's opinion, I imagine there wouldn't be that much more land required to accommodate another line because there are existing lines there already. Now, that's my non-engineer's opinion.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Chair, I appreciate the minister's comments, and I do want to just reflect on some of the things he said. I think we're all interested

in terms of economic development for our First Nations communities. We're obviously interested in the health of our First Nations community. You mentioned that you didn't think a Bipole III line on the east side would necessarily provide those opportunities for First Nations communities. I'd just like to get your opinion in terms of other infrastructure that may be a benefit, and I'm talking about roads to those communities. Do you feel that all-weather, all-season roads would be of benefit to both the economic development and, of course, the health of those particular communities?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, let me say that in the past there has been this notion that, once you build a transmission line along the east side, an all-weather road would almost automatically follow. Our government says, no, that's not true. However, we are listening to the people from the east side. We firmly believe after listening to them that most of them would want to have an all-weather road go along the east side. Even there, I should advise the member that there are people who are still opposed to having an all-weather road come along the east side. They have their reasons, and I think they are valid reasons, but I think most of the people that we've talked to would prefer to have a road come along the east side.

We just talked about the WNO protocol accord agreement, whatever we want to call it. There would have to be quite a bit of consultation that would have to be carried out, where to locate the road and what kind of road it would be if one were to be built.

* (16:00)

So, to summarize, yes, I believe that an all-weather road along the east side would greatly benefit people and business in that area. They would have access to a lot of things: economic development, not to mention a cheaper way to transport food, goods and services to their area by way of trucks and other vehicles. They would have access to health care and other opportunities in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Chair, I'm curious how the minister would respond to comments made by Marcel Balfour. I guess he is the vice-chair of MKO. His statement last week, basically saying that the Doer government did not consult First Nation groups before making this decision public. He goes on to say that the Province ignored the opportunity to build roads and supply First Nation groups east of Lake Winnipeg with construction jobs and positive

economic development. So I'm kind of interested what your response to his comments were and your thoughts on that statement.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I want to indicate to the member, too, that I remember the time that we carried out those visits to the communities. I was supposed to be one of three people going to Norway House at the time and, unfortunately, I don't remember what happened in the community, but we were not able to—the council could not accommodate us. I truly can't remember what the reason was, but we ended up not being able to go to Norway House on the time that we visited all the communities.

As far as jobs being created, we have been working on Highways 373 and 374, well, ever since we were elected in 1999. We're not able to do all of it in one shot, but ever since 1999, every year we've incrementally constructed the road; we did a lot of preparatory work. I'm finding now we are starting to lay asphalt; we've paved about 20 kilometres of Highway 373 and our plan is to—in fact, this year, I guess, we were to pave another approximately 14 kilometres of the same road. Then, from there, we're going to pave some more road the following year. So the bulk of the work that we're doing right now for 373 and 374 is a lot of preparatory work. I'm told that that's probably the most expensive part of the road construction, and I'm also told that—I mean, I know for sure our plan is to eventually pave 373 and 374 all the way to Cross Lake and Norway House. I'm also advised, because I check into this quite regularly, that contractors who work in that area are required to hire local labour machinery and so on. I understand that's pretty successful.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

In the long term, we're looking at a road from the Island Lake area to Norway House. Norway House has promoted that project for the longest time now, and I think it's a good idea, although you know we haven't started to work on it yet. It would seem feasible to me to try and build a road from the Granville Lake area to Norway House. It's the shortest route, but it's not subject to the elements as much as from Island Lake to Berens River. So our long-term plan is to go from the south along the east side and I think we've started already. Where is it that we're building? We're doing the work right now on the road from—the Rice River road, they call it, to Hollow Water, and then from Hollow Water to

Bloodvein and eventually to Berens River. So that's what we're working on right now.

Mr. Cullen: Just to close off my questions with a comment, I do thank the minister for his comments, and I do look forward to more questions and more discussions as this whole bipole 3 unfolds, and I look forward to having the opportunity to discuss this situation with the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) as well.

