

First Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, October 5, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH

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 Health. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Honourable Minister, it's been talked about quite a bit that the ambulance service has been updated, and I think you've done a wonderful job. But, in some of my riding in particular that I'm familiar with, in the far southeast corner, our ambulance service is probably a one-hour to a one-hour-and-a-half wait. So it also indicates that you're going to have the same ride back. Is there something that can be done about that?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question and, also, for the acknowledgment of investments that have been made over time in EMS. I appreciate that. I recognize sometimes we are on opposite sides of the political fence, but when we can come together to celebrate the successes and address the challenges head-on, I think we are all further ahead.

I would ask the member, just for clarification, not to suggest that there aren't some challenges in his region, but if we could just clarify for a moment the times that he's citing, one hour and one and a half hours. I'm wondering if the member would be able to suggest from where to where he might be thinking. I know that certainly from Emerson to Morris or Emerson to Altona, that those response times would, as my understanding goes, not be that long.

So I would be interested just for clarification if the member could be just a little bit more specific so we could speak directly about what we can be doing to improve that service.

Mr. Graydon: Yes, I would expand on that, Madam Minister. You're quite right in saying that a response time from Morris to Emerson or the response time from Altona to Emerson is much less. Morris, at best—at best—can do it in 40 minutes from the time the call goes in until the ambulance gets to Emerson. That's been demonstrated over the past summer.

However, when I spoke about the hour or the hour and a half, I was referring to the elapsed time from Steinbach to Sprague, or the elapsed time from Vita to Sprague or to Piney.

Ms. Oswald: I do acknowledge what the member is saying. In those particular response times, we know that there are efforts in place to have medical first response available in a number of intervening communities to address any wait times that exist there. Probably the single most important thing that we can do is ensure that there is a rigorous collection of data and of response times, data that would include such things as the member implies in that there are best-case scenarios for response time in very good weather, for example, but we live in a province, also, where we cannot count on that much of the time.

So that certainly is why the opening in September of '06 of the Medical Transportation Coordination Centre in Brandon, MTCC, was designed to achieve a number of purposes, certainly one of which is valid data collection on where our response times are longer, where the response times are shorter, where intervening first medical response needs to be in place in case of dire emergency. We know that as the data builds and is gathered at MTCC we're going to be in an even better position to be deploying resources and ensuring that, not only the physical infrastructure is available for EMS response, but also as I've mentioned over the last couple of days in Estimates that the human resources themselves are there.

We know that we have had very good advice from our regional health authorities and from the Paramedic Association of Manitoba about the need for building our complement of primary care paramedics in the field, in particular in rural and northern Manitoba. That's why we made that announcement last week in our partnership with

Red River College to have that program for the first time in Manitoba. It's a \$1.3-million investment.

In addition to that, we have set aside a \$100,000 fund so that individuals who are choosing to make a career of being a paramedic are in fact able to do so, and, in the same way, that there has been financial relief in the form of essentially a forgivable loan for a return of service agreement so that those people can have the benefits of support with their education as well as being educated from various communities in Manitoba so that they'll do that service in Manitoba.

So the member makes important points about our need to build, continue to build, EMS and I take those points very seriously.

Mr. Graydon: Thanks for those comments Madam Minister. What we've been experiencing in the far southeast, and I'm going to refer to that Sprague, Piney, Woodridge type area, that a number of the population in that area are born in Minnesota. They're born in Roseau, Minnesota, and I'm wondering if—until now, apparently, we've had no type of agreement other than a handshake. They have supplied the service and our health care system has paid for that service. I think that's a good situation. Not only is it a feel-good situation that we can work well with our neighbours to the south, but also it provides a very needed and timely service for people that require the health care.

* (10:10)

What we've experienced since the 9/11 issue is that the port that leads down to Roseau, Minnesota, is not a 24/7 port. That port is a restricted port, and there are now steel gates where there never were before. Previously, even though the port was closed, our people, the ambulance from Roseau, Minnesota, or the people from that area were able to just drive across the border. That wasn't an issue. Today, because of the steel gates, they are faced with this long wait. Is there something that the minister can do to alleviate that situation in that particular area?

Ms. Oswald: I thank the member for the question. I would agree with him in that co-operation with our neighbours, with essentially the disregarding of a border, there are no borders when your loved one is in trouble and you want them to get emergency care. That, certainly, is the way that I would like to look at it as well. As has been the case in the past, we do know that the region is certainly well aware of this additional challenge that has arisen post-9/11. We do

know that Health is not the only department that has been affected by increased security, although one could argue it's possibly the most important one, referencing again when our loved ones are in crisis. We are working in partnership with the region, who is endeavouring to work on a broader level with different departments, with our relationships in Intergovernmental Affairs, on these issues. Certainly, I would be quite prepared to get a status update of where we are in being able to untangle some of these gate issues, and I can commit to come back to the member to give him an update on that.

Just, also, I wanted to acknowledge I failed to make a point before about what we're doing to work on augmenting staffing complements in some of the areas that the member cited. We know that Vita was a previously purely voluntary situation and environment before for EMS, and it's now supported by some full-time staffing, and those are the directions that we want to go as we build our complement of human resources for paramedic service in Manitoba. So I'll commit to come back to the member with a status update on how those relationships and opening of doors, as it were, are working in relation to Roseau.

Mr. Graydon: The comments that the minister makes about staffing, and you're absolutely right, Vita has been upgraded to a full staff, not volunteer staff. However, in the same breath, Emerson was a volunteer staff with their own ambulance, an up-to-date ambulance. It was bought with volunteer money. Of course, they did a fee-for-service for the government, but with that type of an upgrade that you have suggested also regulated that particular unit out of operation, and I would say to the minister that their response time was excellent. The survival rate of any of the people that were involved, whatever they were, was as good as any other service that we've had, and on top of that, Madam Minister, the last year that they operated, they weren't reimbursed at all for any of the calls that they had made.

I'm sure that the minister is probably not prepared to go back to that type of system. However, it would be nice to acknowledge the fact that those volunteers, over the 25 or 30 years that they provided a service, should at least be reimbursed for that last year of service that they did provide in a very timely manner. The people that they provided that for certainly were happy that they were there. So I think it would be incumbent on the minister to maybe check that out, and perhaps she would find her way clear to reimburse them for that last year.

Ms. Oswald: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, we've discussed with a couple of other members the complexities in the system of transitioning from a purely voluntary environment, and we absolutely acknowledge that the volunteer base in that particular situation was excellent. It was a good complement of people. To any volunteer that has worked part-time as a first responder in those times when we really need someone, our hats must go off to those folks. That kind of volunteerism is particularly special, I would agree.

On the subject of reimbursement, certainly, again, it becomes a very complicated issue of balancing our health-care budgets and the health-care needs of folks around Manitoba, and it would be a complicated, precedent-setting kind of scenario. I can also say that as these standards for safety became more rigorous—and certainly I don't believe that there would be any Manitoban that would disagree with the fact that they wanted to be absolutely sure that standards were being met when they were relying on emergency personnel to be assisting them in those times.

As those safety standards came into place, that particular complement had some challenges in keeping up with the level of standards. The member says that we kind of put them out of business with that, and it is a balance that, of course, we're required to look at. Ensuring that a basic standard of care be met is truly the expectation of Manitobans. I suppose we can look very carefully at records of days gone past, and I'm sure the service from the volunteers was very good, but going forward, the Paramedic Association of Manitoba in particular, has very strong feelings about a standard of safety care being met.

Again, I will commit to the member that while the dissolution essentially of the volunteer squad in that particular community was not necessarily a desired outcome of safety and standards regulations being in place, we will continue to work with the region to go forward to build our workforce and to build our complement of human resources in paramedics, so that people in all regions of the province can get the care that they need when they need it.

It's complex. I don't disagree with the member, but we're going to continue with our investments in EMS to get people the care that they need when they need it.

Mr. Graydon: I concur with the minister that it is important that people get the care that they need and when they need it and then, of course, the best care that we can afford to have for our constituents throughout the province.

It actually brings me to my next question and, if I understood right, the answer is no, that they wouldn't be compensated for the last year, which I don't think would be a big issue in the budget that the minister is in charge of.

However, when we start looking at the best care possible, Madam Minister, we have in the Altona area a hospital in the town of Altona. We have two ambulances stationed there. One is fully manned and the other one, it makes me wonder why it is there, because it isn't manned. However, we find increasingly in the village of Altona or the town of Altona that the wait time can be exactly the same as it is in Sprague.

We had an incident this past summer, and I will get the proper paperwork to verify that for the minister if she really wants that. In fact, I think she might have it already. We've had a couple of them, but one of them happened to be the police that called for an ambulance were put on hold first of all. Then, they were off of hold. Then the call was disconnected and they were back on hold. Keep in mind that they are only three minutes from a hospital. There was a baseball player down on the field, a doctor attending him on the field, I believe, 45 minutes before the ambulance got there. This is not in a timely fashion when the hospital is that close. We need to understand or better understand what can be expected, Madam Minister.

* (10:20)

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, the member cites an example that, you know, very clearly, is an unacceptable amount of time. Something clearly went wrong in that transferring of information. We would be very happy and grateful, in fact, for the member to give us more details as he knows them of what happened on that day so that we can investigate.

We do know that in Altona there's a model of staffing where some is full time and some is on call. We would certainly wish to investigate the particulars of a situation where someone was in need of an EMS response and didn't get it in a timely manner. We need to know why, and we need to have

as many details as possible so we can work very diligently to ensure it doesn't happen to anyone else.

Mr. Graydon: I'd like to thank the minister for that. I will have both police reports forwarded to you, very shortly actually.

I have a question then on a bit of a different avenue. We have a hospital or a building. I guess it is a hospital in Emerson. At one time it was going to be rebuilt, and I would suggest that it would be nice if it was. However, probably, it will not be with the way the hospital regionalization has taken place. However, it is a well-maintained facility, and I would point out to the minister that her government has spent many thousands of dollars to revamp that building. I'm wondering if it would be fair for this administration to turn that into a full personal care home.

Would that be a fair question, and when would the minister be prepared to do something like this?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, when we're looking at capital investments across rural Manitoba, we are open to the creative suggestions from members, from citizen groups and from the regional health authority. I know, I was in your—or close to your region recently with the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), looking at some capital infrastructure in Morden and had an opportunity to be speaking in the community with members from the Central Regional Health Authority who again are working very diligently within the construct of their budgets and their health capital plans. We would be very open to having discussions about what would be the best possible use of our capital infrastructure in Manitoba to meet the best possible needs of people in the region.