So thank you, Mr. Minister, for your comments.

Mrs. Rowat: I have a couple of questions, and I just wanted to share a couple of statements or observations made by the mayor of Thompson when we were up visiting with him last week. A couple of them were key to my concern.

When communities lose professional jobs that are within their communities that are government jobs—and I am a strong advocate for decentralization and the need for government to be available and accessible for all Manitobans and our discussion followed that line. There were a couple of areas that I learned from the mayor and council that are a concern to them.

One of them was the air traffic manager's position at the airport in Thompson. His position plus two of the professional positions that tie into the airport have been moved to Winnipeg. I would like the minister to comment on that, and if he's been an advocate to trying to keep those positions, those three very important professional positions, in Thompson.

Also, two other positions that have left the community of Thompson were two prosecutor positions within Justice and again, those positions, those individuals will be coming up to Thompson on a rotational basis, and I believe that that is not acceptable for a community that really is a regional hub, a regional centre. So, when positions like this get taken out of the community and are put into Winnipeg, it's a concern for any community that loses these jobs. It's not only that position that they are concerned about; it's also the families that they lose who would supplement that individual's position in those communities. I believe that, if Thompson wants, has a vision to become a regional, continue to grow as a regional centre, these types of positions cannot leave the community.

I want to know if the minister can indicate to me what role he may have or has had in advocating for

rural, for these northern positions and how important they are for the community of Thompson.

Mr. Lathlin: I can say to the member that, as a person that's been born and raised in northern Manitoba, now as MLA for one of the ridings in northern Manitoba, I always advocate for northern people. In doing that, even when I was chief and now as an MLA, I've been doing that for 17 years.

Sometimes it doesn't matter whether a job is within our jurisdiction, a provincial government job. Tolko, for example, did a lot of work there with the Premier (Mr. Doer) a year ago. So, wherever I go, it doesn't matter; it doesn't have to be in my home community. I advocate for jobs for northern people.

* (16:10)

In the case of Thompson, I am told that it's not a provincial government entity. I believe the city of Thompson—was it during the federal government devolution of airports? I know we went through the same thing in The Pas. I think that's when Thompson—I could be wrong, but I believe that's when Thompson started to upgrade the airport in Thompson. They formed, just like here in Winnipeg, an airport authority. The airport authority has full control of the operations at the Thompson airport. That's the authority that you would have to deal with to find out how come these jobs were sent off to Winnipeg.

But the same thing happened in The Pas. In that case, the city wanted to save money for other priorities so they laid off, I don't know how many, one for sure they laid off, maybe two people in The Pas.

Mrs. Rowat: My question is with regard to those positions. Those are professional positions with the airport that have been taken away from the community and put into Winnipeg. I want to know what advocacy role the minister has played in speaking to the City of Thompson regarding this, and if he's made any effort to work with the City of Thompson to get these positions back within the community. That would be the same for the two government jobs, the two Justice position jobs that have not been filled and that will now be covered on a rotational basis, which, I understand, is not satisfactory to the City of Thompson who are very concerned that this will lead to the loss of those two jobs within the city of Thompson. I do believe that will only add to the cost of services being provided.

Again, it's taking away something that is available to the community.

I agree with the minister, you know, when you represent a region or an area, you fight really hard to keep what you have and to build on that. I'm an advocate for Westman, in that aspect, so I want to know if the minister—what he has done to be a voice for the community on those two specific losses that the community has faced.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Acting Chair, I must say that, on that particular issue with respect to the airport employees being relocated to Winnipeg, I have never received any notification of such a thing from the mayor or from anybody from Thompson.

Usually, when I get letters from northern Manitoba, I try to act on them right away, but I don't recall ever receiving a phone call or a phone message or a letter from Mayor Johnston from Thompson. Occasionally, I run into Mayor Johnston at different meetings around the north and he's never mentioned that issue to me.

As far as the provincial government jobs that the member is referring to, I believe those were Justice positions. I will endeavour to chat with my colleague on that and find out the reason and whether he would be willing to reconsider his decision.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Rowat: In those discussions, you might want to ask the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), or maybe you even know if there has been any discussion on a remand centre for Thompson. I believe that is something that has been on the radar screen for them for a number of years.

I would like to know if the minister has any background that he can share on that potential. I believe that the number of law officials that have to accompany individuals back and forth to The Pas for remand appointments take away those individuals from doing law enforcement. So has there been some discussion with the City of Thompson or with the Minister of Justice on remand options for the city of Thompson? Especially, considering that Thompson is a regional community, this type of service would be most beneficial to the community and would allow law officials to do the work that they're hired to do in ensuring that law and order is taken care of within the community of Thompson.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, unfortunately I haven't been privy to any discussions, if there were

discussions taking place regarding the proposed remand centre in Thompson. I will assure the member though that I will, again, talk to my colleague and find out if there is a proposal in the works. I'll find out where it's at and get back to the member.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm just curious. Can I ask the minister when was the last time he had a formal meeting with Thompson Mayor Johnston and council?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I want to indicate to the member that I can't remember exactly when the last time I had a formal meeting with the mayor and council of Thompson. I have been to Thompson lots of times. In fact, the last time I ran into Mayor Johnston was in The Pas where he and I attended the same meeting, and that was, I believe, in February. Again, I want to say that I go to a lot of meetings in the north and, generally, wherever I go the mayor seems to be there too. So we have a lot of opportunity to discuss issues and a lot of times, too, I accompany the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) when he has to go to meetings in Thompson.

So there is a lot of discussion that goes back and forth between ourselves and the mayor of Thompson, not just the mayor of Thompson, but the mayor of Gillam as well. Along those NACC mayors I meet with them constantly anyway. I meet with the mayor of the town of The Pas regularly, maybe not formally, but two weeks ago I was in a formal meeting with him, along with the reeve of the R.M. of Kelsey and the chief of OCN. Flin Flon, I go there quite a few times, but I honestly can't remember when the last time I met with the mayor or council from Thompson. You know what, next time I do that. I'll keep track and write it down in my book.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Rowat: Madam Chair, I understand and appreciate that the minister's a very busy individual, so I do appreciate—I was just curious.

In our recent meetings with MKO, there were a number of issues that were brought forward, and one of them that I'm going to raise right now has to deal with the Forbister inquest report. That was the report that, August 21, 2007, was released that talked about an incident that occurred in 2003 in Norway House. It recognized major fault with various organizations that failed to provide support for a woman who lost her life while in custody.

Recently, there were a number of issues that have come forward, and one of them is that there

doesn't seem to be a quick enough turnaround in the time lines for the completion or implementation of report recommendations. The proposed amendments included that a time period for submission of an autopsy report should be set at 60 days from the start of the procedure, with a maximum of 30-day extension at the request of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Recommendations of a working group would include child and family service agencies that would be provided for children and parents of children who die in these situations, and fines for interfering with inquiry processes would also be considered.

There are a number of amendments and a number of requests made by outside stakeholders who want inquest reports to be handled in a more timely way. So I'm wanting to know if the minister has been in consultation with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) with regard to these amendments and has taken into consideration MKO's request that a feasibility study be considered that would resource the recommendations that were provided by inquests to make sure that, you know, action is taken when recommendations are made. I guess the bottom line is that reports to be tabled take too long. Recommendations come forward and then they're shelved. I think there is lots to be learned immediately when situations occur and that action should be taken sooner rather than later to ensure that incidents do not occur again.

So MKO is really asking, you know, for some leadership from this government on this file, and I'm just wanting to know what the minister can tell me, what his comments would be with regard to the recommendations and the implementation requirements that MKO has put forward.