We know that, within the context of a long-term-care strategy, many communities across rural Manitoba are working with their communities, and with their older Manitobans in particular, to talk about what exactly the needs in the communities truly are. We know that there may have been a time in history where our parents got to a certain stage in their life cycle where they moved out of their homes and moved into a personal care home. We know now that that is not always the choice of older Manitobans. They want some options close to home in their communities, whether it's an environment where there's supports for seniors in a group-living kind of setting, whether it's more supportive kind of housing before they make a transition into the kinds of higher-level needs that can be met in a personal care home situation. We would be very interested in

working with the member and with the regional health authority to not only look at what kinds of possibilities might be open with construction of personal care home environments, but also with the other kinds of needs that may exist in the region. Are there some gaps in the Emerson area when it comes to supportive kinds of housing?

We've seen some very good successes in other parts of the province already in our first phase of long-term care strategy funding by people putting their heads together and really consulting with the families and the seniors in their communities. There have been some very creative ideas brought forward that have been funded. I would be happy to discuss further with the member and in partnership with the regional health authority and, arguably most importantly, the people in the community what can we be doing to best meet the needs of the citizens in that region.

Mr. Graydon: Again, thank you, Madam Minister, for the answer to the question. There's definitely a need, and I'm sure that there's a need throughout all of Manitoba. I'm more familiar with the needs in my own constituency, of course.

The long-term care facilities, I would suggest to the minister that many of these facilities, and because my father is starting to go in that particular route of the Alzheimer route, we've moved him back into our community. It seems that if they're in communities that they're familiar with and people that they've been familiar with in their younger years, they seem to enjoy a better quality of life. So I think it is important that in the communities we try and keep our older residents there as much as we can. Of course, it also helps to rejuvenate the community, as well, with the staff that works there. So I would concur with her that we would certainly support more of these types of facilities.

One of those facilities could easily be in the village of Sprague. I think they have approached you. They would like to do that. Apparently, they want to have a seniors-type home and then build that into the long-term care facility on the end of that.

Apparently, there's a set rate that is charged. From what I understand from some of the people—I'm not totally familiar with it, but from what I understand, they're willing to pay more for these apartments if they're a dual apartment and a two-bedroom apartment where a husband and wife can be together. And if one of them happens to start to slip and has to move into the long-term and the

extended-, or the 24-hour-type care, the other mate only has to walk down the hall, and it's not an inconvenience. That's one of the types of things that I would like to see this administration work towards.

On another topic, and it's very close to us as well because we have a lot of home care in our area. We appreciate that type of service, but what we're finding is that the home care workers put in many, many hours. I don't know that the support staff for them is doing as much work as is necessary. Sometimes I go by an office and I see the coordinator for that area there at 11 o'clock at night.

I had an opportunity to speak to her the other day, the other day probably being probably four or five months ago, and she was in her office watching her car being stolen in the front, waiting 45 minutes for the RCMP to come to get the car, or come. By that time the car was gone.

However, I said, my goodness, what are you doing with all this overtime money? She said, we don't get paid overtime. She said, our workload is—I have to do this. She said, to get my reports from my girls, they leave them in a tackle box at a corner Shell station. It's picked up by a bus driver; then it's delivered to my office. I don't think that's proper support for the people that do a tremendous job in all kinds of weather with our seniors.

* (10:30)

In the south, I'll just bring this up as an aside, we have relatively no cell service, so these people are on the road at all times with no communications

Madam Minister, I'd certainly appreciate you addressing this issue. I think that's an internal issue, and I'm sure that it'll fit in your budget.

Ms. Oswald: I appreciate the member raising issues of support that he has seen, or more to the point, not seeing, in his region for the individuals that are working in home care. I agree whole-heartedly with him about how important our home-care workers are. Certainly, you know, in the last months of my mother's life, home care was an absolute lifeline for her and for us. We, of course, you know, as children, always wanted to be there every moment of every day, but that is just not possible. And the care and the work that they do, just from my perspective, not what I know professionally in this role as the Minister of Health, I cannot agree more with the member that the care that they provide to individuals, oftentimes older Manitobans, and the comfort and security that they provide to those older Manitobans'

families it's almost impossible to put a price tag on such a thing.

Certainly, you know, home-care workers as I understand, do belong to a contract setting, and it would be very surprising to me to learn that appropriate compensation was not forthcoming in those situations, so it would be something that will absolutely be followed up by us in our office, and certainly how those arrangements, some of the mechanics that the member was talking about, about transferring of paperwork and so forth and general support certainly fall under the umbrella of what we expect regional health authorities to be taking of.

So we will most definitely have conversations with the region to see what we can be doing in partnership with them to be providing a different kind of support, a different protocol and endeavouring to help these people who are, quite frankly, award winning, one might say. We know that when independent bodies like the Canadian Institute for Health Information come in and do a very detailed study on such things, and they cite Manitoba as having the best in Canada for home care and that we invest more than any other province in Canada in this, that governments like to take credit for that. But really that credit is to go to the people that are at the bedside and at the elbow of those folks that need that help the most.

So I appreciate the member acknowledging that and commit to him to investigate the support situation that he cites with a goal towards improving that situation.

Mr. Graydon: Thanks again, Madam Minister. You're absolutely right. These people are very special people, and I have a great deal of respect for them and for what they do.

It's becoming increasingly, I shouldn't say popular. That's not the word I'm looking for. But it's increasing more and more that hospitals have people that really don't belong in a hospital; they belong in an extended-care unit. We're finding in a town like Altona, for example, where the people have built units, albeit maybe with some government assistance, but a lot of it without, they have built units to assist people in these situations, and what we are finding is a lot of offloading from the hospital onto these facilities, just saying, we have no place or we have nobody to look after it. So the volunteer system in Altona has been stretched almost to the limit at this point. I give Altona a lot of kudos for the volunteerism that does go on in that particular

community. But, also, they're running out of space and, Madam Minister, I would suggest that this needs to be addressed in that community. I'm not sure if it gets downloaded from Boundary Trails to Altona hospital and then from there down to the next tier down, but it's certainly an issue that's in that community, and they'll be wanting it addressed. I would like to see it addressed, and, if the minister is willing, I will supply her with a lot more information on this particular topic.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, yes, we would be interested in as many details and specifics that the member can provide. If he's aware of a particular organization or a particular unit that is feeling the pressure of what is perceived to be offloading, as he says, from the hospital, some details on that would be very useful to us. We'll have the department follow up absolutely on that.

And on that same theme, I think I've made mention of this to members yesterday and the day before, whichever day we were in here before, it all seems to blur together—that certainly what we can be doing to increase the complement of health human resources so that people are put through hospital situations more quickly and that there are more nurses, whether they're of a personal care home nature or acute care nature and health-care aides available in the community to care for these people. We don't hear very often of terms like offloading or a back-up of people in a hospital when we know we have communities that are as fully staffed as they wish to be. That's why we've made robust commitments to increasing complements of nurses, to increasing and adapting the staffing complements that we see in personal care homes.

I've said to the member's colleagues, in the days gone by, that we have done a review of personal care home staffing guidelines that had not been amended, adapted, since the mid-'70s, 1973, I think. We know that, as I said earlier, the nature of the client that goes to a personal care home environment today is not the same person that was going in 1973. We know that we need to look at how those environments are staffed, that we need to staff them in a different way to address those levels of acuity, to ensure that the nurses are supported by health-care aides, and that all of the needs of the patients are being looked after.

So that work has been done with people from the department and the regional health authorities. Arguably, most importantly, nurses from the front line who have said: This is what we are seeing every

day. It's not the same as my mother saw, my mother who was a nurse saw in 1973, and I need a different kind of help.

So we have committed to do that analysis, and the study has been complete and the recommendations have been made available to government, the advice. We're working to move as swiftly as we can to ensure that that staffing complement is in place, the support is there, as the member says, for these hardworking folks on the front line so that the people that need the care are getting the best possible care that they can and in the communities where they want to be.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Madam Minister, good morning. I thank my colleague from Emerson for posing the concerns that are germane to his particular area. I think I've learned, as the new Health critic, that when you put out an e-mail to your colleagues saying, if you have any local health concerns, let me know, maybe I should handle that differently next time. Certainly, there were a number who came forward and who will come forward still. But it's good, obviously, that these local issues are brought forward because I think that that's probably the best way to get resolutions to them.

* (10:40)

On broader issues that the minister and I left off with yesterday morning in relation to West Nile, I know the minister endeavoured to bring back information in terms of when she had briefings and when she was first alerted to the difficult year. This would be with West Nile. I wonder if she could provide that information just to get things moving on that topic again.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I do have some updates for the member on that and one other issue. I can address them both in this answer if he so chooses. I can tell the member that, in going back and doing an analysis and an inventory of meetings that have happened with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Joel Kettner, from whom, of course, we take all of our advice about medical and health protocols concerning West Nile and other issues of public health, and Dr. Susan Roberecki, who also is an expert on this file—in going back to do an inventory of when meetings occurred, it became evident to me that indeed these meetings are regular and ongoing throughout the course of the year. Certainly, it almost becomes difficult to discern when the meetings concerning what happened last year with West Nile and the post-analysis and synthesis and

discussion about what to do in the following year end, if they ever end, and when the conversations about this year begin.

I believe that there was a meeting that I might define as such that took place in December when the first discussions about how the protocols and trapping measurements and issues would be taking place for the '07 season. I suppose that, arguably, that would be the transition meeting from last season into this season.

But I think what the member is specifically wanting to ask me is at exactly which hour did Dr. Joel Kettner tell me that there was going to be more West Nile than not. As it clearly states, you know, in a number of the publications that are available about West Nile, there are a number of factors that go into that.

Dr. Joel Kettner himself will say that we can suggest that, based on patterns in years gone by, what might happen until actual birds that are infected arrive in the province and actual mosquitoes are hatched and born that then bite the birds and actual rains occur or actual droughts occur or very hot weather occurs or very, very cold weather occurs, one cannot stand and say that today we know that we are going to end up with 566 cases of West Nile virus.

Now, having said that, Dr. Kettner pays very close attention to what is happening with weather, humidity, water and standing water and what's happening with larviciding and the ordering of larviciding and co-ordinating with municipalities on larviciding. As the conditions come together, Dr. Kettner will advise that the situation is higher than it was the week before or the month before. It's in those times that, within the context of the weekly report, the public will be notified that the risk is indeed higher.

Further still, when health orders are issued—and again, I'd reiterate to the member that there were 19 this year, more than all of the other years combined by some margin—that is how the public is notified that, indeed, the risk is higher.

So we endeavour to ensure that our communications were in place, that the public campaign, particularly emphasizing that people had to take personal protection and personal precautions, the single most important thing that we can do, that those are issued as the risk increases.

So I would say to the member that discussions about West Nile and what we can be doing on the public communications side, those go on yearly. We also know that this year, given the development of warm weather, of moisture, of the kinds of conditions that do indeed create a scenario for more West Nile to be spread, that fogging orders were issued earlier this year than any other previous years.

So, taking our advice from Dr. Kettner, we acted earlier. We acted with spraying in more communities significantly than ever before. We extended our communications protocol longer than any other year before, and we will continue to take advice from Dr. Joel Kettner. Indeed, we are open to suggestions from the member opposite and from those that are communications experts if he feels that there's more that we can be doing on the communications side. We are open to listen to his ideas on what he thinks can be done.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm tempted in some ways to sort of press a little further. I always suspect there was probably some sort of a seminal moment where within the context of a departmental briefing or in the context of discussions with those who you're meeting with on the issue, that there was a moment in time where somebody would have said, you know, Madam Minister, I think we have a very significant issue here this year.

But I'm also not confident of the fact that I'll get that answer. I know the minister yesterday I think described Estimates as a blood sport. I don't think I would agree with that in my experience. It seems to be more sometimes of a slow dance, and this dance might be going too slowly if I continue to try to press just for that simple moment in time, because I don't think that that would necessarily come.

I do want to ask the minister whether or not her department—and, certainly, there have been suggestions that have come forward. I know the leader of our party has talked about having sort of a different classification system, a warning system for the risk of West Nile virus at different times. So suggestions have been brought forward to the minister.

But are there discussions underway at this point about how things could be done differently for next year or when it becomes evident that we might have a difficult year? Can the minister share with us any of those suggestions about how they might approach the West Nile problem in Manitoba differently in the years to come?

Ms. Oswald: I concede the point that I was conferring with the deputy minister there. I thought I heard the member opposite asking me to dance. Is that correct, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairperson: No, it's not.

Ms. Oswald: I'm sorry. Just wondering.

I can say to the member opposite that, again, from year to year as we get the advice from Dr. Joel Kettner about the number of variables that exist when protocols are put into place, communications put into place, health orders issued, it really does depend on the conditions that we see gathering around us. It is difficult to predict the weather, although that can be done somewhat. But the conditions certainly do rely on a number of variables. So Dr. Joel Kettner and Dr. Susan Roberecki and many others that are doing this analysis, you certainly take all of those factors into account to inform us to the best of their ability so that we can get our communications out as quickly as possible.

* (10:50)

I did read with interest, whether it was the member opposite or the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) making some suggestions about a rating scale, sort of. I think it was compared to a fire hazard kind of rating scale. I don't want to say that that's absolutely true. I certainly do appreciate another way of trying to alert the public to the importance of taking personal protection. Whether or not that's exactly the way to do, it I can acknowledge creativity in communication would be key.

I know Dr. Kettner did make some examination about us needing to be very careful in our communications about even having the best of intentions, but perhaps having perverse outcomes. Is it possible that some of our communications; perhaps if it was with a rating scale like the fire hazard saying today the risk is quite low, would that create a situation where people might individually believe that they didn't need to take as much protection themselves and perhaps find themselves exposed to a mosquito carrying the virus than if we communicated in another creative way that kept people on high alert all the time about the importance of personal protection?

I think that that idea needs to be explored further to make sure that even with the best of intentions with our communication plans and creativity, we don't do anything that would go against the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health who believes

that personal protection would be paramount. At the same time he also says that he doesn't want people to be stricken with such a kind of fear about West Nile that they stay indoors all summer long, that there is a fine balance that needs to be struck here, indeed.

But, having said all that, I do acknowledge that the member may have that idea or other ideas about how we can communicate with our citizens to alert them to the fact that, while in many statistical respects the risk may be quite low of contracting the neurological strain of West Nile, that personal protection is very important.

I can also confirm for the member that we have asked Dr. Kettner. I have asked, and through the deputy, that in addition to the regular report that is done at the end of the season this year, that we in fact receive a more detailed report, looking at the fact that we did see larger numbers and offering us even further very good advice about how we can continue on our journey of providing public health information and providing mitigation efforts in a way that will be effective in doing our best to work together with the public to prevent people from getting West Nile.

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, I'll have to correct the record to indicate that I drew an analogy similar to the analogy or different than the analogy that the minister drew yesterday, but, certainly, I wouldn't want my wife perusing *Hansard* as she does at some point and wondering in some nefarious way what happened here at Estimates. I was not asking the minister to dance and, of course, to those in my community, some of them who still don't dance, I would not want this to go beyond this room.

But, moving back to the issue at hand, West Nile. My friend, my colleague, from Emerson whispered in my ear about possible early warning systems and whether or not there is a correlation between what might happen in other jurisdictions in the earlier part of the year and what might be coming to Manitoba. So, for example, if there was a higher proportion of dead birds found in a southern region of the United States, or South Dakota or other jurisdictions, whether or not that would provide an indication to us that we might have a worse year for West Nile than otherwise. On behalf of my colleague from Emerson, I pose that question.

Ms. Oswald: I will concede the point that, when it comes to relationships of the existence of *Culex tarsalis* mosquitoes in traps and the counts of those traps and the best way to track probability of people

contracting the disease, we can best do that through the tracking of the neuralgic syndrome versus the asymptomatic syndrome.

I will concede that we do start to get into the language of Dr. Joel Kettner, and it should be his language that is talking about such things. So I would not deign to pretend to be a scientist. What I can say is that when we look at what happened this year, for example, in North Dakota, where we have seen maybe some 43 out of 310 neurologic cases classified, with them being reasonably close neighbours, it didn't make a great deal of difference in helping us predict that we were going to have a lot more. Minnesota isn't really a fair comparable particularly. We have seen west of us in Saskatchewan rather explosive numbers compared to what's happening in Manitoba. While we certainly pay attention to what's going on in the other regions, according to Dr. Joel Kettner, and again, I would leave the scientific explanation for this and the probabilities thereof to him to explain, I can say, in a very up-at-30,000-feet kind of way, that it isn't absolutely a fair forecaster or a fair predictor of what's going to happen in Manitoba. He might say that again, it has so much to do with humidity, heat, moisture, standing water, how much larviciding we're doing, how many health orders we issue and when.

So there are just incredible variables that really can't be matched jurisdiction to jurisdiction. We pay attention, absolutely, but need to keep very close surveillance here at home and here in our home communities to ensure that, as would be indicated from some preliminary numbers here, because the situation in Minnesota, for example, did not seem that grave, we didn't have to worry here, that people kept their eye very closely on the Manitoba environment. So it would be used, it being comparisons to other jurisdictions, would be used as a very low but relevant indicator compared to what's happening here in Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for that answer and perhaps my colleague would like to pursue that more directly with the minister at another time.

Specifically, and it is a very specific sort of instance on the issue of West Nile. I did receive a letter from an individual—I don't want to put his name on the record, but I'm certainly happy to give the minister the name, though, off the record—who's indicated he's the spokesperson for his father-in-law who died on August 19. He indicates in the letter that

it was a result of West Nile virus, but that that death hasn't been confirmed yet as a death from West Nile virus. Two particular issues he raises in the letter, and that I know that he has also sent to Manitoba Health, one being the sort of time-lag between the death and the confirmation. Also he indicates that a doctor—and I'm not going to name the facility or the doctor; I'm going to let the minister look into this, not name it on the record, indicates that when his father-in-law was showing symptoms or stress, had gone to the doctor and the doctor had said, we don't like to even speak of the possibility of West Nile virus because it's bad for the Manitoba economy. Now that is obviously not something the minister would have personal knowledge of. So I'm not going to ask her to comment on that. I'm just going to leave the information with her, but I do want to get an indication of how long would it normally take to confirm a death of West Nile virus and then to be reported back to the public.

Ms. Oswald: I'll thank the member for, first of all, respecting the nuances and realities of private, personal health information, thank you, and we will receive that information from him and endeavour to investigate any details on that subject.

* (11:00)

As far as the scientific time required to confirm or refute the existence of West Nile virus, that would be a question that I would need to ask directly to Dr. Kettner. I do not know the answer to how long the testing takes, but I will endeavour to try to find that answer for the member if, in fact, it is a consistent time every time, but I will endeavour to find that out.

Mr. Goertzen: That's fine. I thank the minister for that, and I will get her the name of the contacts before we leave committee today.

A few questions before I turn it over to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), who I know, has some broad questions regarding issues related to health. On the issue of the regional health authority review that is currently undergoing, I believe in Interim Supply the minister indicated that she expects the report by the end of the year.

Could she indicate if that time line is still relevant and if she has any understanding of how many submissions have been made to the commission doing the review?

Ms. Oswald: I can confirm for the member that we do believe the review to be on track as far as time goes. I can tell you that as of the middle of

September the reviewers had received over a hundred public submissions and over 500 submissions from health-care representatives, from faith-based organizations, from First Nation communities and Manitoba businesses.

I'm just checking to see if we can gather to date how many submissions have been received, but that may give the member a sense of where we were on or around September 16.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the minister's answer. I know there's been discussion about whether or not there would be sort of a broader public consultation, and that obviously wasn't going to be coming forward in this particular round, but I wonder if the minister—and I know in reading Interim Supply answers, she had indicated she hadn't ruled out a public consultation process. There probably would still be an opportunity, once the report comes forward, to take the report to the public for consultation based on that.

I wonder if that's part of her thought process of having a public consultation on the report that comes forward from the commission.

Ms. Oswald: Well, the member is quite right, Madam Chair, that we have not closed the door on the concept of a public forum. In what form that will take, we have not yet determined that. We do know that the independent members on the review committee who, it should be put on the public record once again, are indeed excellent are feeling very confident about the range and the breadth of the kinds of responses that they are getting. They are also going to meet with groups that, rather than submit a proposal, wish to have a face-to-face meeting with them. It's their advice at this point that the nature of the kinds of responses that they're getting is very constructive and fulsome in their discussion and their analysis.