Mr. Lathlin: I can advise the member that I empathize with the positions or requests that are being made by MKO. Sometimes I think that these reports do take a long time to be produced and that sometimes people lose interest or they lose their relevance to a lot of people. I know when I was a chief that was always my concern. Not only inquests, how fast they were conducted and how fast the reports were made, but also to the Chief Medical Examiner. I had a good working relationship with him, speaking for my people when remains of family members would be shipped to Winnipeg for an autopsy. Sometimes it took longer than what the family members wanted, and sometimes all it would

take was a phone call to the Chief Medical Examiner's office and he would co-operate with us.

As far as the inquests are concerned, I really don't have any authority and power over how they do their work, but I agree with MKO. In fact, I will have a chat or a discussion with my colleague, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) and find out where this proposal is at. I will say, too, that I have yet to talk to my colleague, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton). I understand he attended the AGM for MKO in Nelson House, and he's been wanting to get together with me to give me a report on what took place in Nelson House. So, along with him and the Minister of Justice, we'll discuss it further.

Mrs. Rowat: I also attended the MKO's AGA. I was an invited guest so I had the opportunity to attend and to hear first-hand a number of the issues and concerns that were being shared by the northern chiefs. So, if you'd like, I'd like to join your meeting.

Just some background, in July of 2002, the Minister of Justice proposed amendments to The Fatality Inquiries Act to bring time lines in for the completion of inquest reports; that was in 2002. We're not seeing anything happening at this point. So I guess my concern is what happened to those proposed amendments. Recommendations are being made on a number of inquests since that time, but there doesn't seem to be any implementation to that. So we need to get moving on this, and that's the concern that we have with regard to that.

With regard to another issue that is of importance to a lot of northern communities, especially First Nations communities specific, I guess, an issue that came forward was the need for services for children with lifelong complex medical needs. Families in Manitoba faced funding issues due to a debate regarding jurisdiction of their children. This was an issue that came up at MKO; it came up at their AGA. It also came up in a meeting with representatives of MKO at an earlier time frame.

So my question is: There seems to be a need for government to move forward on children with lifelong complex medical needs, and in 1999 an 18-month agreement was signed with Awasis for the establishment of Children with Lifelong Complex Medical Needs pilot project. A total of 90 cases were brought on by the project, and by 2001 referrals were stopped. So at present out of the 19 cases there are 7 cases remaining, and this is a result of children

reaching the age of majority or passing away. Those reaching majority are either in medical institutions or in home communities making it on their own with their families so there are no supports available for them. Again, they're running into jurisdictional issues. There continues to be a high need for services to children with these needs, but there's the ongoing issue that needs to be addressed so that families living with disabilities are not forced out of their homes in order to endure the overall well-being of their children's needs not being met.

So there are a number of issues and I just want to know: What role do you believe the provincial government should play in providing resources and supports for families who want to keep their children within their own home communities and need resources to do so?

* (16:30)

Mr. Lathlin: Well, Madam Chair, I have to say that these are very difficult issues that First Nations communities have to deal with all the time. On the reserve, in the First Nations community, we have health authorities. Their funding comes from the federal government through what we call FNIHB, First Nations and Inuit Health branch. In many cases, they're at the mercy of funding from the federal government.

I know Norway House, for example, I don't know if they carried out their plan to return all transportation services to the federal government, medical transportation, because the federal government was not covering all of the costs, all of the trips that Norway House was being faced with, you know, a number of their people having to come to Winnipeg, Thompson and elsewhere.

So I agree, this is one area that we have to work closely with AMC and MKO and SEO.

We have made strides in other areas, like where we've gone over the jurisdictional line as a provincial government. For example, in the Island Lake area, where we're doing the dialysis machines. Norway House, we're doing the same thing. I believe we're going to be looking at doing the same thing in the Berens River area, using Berens River as a centre.