We certainly have made a commitment as well to hold the line on the budget that we have set for this review, and we are on target to do that as well. Members opposite and citizens alike spend much of their time passionately speaking about resources being on the front line, and we agree with them, so we want to ensure that we hold the line on that budget.

We know that there was a broad public consultation called Health Choices that was undertaken in 2002, and we know that we had much that we could learn from that. So the nature of this

review that is, by all accounts and reports from the reviewers going very well so far, is on target. I'll say again that we haven't closed the door on a public scenario.

Ms. Erin Selby, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Certainly, the results of the review will be public, and we're going to continue to hear from the public in ways that, whether it's the regional health authority system itself which, of course, is what this review is about, or particular issues concerning health care. We are hearing from the public all the time on those issues, and let it go on the record to say that it isn't always negative.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and for the record, I'm not always negative either. I think the minister and I had a good announcement. I wouldn't call it a joint announcement because I didn't get an invitation nor did I get an opportunity to speak at the announcement, but I did have a chance to speak to the media after and said it was positive that we had the expansion of the ER in Bethesda. It was certainly long overdue.

Specific to the region and the regional health in South Eastman, the minister, I'm sure, is aware of a lot of the statistics. I know she's met with the regional health authority as well as other representatives from the community and knows that 21 percent of the provincial growth in Manitoba between 1998 and 2006 happened in the region of southeastern Manitoba, which I think is remarkable. There aren't a lot of areas of Manitoba that are growing, but certainly South Eastman is growing at a significant rate. That also causes pressures, and the ER announcement I know would have been a partial response to those pressures, but there are others, certainly, within the community and within the region more generally.

Information provided by South Eastman Health indicates that the wait times for surgeries at Bethesda Hospital have risen from, and there are two doctors performing surgeries, have risen from between six and eight weeks from the two doctors in September 2004 to the range of 20 to 22 weeks between the two doctors in March of this year. So that's a significant increase in the wait times for the surgeries, and while I recognize that there is investment going into the Ste. Anne Hospital for surgeries, I don't think that that will be a long-term solution to the wait times at Bethesda and because of the growth of the region.

Also, the number of personal care home beds per individual over 75 has dropped significantly over the last number of years as a result of the fact that we're holding a good part of our population; also others are moving to the area. There's proposals from the Menno Home in Grunthal related to personal care home or to care beds. Also, certainly, Steinbach has some of those needs. I'm sure others in the area, such as Niverville, will as well.

So, particular to two issues: of personal care home space in south eastern Manitoba and the area that I represent, and also surgery times at Bethesda, can I expect that the minister and I will be sharing another meeting soon in the area for announcements on those two issues?

Ms. Oswald: We did have a very fruitful morning at the Bethesda Hospital together. Certainly we know that the people in the region were very, very pleased with the announcement, as were the folks in Ste. Anne.

It's true that the population is growing out there. I have no question it's probably because they really like their MLA, but there may be other reasons as well.

We know that we need to be continuing to make investments in South Eastman as a result of the growth in that area. We know, and I'm fairly sure the member is aware, that the South Eastman region has had funding increases from '99 to '07-08 of over \$30 million, and the average year-over-year percentage increase was about 8.9 percent. We know that average year-over-year percentage increases for all RHAs over the same period was about 7.2. So we know that the region is receiving more resources that they need for the increased population that's happening out there, and we know that last year the region was some 3.6 percent higher than the average of the other RHAs.

*(11:10)

Again, the people at the regional health authority, who are excellent advocates and terrific leaders for the community, do make impassioned and very detailed presentations to government about their needs, and we're working hard to work with the region to make those needs happen. I think it's also very appropriate to say that, at Bethesda specifically, the work that the foundation has done there, as a very significant partner in the development of capital resources for the region, is extraordinary. I don't believe the paint was dry on the tower for

chemotherapy, for the new birthing rooms, and we were able to be there, again, with the foundation at our side ready to make a further contribution as we announced the expansion of the emergency department. So we're listening to what Eastman has to say. We know that its needs are expanding, and we're endeavouring to work as hard as we can with the region to meet those needs.

We know that since 1999 we've seen a net increase of personal care home beds across the province, but as the member points out, we need to be paying close attention to regions where our population is growing and the kinds of efforts that can be made in partnership with community groups so that people can have the access to personal care home settings for their loved ones when they need to have that. As well as what I was saying to the Member for Emerson before—I believe you were present for that—that we want to work with the region to be providing a range of opportunities for people in the community, supports for seniors in group living, for example, other kinds of supportive housing environments so that people have choices as they grow a little bit older and may not be ready for a personal care home, but indeed may well be ready for more support and more assistance. So we look forward to working with the member and with the region to look at as many of the needs as we can and try to address them in a timely manner, most certainly.

On the issue of wait times that the member cited, I do want to let the member know that we acknowledge that there is a wait time situation in South Eastman that is not, on orthopedics in particular matching what is going on in the rest of the province. We recognize it as a serious issue and our provincial director of access, Dr. Luis Oppenheimer is intimately involved with doctors in the region to assist in what can be done with wait times and with wait lists. We know that as we work together as a community, all the way back to our first ministers, making that commitment to bring wait times down, and with the support, which I freely acknowledge, from the federal government to help us work on wait times, that it isn't just a matter of investing money. It's a matter of changing the system and sometimes the culture, and having individual physicians, whom I respect deeply, that may hold on to their personal wait lists more snugly than other doctors who are willing to co-operate and collaborate and centralize, and do the very best that they can for the patients and for their care.

We know that Dr. Oppenheimer has shown incredible leadership in Winnipeg with orthopedics, and we have every confidence that his vision and his expertise and support out in South Eastman, with those docs and their wait lists, is going to be very fruitful as well.

With that, I'm not certain, maybe the member can signal to me if he's planning to transition because I did want to put one more thing on the record from yesterday. Is this your last question?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) applauding my question. While I'm not going to take credit for the population growth in southeastern Manitoba, other than one, I had responsibility for one individual population growth in the region and it may be two in the future, but that'll probably be it.

But, certainly, there are a lot of pressures in the region regarding the population. I hear what the minister is saying about an increase in percentage of funding, but it's not anywhere near keeping pace with the population growth. Even that disparity between the average funding increase for RHAs in South Eastman, when you look at the population growth and disparity between our region and others in the growth there, I think that the funding increase should have been significantly higher.

There was a report released, I believe it was yesterday, from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy on different models of funding for RHAs, and one was a population-based model. I haven't run through sort of the calculations and how that would affect different regions, but I wonder if the minister could briefly—because I only have one question following this—but briefly indicate if she's had an opportunity to see that report and when she might be prepared to make a comment on it.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I've had an opportunity to take an initial look at the study from the Centre for Health Policy. I would say, broadly, it is good information for us, you know, to be able to look at different ways and different models of health spending, but as our CFO quite rightly points out—and I certainly do defer to her when it comes to matters of arithmetic and health funding—that these are reasonably gross numbers with things like, you know, community health, whole segments of issues of mental health, outpatient kinds of procedures that aren't fully and accurately captured.

While we will, of course, continue to do an in-depth analysis to continue to strive to provide the best kind of funding model for the people of Manitoba, we need to be looking at different ideas and make sure that what we're applying is indeed apples to apples, oranges to oranges, bananas to bananas. So we will make sure that we continue to do that.

Just prior to—and again, I'm not sure if this is the last question—I did want to go on the record with the member. We touched very briefly yesterday on blood sample legislation and, of course, I did want to cite with the member that, you know, of course, I'm acutely aware of discussions that have gone on between the member and the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) about previous discussions concerning blood samples legislation. Certainly, this was part of my journey in learning about the importance of immediate administration of any sort of prophylaxis for those that have been infected.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair.

I did say, and in the spirit of acknowledging when we are absolutely right and when we are not, I do want to acknowledge for the member that I went and did my homework and learned that the member yesterday was quite right, and I was off by two provinces, that, indeed, Saskatchewan does have mandatory testing and disclosure—The Bodily Substances Act which came into force in October of '05. Interesting data there, too, on the number of voluntary situations that occur and the number of times that the legislation itself has had to be enforced. They are doing very, very, very well on the voluntary side. So those numbers are very low. Nova Scotia, indeed, mandatory testing and disclosure in force June '06; Ontario, and indeed they've made some amendments, but that is in force as of August 10, '07; and Alberta, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act in force October 1, '07.

So, when the member cited four provinces yesterday, he was quite right. I want that to go on the record.

* (11:20)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I appreciate that from the member. We had a discussion yesterday that nobody's ever perfect and it's always mistakes made, and so I know I've made my fair share and will continue to. But I'm glad that's been corrected, and I look forward to similar legislation coming forward in Manitoba.

One last question, and I have promised that I would turn it over to my friend from River Heights. It is sort of in relation to the minister's last answer and things that were happening in other provinces. There are now a number of other provinces, although I won't put the number on the record and test my luck again, but there are other provinces that have gone to funding insulin pumps for type 1 diabetes, and there are different ranges of coverage even within those models. I know that some have covered it for adults as well as children. Others, and I think probably the majority, only cover it for children. It is an issue that's been raised a number of times, both in the Legislature and more broadly in Manitoba.

I want to commend an individual, not a constituent of mine but who lives nearby me, her name is Leah Wiebe and she's been active in getting petitions and raising this issue not only to my attention but also to the attention of Manitobans as a whole. Mrs. Wiebe's crusade, I don't think she'd mind me calling it a crusade, is to get the government to have some sort of funding for type 1 diabetes. I believe she indicated that she would like the funding to be for everyone, adults and children, and I would certainly support the efforts that she's been making in raising this issue. I wonder if the minister could indicate if the Province is moving in that direction that provides funding for insulin pumps for type 1 diabetes.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I am aware that this issue has been raised before, not only by the member opposite, who has been a passionate advocate—he's being quite modest, I think—and also by members of the public, in particular the individual that he's made mention of. I can alert the member to the fact that he is aware that we have made progress in the area in assisting folks that are living with diabetes in that Pharmacare does cover glucose test strips, lancets, lancet syringes, needles, and some pump supplies, which includes insulin infusion sets. We do know that there have been movements across the country on this front.

We believe that a good estimate of the cost of insulin pumps would be somewhere between \$6,000 and \$7,000, depending on the features, and to date the annual supply costs under Pharmacare would be estimated at \$2,000 to \$4,000. What I can say is that, knowing there are some 500 or more individuals under 18 in Manitoba who might be eligible if a benefit program was in place, we know that that calculates to somewhere in the neighbourhood of over \$3 million and then \$2 million-plus for ongoing

supplies. We know, as we go through the balance of what our Pharmacare can cover and cannot cover, that it is a subject of debate at present, and we will continue to do our work on this. I know, as a parent, were this to be something that my child might need, I would, too, want to know that that assistance would be available. So I'll continue to work with the member in efforts to go forward and see what we can do on this point.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question relates to the inspections done in St. James homes, which was the area where there was sewage as a result of what happened with the City of Winnipeg. Water containing sewage got into quite a number of basements in the St. James area. I would ask, what inspections were done, when were they done, and what were the results of these health inspections?

Ms. Oswald: I will endeavour to provide the information to the member once I'm able to gather the list and the details of the who, what, when and wheres.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you, I look forward to receiving that. I'm a little bit surprised that the minister is not on top of that because there are clearly a number of people in the St. James area who are very concerned about the situation.

Let me move on, then, to ask what health inspections have been done in Flin Flon in relationship to the concerns over metal toxicity and high levels of a number of heavy metals in parts of Flin Flon. Can the minister tell me what health inspections have been done, when they were done?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I don't believe it's a case of whether I'm on top of a file or not. Just to get the ball rolling on a positive note, I know that the member opposite would expect accurate information, and that's what I'm committing to get for him on the issue of the St. James situation.

On the subject of the Flin Flon report that we saw appear in the paper recently, come up in Question Period recently, we know that the findings of the report were made public in July of 2007, and those findings included letting the public know health information such as the importance of adults and children washing hands after exposure to dirt and soil, washing garden vegetables well, keeping children's outside toys very clean. As the member knows, this information was provided to and printed in the local newspapers on July 31 of '07.

We also know that Manitoba Public Health officials are suggesting that the risk to human health may likely be very low but that indeed a more comprehensive human health risk assessment is needed to better and more fully determine the risk and appropriate actions. Certainly, the people of Flin Flon would expect that, and that's underway with a community advisory committee and the company itself.

Remember, once again, that Manitoba Conservation released the study to the committee in July as part of its regular Healthy Flin Flon monthly meetings. Again, I would reiterate that the public was made aware in the July 31 local paper as well as being available from the department's Web site.

There was a public meeting that was held last week, I believe, and we know that the government is going to continue to work with Manitoba Conservation and Manitoba Health to ensure that we can gather as much information as we can to be able to provide the best information to the families in Flin Flon, to the professionals in Flin Flon, so that the most appropriate actions can be taken.

Mr. Gerrard: Can the minister tell me the name of the health inspector for the Flin Flon region?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, we will endeavour to get the name of the public health inspector for Flin Flon, to be accurate. I know information I have in front of me cites the MOH, Dr. Routledge, but we will get the information for the member, the person's exact name.

Mr. Gerrard: What I had asked initially was what has been inspected in terms of Flin Flon, and what has been found?

* (11:30)

Ms. Oswald: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. As I said, public health officials are working on a more comprehensive human health risk assessment. This work is ongoing at this time. Certainly, not only will the member, but the community and, of course, people in Conservation and all of those that will be working together on a multidisciplinary team will have the findings of tests and assessments and analyses that are being done in Flin Flon in a timely manner.

Mr. Gerrard: The report which was publicly released in July documents some quite high levels, certainly above acceptable levels, of lead, mercury, and arsenic in areas where children are playing. Can the minister tell me when those first results were

available? Clearly, they would have been available sometime before the public report was made.

Ms. Oswald: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. As I said in my answer earlier, the report was made public in July of 2007. There are issues in the report that merit further analysis, and that's why further health assessment is being done. That's why in the meantime there has been health information put forward to the public in an abundance of caution concerning handwashing after exposure to dirt, washing any garden vegetables, keeping children's outside toys clean, so that, while that work continues to be in progress, people are as fully informed as they can be about efforts that they can take on personal protection for themselves and for their children.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. There were my recollection from that report, two schoolyards and a number of playgrounds, park areas, where the levels of arsenic, mercury and lead were clearly above acceptable levels. Can the minister tell me whether, in fact, children are still playing in these areas?

Ms. Oswald: Again, the report itself which was made available to the public in July of '07, a report that certainly did cite some concerning statistics, enough so, of course, that public health information was provided to people about handwashing with exposure to dirt, with washing food from outside, washing toys.

It certainly is a report that has once again brought public awareness in Flin Flon to the importance of these kinds of public health information issues. As far as the patterns of families in Flin Flon, the patterns of children going to school in Flin Flon—and by patterns I mean where they walk and where they play—I can't report the exact migration of people in Flin Flon to the member, certainly without being there. But I can tell you that information has been made available to the public concerning the contents of the report. Parents and teachers and community leaders are going to work on the best advice of that information as further health assessment goes forward. Again, regarding specific details of the report made to Conservation, I have no question that the member opposite will be directing questions of a very specific nature to Conservation and can rest assured that our department will be working closely with them on results of any inspections or health assessments in a protocol going forward to ensure that public have the

information that they need to have to be as safe as they possibly can.

Mr. Gerrard: To the minister: Has the public health inspector for the area done the inspecting to find out whether the guidelines with regard to hand washing, kids not putting fingers in their mouths, and so on are being followed in Flin Flon?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I would endeavour to get back to the member on the specifics of work that has been done, is ongoing and will be done related to public health inspectors. I can confirm for the member, once again, that the findings of the study were made available in July of '07 and that the public was given information concerning the hand washing. I think I can say with confidence that there are no public health individuals going into people's homes to watch whether or not their hands are being washed. I don't think that's exactly what the member meant, although it sounded like it. But, certainly, those efforts have been made to notify the public about protocols: hand washing, washing of toys, washing of any kinds of materials that would exist in someone's yard that parents and children may be using on a daily basis that need to be kept clean, not to mention the garden vegetables; that information has been made to the public in a variety of ways. Manitoba Health will continue to work in close proximity to the Department of Conservation so that we can be offering the best information to parents and families so that they can do the best that they can for personal protection.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm wondering whether it's been made very clear to people in Flin Flon which specific schoolyards and playgrounds and park areas have got levels which are above the acceptable range. I'm wondering whether it's been made very clear to people in Flin Flon which specific schoolyards and playgrounds and park areas have got levels which are above the acceptable range.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Member for River Heights.

Ms. Oswald: Again, the member is asking for—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister of Health, I apologize.

Ms. Oswald: Really? Does somebody else want to answer? No.

Certainly, the details of the nature of the communications that have gone to the public in Flin Flon are available on, I believe, the Department of

Conservation Web site, but I will double-check that. Again, it has been made public. Whether or not a list of specific areas has been made available to the public or not, I will have to specifically get back to the member on that issue. I do believe the nature of the communications, though, were of an overarching nature as one would not want to tell somebody in one schoolyard that they should protect themselves, but not in the next schoolyard. It's just illogical. So the nature of the communications, in many ways as it would be for West Nile, is of an overarching in an abundance of caution manner so that people can take that abundance of caution with their garden vegetables, with their children in any schoolyard, and with their families in any locale in Flin Flon, but I will commit to the member to see if communications have teased out one yard versus another.

* (11:40)

Mr. Gerrard: One of the concerns that has arisen is that, in some cases, it would appear that RHAs are not providing as good service as they should be, and the net result is that people are going to another RHA. It's sort of like offloading services from one RHA to another. A good example of this concern is from Pine Falls. There is a specific concern with regard to there not being anywhere in North Eastman, including Pine Falls, an obstetric or maternity care. I think it may be the only RHA which is in this situation. This, then, must be looked after in another RHA. Most RHAs in total have enough births that having maternity care somewhere would be reasonable.

The situation in Pine Falls is clearly broader than this. What concerned me when I was there recently was that I was told that the number of people going to Winnipeg for care, for doctors' visits, you know, has gone up quite dramatically in the last three or four years, and that people are quite concerned about the situation. They're concerned about quality of care. Access to care locally is not what it needs to be. At the same time, it's sort of seen as an RHA trying to save some dollars on its own budget and kind of offload them to another RHA. Of course, that creates problems for Winnipeg as well.

I would ask the minister what she's done in terms of looking at the situation in Pine Falls, and what she is doing, generally, in terms of this problem of RHAs not providing the quality of service and offloading costs and services onto other RHAs.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I believe the member has addressed a couple of broad issues there, and I'll

begin with the issue of maternal care. We know, of course, that the No. 1 paramount consideration that we must have as government and as the Department of Health is working with our regional health authorities to ensure that our mothers and our babies are receiving the best possible safe care that they can. We do take advice from medical personnel on these issues concerning—I don't have to explain this to this particular member—the volumes of delivery and ensuring that those families can be getting the best and safest care. So there are issues of mothers being transported to areas where there is a higher volume of delivery to ensure that they are, indeed, getting this best possible and safe care.

But, certainly, when we look at reports and analyses that have been done over time, we do see advice about the importance of endeavouring to have Health human resources and, as a result, increased volumes into all regions in the province. Being able to bring that kind of care close to home is also a priority for the government. We know that we have struck a task force to deal with this specific issue coming from the maternal newborn report, very ably chaired by Dr. Brian Postl, himself a pediatrician and one who works very closely with high-risk populations, and also, Marie O'Neill, the CEO of the Burntwood Regional Health Authority. They have come together with a group of multidisciplinary expert minds to offer advice to government on how we can repatriate these services in a safe and timely way to all regions of the province.

We will take the recommendations of that group very, very seriously and ensure that we are getting care to the people of North Eastman, to the people of all regions of the province in a multi-pronged approach to improve maternal newborn care in Manitoba. We know that we can also do this by expanding our midwife education programs, and we're working diligently to do that as well.