We have committees that work on First Nations health. For example, there's one called the Intergovernmental Committee on First Nations Health. These people have been meeting for quite a while now—Health, Family Services and Housing, and our department. We participate in the joint

working group to try to address health care issues on First Nations, on and off the reserve. Whenever these committees are held, the jurisdictional issues are often a hot topic of discussion.

We are working all the time to try to improve the health-care services for Aboriginal people, even though it's clearly a federal responsibility, but, in many cases, we've crossed that line because we think it's important to do so.

Mrs. Rowat: The pilot project for children with lifelong complex medical needs was created and established for the purpose of addressing service gaps left by jurisdictional challenges or disputes among the departments of both the federal and provincial government. Funding for the ongoing service of those children brought on by the pilot project has been secured by a case-by-case situation, so children that are within that pilot project continue to receive support by project staff. However, services are limited to the original pilot caseload, so the project has and still receives numerous calls and referrals. Many families are asking for help and support, and they are requesting to be part of the project. So I guess what I'm wanting to know is if there's some leadership from the provincial government to see what can be done to make this move forward.

What is being said is that Awasis, or the project itself, they're in no position at this time to take in new referrals due to lack of funding or direction. So they're looking to see what type of leadership is going to be shown from this government to get past the jurisdictional disputes and to determine how children who need care, who need help, are going to be dealt with and receive services that are very, very critical and important to not only themselves, but their families. I've been told that there are probably in excess of 250 children that meet the criteria, but have not been able to access the service; that's 250 children in northern Manitoba that need help.

Mr. Lathlin: Well, Madam Chairperson, I want to assure the member that we will do everything on our part as the Government of Manitoba to work with First Nations in Manitoba to ensure that the health-care needs are looked after. I had great hopes. What is it, two years ago, now, I was in Vancouver for the first ministers meeting where we thought we had a good agreement, over \$5-billion worth of programs and services that were agreed upon by the Prime Minister at the time and all 10 premiers and provincial territorial leaders as well. It didn't come

about. When was it, a year ago or two years ago, there was an announcement of some \$400 million that was going to be spent on Aboriginal health, and none of that came about.

So I think issues like this will become increasingly difficult to address in a full way because, although we're going to do everything we can, we also need the federal government as a partner to try to address these very serious issues because until both levels of government agree to give them higher priorities then nothing will be done, and people will continue to suffer. It's not just youth having mental problems; it's disabled people as well. You know, you try to run a wheelchair in Pukatawagan in the mud; there are no sidewalks in Pukatawagan. So it's a very complex issue, but one I think that could be addressed quite adequately if only both levels of government would quit haggling over jurisdiction. I mean it drives me nuts all the time.

Mrs. Rowat: Going into another area before I give the floor to my colleague here.

In reference to the First Nations gaming market study that recently came out, the minister responsible for gaming indicated: it doesn't change the basic point that First Nations gaming is one of a number of economic opportunities we're working on with First Nations, and we're going to continue negotiations. That was the minister being quoted, September 1, 2007, in an article.

Can I ask the minister what is his perspective regarding the development of additional gaming facilities in Manitoba? Just a statement, before you answer, there has been some concern that the province has forced South Beach to agree to go smoke-free before attaining a licence for additional VLTs. So that perception is there. So I just want to know what your perspective is regarding the development of additional gaming facilities in Manitoba.

* (16:40)

Mr. Lathlin: I sit on a committee with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) dealing with Aboriginal gaming in this province, and the member will probably remember, I forget what year it is, but it was during the days when I was in opposition, so it would have had to be over eight or nine years ago, where the previous government commissioned a study or a review of gaming activity in Manitoba. Particularly, the report was going to look at, you know, should the government license any

Aboriginal-owned casinos in Manitoba. The report came back with the government of the day saying that the province could accommodate up to five Aboriginal casinos. As it turned out, the government did not implement the recommendations of that particular report.