On the subject of the broader issues in the regional health authority, we know that we have worked very hard in our commitment to bring care and bring surgeries and procedures outside of the perimeter of Winnipeg and into regions across the province. Our investments in rural health care are clear and numerous. We know that in North Eastman, we have endeavoured to make a number of investments like rebuilding the Beausejour hospital and primary health care centre, building a community cancer care centre in Pinawa, upgrading the Pinawa ER. We do not deny that we have more work to do to provide even more capital investments

and, arguably more importantly, health human resources to all regions of the province, and we are committed to do that work.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I would take it that your advice to people in Pine Falls would be to make a submission to the Postl review. Maybe you can put on the record how they would do that?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, that would be one avenue. The regional health authority, the community of Pine Falls, can follow a number of paths. They can continue to make their concerns known to the regional health authority; that's the Pine Falls community. They can direct their concerns about maternal newborn care to Manitoba Health, to government, and we will ensure that this group takes a very close look at the particular situation in Pine Falls and in the surrounding North Eastman area, and to make a direct submission to the task force. The group itself has an e-mail address that I will make available to the member. I haven't committed it to memory, sorry. But I will make it available to him.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister. With regard to the concerns about the significant increase in numbers of people seeking care in Winnipeg as opposed to Pine Falls, I would ask the minister if she's prepared to look at this situation and investigate the extent to which this is occurring, and the reasons for it.

* (11:50)

Ms. Oswald: Again, certainly, the first thing that we need to do in light of this question and this issue is pay very close attention to the data that we have about procedures and surgeries that are occurring in the North Eastman region and the numbers of people that are, indeed, receiving their services elsewhere or in Winnipeg. As the member says, we'll want to take a very close look at that data, and, again, we will pay very close attention as well to the findings that come from our RHA review that's ongoing. By "our," of course, I mean the Province of Manitoba. It is an independent body, of course, that's taking a close look at our RHA systems as they function.

This group will undoubtedly come back with recommendations that will clearly show us where regions are having terrific success in having services for their individuals in their individual regions. Undoubtedly, I would be foolhardy to think otherwise that the RHA review will come back to us with challenges, challenges that may include an issue of efforts that need to be made to balance services

that are available to people, whether it's in Pine Falls, in North Eastman broadly or in any other region.

We know that, while we provide very robust pre and postnatal services through our commitment through Healthy Child Manitoba, another discussion for another department I know, that we can always be working to do better, whether it's on the surgical side or on the obstetrical side. So we'll look very closely at the true data coming out of each of our regions, but the member has cited Pine Falls and North Eastman in particular, so we will pay very close attention to what the member is asking. We'll look at the data and we'll take good advice from the fine individuals on the RHA review team as we all work together to improve the services that regions provide to the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the issues that has come forward in terms of health care provision recently and which the minister, I believe, is aware of, is the situation, for example, in Killarney, where there is a personal care home where there are empty beds and where there are people waiting to get into those beds.

Can the minister tell us (a) why this is happening, and (b) specifically the way that the funding from the Department of Health flows to support the care at that personal care home? (a) Does it all go through the WRHA, and (b) is it on the basis of who's in the home, or is it on the basis of the number of staff that are there, or what?

Ms. Oswald: I'm sorry I didn't hear the last part of the question. Could the member repeat that, please?

Mr. Gerrard: There is funding which flows from the provincial government with respect to the personal care home, I think it's the Bayside Personal Care Home in Killarney. Does that flow on the basis of the number of individuals who are actually in the care home or does it flow on the basis of the number of nursing staff that are working there or in some other fashion?

Ms. Oswald: Just to confirm for the member that the funding for the personal care home in Killarney does flow directly through the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority. The Assiniboine Regional Health Authority does not, you know, it's not funded on a per-patient type of arrangement. It's through their global funding. Manitoba Health, of course, has an expectation that the personal care home is staffed according to personal care home staffing guidelines.

It's worthwhile to note, of course, that government has taken the initiative to review those

staffing guidelines that had not been amended or reviewed since, I believe it's 1973, certainly the mid-'70s. That work has been done by a team comprised of members from regional health authorities, from Manitoba Health and, arguably, perhaps most importantly, by front-line nurses, nurses who very rightly point out that the nature of the individual residing in a personal care home today is not the same kind of individual that may have resided there in 1973.

I know the member well knows that acuity levels have increased substantially. That's why we have undertaken this review of staffing guidelines. We have received the advice of this committee quite recently and are working very diligently to go forward on that advice and to ensure that amendments are made to those staffing guidelines and, more importantly, that people in personal care homes are getting the kind of care that they need, when they need it, and that these very important professionals working on the front line are getting the kind of support that they need.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I'd like to move on to some questions about FASD. I wonder if the minister can provide me with good statistics on the incidence of FASD in Manitoba.

Ms. Oswald: While the member was not at the table at the time of the beginning of Estimates for Health, we did make clear that the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), under whose purview the file of FASD falls, will be available—it's my understanding, although not directly from the opposition critic, that that will, in fact, occur on Tuesday. I'd ask the member to confirm with him, but I believe that that's when she will be appearing to address questions concerning FASD and other files under the purview of Health Living.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the minister suggesting that everything related to FASD, including budgets related to FASD, is under Healthy Living now?

Ms. Oswald: Well, I'm suggesting, as I always have, that the health of Manitobans is a shared responsibility, just as within the context of Manitoba Health, we share responsibility for files. I know that the member opposite is aware that while, certainly, I take a keen interest in this file and acknowledge its importance and the work that we need to do that it is, you know, pre-agreed that the Minister of Healthy Living under whose purview this item falls will be answering these questions.

Mr. Gerrard: It would seem to me that the minister, as part of her job as minister, surely should be collecting information on the basic incidence of conditions, whether it be West Nile virus or FASD. The prevention programs may fall under the Minister of Healthy Living, but surely the data collection in terms of the incidence should be a fundamental role of the Minister of Health and the ministry of Health.

* (12:00)

Ms. Oswald: Again, I say to the member that, of course, people working in the Department of Health and Healthy Living share information and knowledge on a continuum of care. There isn't a single subject that falls within Healthy Living that doesn't have something to do with Health, and there isn't a single subject in Health that doesn't have something to do with Healthy Living.

It's the arrangement that has been made by government in the responsibility of these files, and in the process of Estimates the file of FASD will be warmly and enthusiastically addressed by that minister. That's the way that we have divided our responsibility.

It does not mean, as the member may be suggesting, that I don't have an interest or knowledge or a passion for working together with everybody in Manitoba so that no baby, again, is ever born with FASD, but certainly, the arrangement of how we're going to be answering these questions is such that the Minister of Healthy Living will answer the questions on data surveillance, prevention, promotion, on FASD strategy, on our partnerships with Justice, on our partnerships with all departments within the context of Healthy Child Manitoba. They will be answered by her.

Mr. Gerrard: I can understand why the Minister of Healthy Living might answer questions on a particular program on FASD, but in terms of the basic and fundamental statistics of the incidence of diseases, it would seem to me that surely that would fall under the minister's role. It seems to me that you would not collect such statistics separate from collection of statistics on other conditions, as I said, like West Nile virus and many other diseases on which we collect statistics.

Let me ask this question: Is there anything in the minister's budget that would pertain to the collection of data related to FASD and the incidence of FASD?

Ms. Oswald: As I said to the member before, we are talking about a continuum. I can't really think of

another member in the Manitoba Legislature that would understand this better than the member opposite that one cannot put into a silo, or compartmentalize, an issue as complex and broad as FASD. We can spend the next 28 minutes discussing who's going to answer the question. I will assure the member that I'll give him the same answer every time, but I know that the Minister of Healthy Living has this as her file. We have agreed, prior to the beginning of Estimates, that this is how we are going to proceed on data collection, on surveillance, on the continuum of our budgets, working hand-in-hand.

I know that the member has a passionate interest in a number of topics under Health, and I suspect he'd like to ask other questions. I will keep answering this one question if he wishes me to. The answer is now, as it was in the last four questions and maybe for the next 10, that the Minister of Healthy Living will address the answers on this file. I would encourage the member to ask her those questions, and we can move on to any number of the other issues about which he cares so deeply in the Department of Health.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister, and I would ask whether the minister has allocated full responsibility for the treatment of FASD to the Minister of Healthy Living. I can understand the provincial programs, but certainly the treatment, some of which would occur in a variety of avenues, treatment of children of FASD and the care of children with FASD, maybe sometimes in hospital, for example.

Has the minister any responsibility, or is this fully under the responsibility of the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) as well?

Ms. Oswald: We share the responsibility in the context of Health and Healthy Living, whether we're talking about treatment that's delivered through regional health authorities, whether we're talking about surveillance, data collection, whether we're talking about programming that may run through Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. These are the questions that are going to enthusiastically and happily be answered by the Minister of Healthy Living.

Mr. Gerrard: I take the minister's point and certainly hope that I can get an opportunity and some time to ask the Minister of Healthy Living some questions about her approach to treatment and dollars being used for treatment as well as the incidence, because, as I understand it, you're not prepared to answer any of these or be accountable yourself, that

that accountability, certainly, is fully on the Minister of Healthy Living. If that's the way the minister wishes it, that's fine. I'll move on to other areas.

Let me ask the minister a question about colon screening. What is the status in Manitoba? What proportion of individuals in Manitoba are currently screened, in terms of—this is, appropriate age individuals who are currently screened for colon cancer?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member. As he knows, we were the second province in Canada to announce a colorectal cancer screening program that would be in a phased approach. We have completed or we are in flight in the first phase of that program. The beginning, of course, was working with physicians and physicians' offices on the recommendations of the professionals at CancerCare Manitoba and, indeed, on the recommendations of citizens themselves that one of the most important things that we could be doing is working with our family physicians and just encouraging and reminding doctors to make available these tests to individuals in the target groups. So we have communicated with doctors in reminding them and have had very good feedback on that reminder. Some folks may have suggested that doctors might be offended in government telling them what to do, but it was received very positively about those reminders about tests.

* (12:10)

We also committed in the first phase to be sending kits, the FOBT kits, out directly to citizens in a target group in two regions, in Assiniboine and in Winnipeg. Those regions were chosen initially based on data that was collected concerning higher incidents of colorectal cancer. Those kits have been mailed, and we are in the process of receiving kits back and processing. We have very good evidence to suggest that this is going to go a long way on the screening and early detection front. We know that the people at CancerCare have been very appreciative of our government's commitment to go forward on this strategy. We look forward to receiving results and ensuring that we're working toward building a system that people can have that early detection and get the treatment they need even sooner.