When we came into government in 1999, we wanted to work with First Nations in order that they could establish—we didn't say five—the report said up to five. One got going at OCN, and then the second one at South Beach. Then we did a study, jointly with AMC, as to whether the market in Manitoba was saturated, you know, can we support another casino? I don't think the minister has made up his mind yet as to where we're going to go, because we're working with AMC and there are proposals coming to us. But I would say that we will continue to work with First Nations in Manitoba to see what could be feasible. We've already, as the member knows, and I referenced that earlier in my comments that we've come to an agreement with AMC that would, over I think it's five years, see them getting approximately \$20 million of economic development money for AMC and their affiliate First Nations.

So we've worked on that end, but, also, we're going to negotiate with First Nations to see if, in fact, another casino would be feasible and where.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, my first question for the minister concerns a situation at Sagkeeng. As the minister I'm sure is very well aware, there is a very severe problem of erosion in the area where the Winnipeg River enters Lake Winnipeg. I would just ask, what is the minister doing with respect to this problem of erosion to address it?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I don't want to sound like I'm trying to divert the question, but, in cases like that, the lead department is the Department of Conservation, although I will be asked to sit at meetings, invited by the minister. As Minister of Conservation, I dealt with the erosion problems at Sagkeeng and, at that time, what is it, four years ago now, we tried to help Sagkeeng out by having, not a comprehensive soil-shore erosion program, but we did some work there. To what extent that prevented the erosion of the shoreline, I'm not sure. But I will endeavour to have a meeting with the Minister of Conservation and find out what he's done so far with respect to the erosion problem that the member is raising.

Mr. Gerrard: It's at least helpful to know that it's the Minister of Conservation because it could've been under Infrastructure or it could've been under Water Stewardship, but this is, clearly, a major issue. Earl Fontaine took me along and showed me where Mary Courchene's home—you know, last fall the bank had eroded 15 metres in one night. It's not a simple issue, and it is a severe problem which needs, I would suggest to you, some fairly urgent attention. It threatens the road; it threatens the school. It is an area where one can make a fairly good argument that the dams, for example, have held back the deposition of silt which was presenting erosion, and the dams at the north end of Lake Winnipeg may have had an impact. You know, whatever the cause, it needs addressing. So I would suggest and urge you to take this up with your Cabinet colleagues to get it addressed.

Let me ask a question with regard to something that I've talked about before, and that is when I was in Cross Lake just in the last few weeks, once again, a concern about the situation with the hospital there. I think they're the largest community in Canada without a hospital. When I wrote to the provincial Minister of Health some time ago, the provincial minister said it was a federal issue. When I wrote to the federal minister, the federal minister said it was a provincial issue. You know, this sort of buck passing has gone on for quite some time. Clearly, I mean, the federal government, one would anticipate that it should have a major role. I would ask whether you have ever gone specifically to the federal minister on behalf of the people of Cross Lake to seek a solution to get a hospital in Cross Lake.

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, I'm quite familiar with the issue that the member has raised. In fact, not recently, but in the past I've talked to both councils. At the time that we were discussing this, you know, the discussion centred around whether Cross Lake and Norway House could go together and get a regional hospital established wherever, Cross Lake or Norway House. It seems to me that there had never been a formal proposal given to anybody. Not that I've seen one anyway.

So I think, before this type of proposal could be entertained again, I want to say that, clearly, Indian health is the responsibility of the federal government. I know that because I'm a treaty Indian myself. A lot of times the federal government wants to offload onto provincial governments, and I believe the member is aware of that practice. In spite of that, though, we're able to work in many areas with First

Nations people, not completely ignoring the federal government, but working in spite of the federal government's reluctance to form partnerships with our provincial government. I am told that there's also an initiative that has been going on in Norway House. I don't know if the member is aware of that. I dealt with it quite extensively about a year ago, a year and a half ago, and I'm told as of today it's still ongoing, that is, the Norway House Health Integration Initiative, they call it. That's yet to be finished. The community council side and the First Nations side are still working with our government and also Health Canada to see what they could come up with.

* (16:50)

I agree. There should be a hospital there, maybe in between the two communities to service both Cross Lake and Norway House. Sometimes it's not easy to get those two communities to work together.

Mr. Gerrard: I would just thank you for your comments, but I would repeat the question, which was: Have you ever talked to the federal minister with regard to the need for the hospital in Cross Lake?

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I'm sorry. I forgot to mention that very recently, within the past two months, the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and I signed a joint letter to the Minister of Indian Affairs, the new minister, expressing to him our interest in meeting with him to discuss First Nations health care issues. So far we've gotten an acknowledgment letter, but we haven't got a meeting yet.

Mr. Gerrard: Would the minister be prepared to provide a copy of the letter?

Mr. Lathlin: No problem.

Mr. Gerrard: My next question deals with the situation at Sherridon. I know that finally we're starting to get some attention to the huge problem of mine tailings in Sherridon, but I would ask the minister whether there has been any discussion of treating the water which comes off the mine tailing so that it doesn't contaminate the Kississing Lake in the way that it's doing.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, well, as the member knows, we started to do some rehabilitation work for the spent mines at Lynn Lake, Sherridon. We started that when I was Minister of Conservation. I believe we committed some \$4 million to do two things:

a health-related study, health impact, and—I can't remember what the other one was. Since then, my colleague from Mines and I were in Sherridon to announce quite a significant rehab program, and I follow it quite closely. I'm told that the work is progressing well, and I'm not sure if the water from the tailings is going into the river. I think that was your question, whether that would be treated—I'm looking to my colleague behind me, I know—okay, the minister will be more than glad to answer that, I should say, technical question, tomorrow. I'm not a mining engineer; I'm just a trapper.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I'll wait for the Minister of Mines' (Mr. Rondeau) turn in Estimates, and then we'll ask the question.

I note when I was in Norway House that they are having a problem there, and that is that there are, I think it is, 37 children who have significant needs who the federal government is not providing support for. On a very temporary basis, the band, chief and council are providing support to these, but this, clearly, can't continue. I wonder if you would be willing to work with them to urge the federal government to fulfil the commitment, which it should be making to these children.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, maybe I can answer that in two ways for the member. Firstly, I'm told we could probably get some more information on the actions that have been taken with respect to the Jordan's Principle for the member.

Also, you know, the letter that I referenced earlier, I have in my office a list of health-related matters that I would like to discuss with the Minister of Indian Affairs if we ever get a chance to meet with him. I think there's going to be a meeting in Ottawa for northern ministers in November, and perhaps I'll get a chance to talk to him at that meeting. We are always trying to get meetings going with federal ministers and it's not easy to get a meeting going sometimes, but in this case we're bound and determined to have a meeting with him just like we

did with Treaty Land Entitlement; finally, you know, we got meetings going and we got some action.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to let the minister know, when I was in Ottawa with the Premier (Mr. Doer), we had a meeting, actually the Premier was not at that meeting, but the rest of the delegation was with the Minister of Justice federally, and I tackled the minister specifically on this issue and the need for federal support. Because the problem fundamentally is this, that the way the federal government is providing support, it's deliberately breaking up families because what he's saying is that we'll provide some support, if you put these children in care, but we won't provide support if these children are looked after at home.

Well, this is deliberately breaking up families, and it's terrible. I think that I would ask that you provide some support in this area. I will give you a copy of the letter which I gave personally to the minister and his staff, and hope that you'll be able to take up this cause because, I mean, the last thing we should be doing is breaking up families and this is what's happening with the specific policy that the minister himself has got at the federal level. So, I hope I can count on your support in this effort.

I would ask, finally, if you've got an update on the Moose Lake school situation.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. Lathlin: Madam Chair, I don't have the latest report on the Moose Lake school, but I got information during the summer that—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, October 1, 2007

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