Mr. Gerrard: Clearly, the screening for colon cancer is something that some physicians have been doing for many years. It would be an ordinary standard of care that the patients of a certain age

being looked after by physicians should be screened. It was one of the low points of health care in Manitoba when the Conservative government, the former Conservative government, said that it would not pay for such screening tests. Some really caring physicians actually took it upon themselves to pay for those tests; they thought it was so important. What is abundantly clear is that the screening should be done through physicians' offices and that physicians of the appropriate age group should be screening and ensuring that the patients they are looking after, who are of a certain age, are appropriately screened.

Do we have information and what kind of information is being gathered in terms of the proportion of patients screened? When will it be gathered so that we know to what extent physicians are doing their job appropriately and that patients are getting screened appropriately?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I think that the member opposite does make a very important point about the commitment of doctors historically, of many, most doctors, historically to be vigilant on this kind of screening. We know that we have reports from constituents who, regrettably, have lost loved ones to colorectal cancer and have asked some very important questions, the most important maybe being, why? Why didn't my husband's doctor order this test? It's not a question that I as Minister of Health or any government can begin to speculate to answer. Would we ever know if that test would have caught that one Manitoban's husband's illness? Would his death have been prevented? I can barely speak the questions without seeing the face of the individual and her profound and never-ending sadness. I cannot answer that question. I do not know why that particular doctor at that particular time did not carry out that test.

But I know that the member opposite is quite right in saying that many, many doctors, in the face of not being funded in the past by governments who didn't make a commitment to this, did, indeed, commit themselves to their patients and saved lives, unquestionably, saved lives. It's through those individual stories and that profound sadness and the determination of the doctors in partnership with advocates at CancerCare Manitoba that we were able to come forward with the cancer screening program that is going to augment what excellent family physicians have, indeed, been doing for years. It's going to be yet another way, not the silver bullet, Madam Chair, but yet another way that we are going

to be able to possibly stop these kinds of family sorrows from happening unnecessarily.

We announced the program on January 29, 2007, that we would, indeed, be working together with CancerCare Manitoba to develop a screening program, and we stood very firmly with CancerCare Manitoba in acknowledging that colon cancer is one of the most curable cancers; close to 90 percent of people can recover if it's caught early.

So our screening program consists of direct mailings, as I've said, to family doctors for this important reminder. It consists of direct mailings of screening kits to Manitobans between the ages of 50 and 74. The kits will also be hand delivered through the Manitoba Breast Screening Program. While not wishing to be in any way sexist, knowing that the member opposite knows, as do I, that men and women get breast cancer and men and women get colorectal cancer screening. But, as one constituent said, if I'm going to go and have my breast screening program, then darn it, give me that kit so I can give it to my husband. I thought, well that's about the best piece of advice I've heard in a long time, and passionately so. We're taking that advice.

We're also doing a public education program to encourage that target age group ask doctors about the early detection of colorectal cancer. We know that the first phase of 25,000 kits have been mailed to target age groups in the Assiniboine RHA and in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Our intent is to expand to the other areas of the province as the program continues, but these two regions were, based on data, the best places to start. The WRHA has confirmed capacity for the anticipated increased need for colonoscopy services, and we're ramping up and ensuring that we're ready for that. We know that, in partnership with CancerCare Manitoba and family physicians, that we are going to make a real difference here in Manitoba, and it will happen one test at a time, as it should. We're very proud of that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, of the 25,000 kits that were mailed out, how many have been returned with appropriate samples, and what are the results in a global sense, not an individual sense, obviously?

Ms. Oswald: It's too early for data as the kits themselves have just been mailed, but we will keep the member apprised and, indeed, the public apprised of information that we hope is going to inspire even more people to take this test. But it's too early yet.

Mr. Gerrard: Was there an effort to not give people duplicate mailings if they had had a recent screening test done?

Ms. Oswald: I think the member makes an excellent point about administrative kinds of efficiencies that we can work to achieve as we go forward and that those kinds of efforts can be very closely examined as we go forward. Certainly, it was our goal, once securing and committing funding to the project, to get moving as quickly as possible. We did not want to get mired down in creating an absolutely perfect list as it were, so there may, indeed, in this initial mailing be some duplicates of people that have had some tests. Regrettably, the testing is not as high in Manitoba as we would like it to be, and we are not anticipating an overwhelming duplication, but it is something for consideration as we move forward and as we learn in this project. It is brand-new in Manitoba. In this realm, though, it was a straight mailing to get into the hands of as many Manitobans as possible so we can this testing moving.

* (12:20)

Mr. Gerrard: The test can be a pretty good test if done appropriately, but there is clearly a variety of foods and other things which can interfere with the test results or cause problems. So I think it's going to be very important to have follow-up, evaluation and a comparison of the results of tests done in physicians' offices versus a direct mail. I hope that the minister will undertake to make sure that that information is available in due course.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, part of the development of this cancer screening program is about public education. The member opposite, as a physician, knows in much more detail than do I about the complexities of consumption of food and the appropriateness and reliability of results as it relates to what is consumed.

I can assure the member that, as part of the public education effort, a pamphlet is included and general information is included for participants to give them information about such consumption of food, the whats, the wheres, the whens. Certainly, people are absolutely encouraged to be following up with their family physicians, to be vigilant on monitoring their personal health and to continue to work with their doctors to ensure that they're getting the best possible care.

This screening program, while we are very excited about being one of two provinces

in Manitoba, or the second one in Canada, I should say, to be doing this program, we know that it is not the absolute antidote for colorectal cancer or even for screening. It's going to go a long way to help, but it is not the only piece of the puzzle; it is but one.

Mr. Gerrard: In some areas in the health community, people are discussing the need to consider a screening colonoscopy for colon cancer; that is, not to use it just for those who have got a positive fecal occult blood test, which is a current screen that the minister's involved with. Perhaps the minister could speak to her view of a screening colonoscopy and its role.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, this particular topic is very timely, just in the news last night, and even before that. Again, not wishing to speak to the medical details of the efficacy of one test over another, that would not be appropriate; I'm not a medical doctor.

But we'll certainly continue to work with members of CancerCare Manitoba, with the Canadian Cancer Society, and all of the really outstanding partners that we have in the community here in Manitoba to continue to look at what are the best possible tools that we can be using to help people in their efforts to not only detect cancer early but, indeed, to what we can be doing on the prevention side.

So we at Manitoba Health or the government are very open to looking at what our next steps might be.

Mr. Gerrard: Let me move on to the treatment issue. There's been a fair amount of evidence now in terms of the effectiveness of Avastin in respect to colon cancer. I would ask the Minister of Health what her view is, what her approach is in this respect.

Ms. Oswald: As we talk about the incredible partners that we have at CancerCare Manitoba and the doctors on whom we rely to make these very important medical decisions every day, we, of course, are in constant dialogue with them about what we can be doing to support the doctors and to support the nurses, to support all the staff that work with families that are, arguably, facing the most difficult times of their lives. The member knows that we provided, in 2006, the largest-ever increase to the CancerCare drug budget in Manitoba's history. It was an increase of over \$13.3 million for a total of \$28 million.

We rely on those medical experts to be making decisions concerning a variety of drugs, including

Avastin, and we know that, while CancerCare Manitoba is looking at individual cases, on a case-by-case basis, and there are people in Manitoba who have, indeed, received Avastin as part of their treatment, that it is, indeed, their advice at this time that Avastin is not provided to patients across the board. It is a case-by-case decision.

Dr. Dhaliwal himself spoke to the need for a national strategy to ensure that new cancer drugs are available to everyone who needs them. It's going to be such a critical partnership that we have with the federal government. We know every cancer care agency in the country faces the problem of how to fund new and very expensive drugs, the demand for which exceeds all of our capacity to deliver them to patients. It's interesting that, in making decisions, these heart-wrenching decisions, about drugs, it was the advice of CancerCare Manitoba on the subject of colorectal cancer that resources being directed to being the second province in Canada to do colorectal cancer screening so that we may be able to have that early detection to, indeed, stop 90 percent of cases from ever getting to the stage where Avastin might become part of the dialogue. That, certainly, was their advice.

We know also that, in Manitoba, we are rated by cancer evaluation groups as having the second highest drug coverage in all of Canada, second to B.C., by the way, and we're very, very proud of that fact. We also know that, in relation to what Dr. Dhaliwal says about the importance of having a national strategy and national support on what it is that we do with very expensive drugs, such as Avastin—as the member well knows, Avastin is not the only one—we are leaders in Canada in partnership with Saskatchewan in beginning the joint oncology drug review process so that all provinces can get together, and we can do reviews. We can do a number of efforts to get these expensive drugs, where appropriate, under direction and decisions made by doctors, into the hands of patients, as appropriate, much more quickly than we have seen happen on a national stage.

We have more work to do, I absolutely acknowledge to the member opposite and to all people of Manitoba. Our record as being the second highest funder of cancer drugs in Canada is one on which we can stand very proudly, but we must never rest in our quest and our pursuit to help families and to take direction from the cancer experts who will pay very close attention to the evolution and to the data that is presented to them concerning Avastin,

its effectiveness, and its ability to prolong life more than say, three or four months. We will listen to their advice and, should their advice change on this, we will listen very carefully.

Madam Chairperson: The time being 12:30, committee rise.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENERGY AND MINES

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Yes, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to say that it's been a privilege to work as Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines in the last while. I am very proud of the work and the very quality, professional staff that I have to work with in the various components of the department.

I know that all aspects of our economy have been doing extremely well lately. I look at mining alone, and just today's announcement of CVRD investing yet another three-quarters of a billion dollars in the province is just a wonderful statement. I know we also are doing extremely well with life sciences where we have approximately 10 percent of the life science sector with only about 3.7, 3.8 percent of the population. I know that we are also world leaders as far as green. We've had some great awards on energy efficiency. We've been recognized as being a very, very green regional government. I'm pleased with that. I'm also pleased with energy as far as moving forward on geothermal, moving forward on wind, and seeing what we are doing in the future.

I'd further like to state that we are moving more and more to the value-added, so the whole R&D, moving that from about \$19 million in 1999 to about \$30 million has been a true pleasure. I think what we have to do is continue to have higher value-added, make sure we continue to move our economy forward.

It's been a true pleasure working with a department that really, truly gets it, that are professionals, and that have been able to work with

industry, with academia, to move our agenda forward.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the Member for Turtle Mountain, have any opening comments?

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for your opening comments.

I certainly want to recognize staff that do all the work throughout the province to endeavour to move initiatives forward. As a new critic to this particular portfolio, I hope you will bear with me as I try to get a feel for what's all involved in this department. So I certainly look forward to our discussion over the next few hours.

I do feel we have a tremendous opportunity here in Manitoba to move some of the initiatives ahead. I certainly look forward to working with the minister on that. I think we're into an area here now where there is a lot of technology, not just in Manitoba but beyond our borders. Hopefully, we can have a look at some of the technology that's taking place in other jurisdictions. Hopefully, we can bring those back home to Manitoba so that they will be a benefit to Manitobans, and, hopefully, move our economy ahead. Also, hopefully, they will be successful in addressing some of the situations that we have now that do need some attention.

So, with that, I certainly look forward to our discussion going forward.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Now on to Manitoba practice. Debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for the department in Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 18.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 18.1.

At this time we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance when they arrive.

Mr. Rondeau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce John Clarkson who is the deputy minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines; Craig Halwachs, who is the director of Finance and Administration; Leigh Anne Lumbard, senior financial officer.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically, or have a global discussion?

Mr. Cullen: I think, as common practice would have it, I would certainly prefer to discuss it on a global basis.

Mr. Rondeau: Sure. Anything to accommodate the new critic.

Mr. Chairperson: It is agreed, then, that questioning for this department will follow in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once the questioning has been completed.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to dispense with some housekeeping items in terms of some of our standard areas of questions and maybe what I'll do is just go through the list and leave it with the minister for follow-up at a later date.

First of all, if we could obtain a list of all political staff, including name, position, and their full-time equivalency, or whether they are full-time, a specific list of all staff in the minister's and deputy minister's office and their respective positions, the number of staff currently employed within the department, the names of staff that have been hired in 2007-2008, including whether they were hired through a competition or through appointment, a description of any position that has been reclassified, and a list of all vacant positions.

Mr. Rondeau: We will endeavour to get that to you. What I'll do is, through past practice I've always listed political staff, deputy minister's and minister's staff, I might as well do that, and then the rest we'll endeavour to get to you. I'll go through the numbers of staff in the department, and we'll endeavour to get the names of the staff, the competition, and the reclasses over time. The one thing, it will take a while because we do have the Technology department in this ministry, and so it's moving around quite a bit because you're talking about—Technology has a lot of staff that's been moved in and out.

One of the things that I'd like the critic to know is that we undertook to bring the Technology branch into this ministry. It was scattered throughout all of government, and in the last while we've centralized the Technology into this ministry. The question after

I go through all the other stuff would be: Do you want all the Technology branch that were brought from Education or from different components into this department? Do you want all of those staff listed? And then I'll go through this. So think about that.

* (10:10)

As far as in the minister's office, I'm the minister; I'm definitely political staff. Jeff Sulymka is my special assistant, and Marina Portz is my secretary. Right now the position of appointment secretary is vacant as of today and Esther Hiebert is my executive assistant. As far as the deputy minister, John Clarkson is the deputy minister. Rachel St. Amant is the appointment secretary, and Shannon Wall is the correspondence secretary.

As far as the numbers of people in the department, there's 372.32 people in the department and there's a total at the end of the month of 21 vacancies. We will endeavour to get you again the names of the staff in the department. There will be a list in Technology, a large list, because what we did is we centralized all the technology positions into this department over the last little while. So that rather than have Technology people in each department, it's all centralized and better co-ordinated.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that information. It's maybe not as important to have the individual names of the staff that were brought into the department. I'd be interested in the numbers that came from the various departments into your department. I'm also interested in terms of where they may have come from, like in terms of physically being maybe brought in from a rural area into the city or something like that.

So if you could kind of outline that in your response, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Rondeau: We can do that. I've been informed that there have been no people who have been moved from rural Manitoba to the city or from the city to rural Manitoba. Basically, what it is was was an administrative function. What was happening was each department had their own technology core of people, and what we've done is we've brought it under one umbrella. By doing that, then you can share competencies better, you can better utilize the talents of the different individuals. So, in some cases, people are doing the same jobs; in others, they're a more centralized function. So we'll get you the

numbers of positions, but I can assure you there hasn't been any movement from rural to urban or urban to rural.

Mr. Cullen: You did talk a little bit about some of the changes in the Technology side. I guess a question for me to clarify, did this just happen over the last year or has that kind of been an ongoing issue?

I'm also interested in looking at how your department is organized in terms of any changes that may have taken place in the last year or two, or if you can explain to me in general terms why the department is established and set up as it is.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll discuss for the critic, the honourable member, the three major changes that have happened over the last while. The ICT restructuring basically started about 18 months ago, and we're still working through that process. So about 18 months ago we started consolidating and seeing what skills are out there, making sure there's appropriate skills out there and bringing it all together and working through that. We're still working through that process.

As far as the other major changes, previously the mines and petroleum branch used to be with the Department of Industry, it's now in Science, Technology, Energy and Mines. The other one was the consolidated service delivery has been brought together under this department. Those are the three major structural changes in the department over the last little while.

Mr. Cullen: My understanding is that you are responsible for, I believe, it's three special operating agencies as well, which fall under your jurisdiction. Is that correct and have they been under your jurisdiction for some time now?

Mr. Rondeau: There are three special operating agencies. One is the Industrial Technology Centre; one's MERLIN—they've been under this type of department for a long time and they've had a long history. Industrial Technology Centre provides services for industry whether it's looking at break-open tickets and ensuring their quality, et cetera. MERLIN provides computer software services-type like that to the Education Department, so what they're doing is they're servicing schools and connecting schools and stuff like that. The Green Manitoba is a newer special operating agency and that's also following within this department.

Mr. Cullen: Another item, I guess more house-keeping than anything. If you, Mr. Minister, would supply any updates or new initiatives or any departmental initiatives that have been announced from your department over the past year. If you could forward those to me I'd certainly appreciate that.

Mr. Rondeau: What we'll do is we'll provide a summary of all the news releases. That's probably the easiest way and so that way the staff just compiles that. So, if that's okay with the honourable member, that's probably the easiest way of getting what you want without a great deal of staff time.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's response and that would be very appropriate if we could do that. Then we could do research after that.

In terms of any out-of-province trips that the minister has taken in the past year and any pertinent details of those trips, such as the purpose, the dates, who went, who paid and what were the associated costs. If the minister is prepared to put those together, I would certainly appreciate it.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chair, one of the things I want to clarify first is that I have two ministries. One's the Competitiveness, Training and Trade. There are some meetings that I did as far as a Trade minister, or in that department. I will be reporting separately between departments to make sure everything is clear.

As far as the Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, I attended the provincial-territorial Energy ministers and that was in Toronto. I also participated with various mine company meetings in Vancouver and also a conference in Vancouver. So those are the two things I did as far as this ministry. I would be happy to provide you details with the expenses on that shortly.

* (10:20)

Mr. Cullen: In addition to that, the Premier (Mr. Doer) may have accompanied the minister on certain events. So we're just interested if the Premier attended anything in conjunction with the minister, or if the Premier was involved in any delegation, and if there was any payment from your department on, either his behalf, or if there are any other delegations that were paid for out of your respective department and, of course, the details of the travel in terms of the purpose, the dates, the costs, and those sorts of things, and who might have been on that particular delegation.

Mr. Rondeau: The Premier has not been any part of any out-of-province travel that I've done. I'd like to positively state that he was at the Manitoba Mining and Minerals Convention. Actually he was there, brought greetings a couple of times over the last few years. I'm pleased to see that he is interested in the importance of the mines and mineral sector in Manitoba as far as employment, as far as a valued generation.

So he did go to the Convention Centre from the Leg. I don't know how he got there. As far as my out-of-province trips, he has not accompanied me on either trips, but we'll endeavour to get the requested information.

Mr. Cullen: One other housekeeping item, and that's in regard to any contracts that your department may be involved in or going to tender for; so just in terms of any details or of how many and what types of contracts are being awarded directly, why this is happening, and how many and when they're going to tender. And something in excess of maybe \$25,000, not every small tender but larger tenders, of course.

Mr. Rondeau: I can give you a list of the tenders that are coming up. Also, we can provide a list of contracts signed and the tenders that have been done recently. Apparently, there is, and I sign off on a list of the untendered contracts that's made public. I guess we can compile the list of those that we've signed and made public and provide that to the member.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's response. In going through the Departmental Expenditures booklet for the upcoming year, it alludes to the Green and Growing strategy the Province has in place.

That particular strategy, I wonder if you could just discuss that for me in broad terms and if there actually is a strategy, a framework, a written document that is available either online or that could be made available for my review.

Mr. Rondeau: The Green and Growing strategy is a public document. It's available on a Web site and in hard copy. It's talking about the seven actions, about how we're planning to move forward with this, a sustainable economy, one that balances the environment, economic activity and growth. It's talking about where we want to be in the future as far as having a sustainable, positive growing economy.

I can make sure that you have it or you can download it or look at the Web site. If you'd like the

hard copy, we can get you a hard copy. If you'd like the link to the Web site, we can get you the link to the Web site. It's whatever you wish. Do you want one or the other, or both?

Mr. Cullen: Both.

Mr. Rondeau: Both? Okay, we'll do both. No problem. We'll do both for you.

Mr. Cullen: In reading the documentation, too, and actually receiving the report here from Green Manitoba, it appears that's a new agency that has been set up. I'd just like to get the minister's comments on that particular agency in terms of why it was established, how it's being funded. I'd just like his comments on that.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll deal with it in two parts.

As to why we established the Green Manitoba, it was a community-based consolidated approach to the whole green issues. So it's about energy efficiency, water efficiency, recycling, waste reduction, all in one spot. So that basically becomes more of a one-stop shop as far as energy, water, recycling and waste reduction. We think that it's better to have one stop rather than multiple places doing multiple jobs et cetera, and we believe that it's important to have a co-ordinated response.

As far as how it's funded, it gets a grant from government to operate and it's also funded by other resources through grants from other organizations, other partners, other groups like that. One of the things that becomes important is, when you're looking at the future, I think with climate change, with more and more concentration on the environment, governments are being obliged to make sure that they have good plans in place, are moving forward with this initiative.

I think that it's really, really important to be at the front of the pack rather than the back of the pack. I think that Green Manitoba is showing us good leadership and I also think that we can hold our heads high with a lot of the things that we're doing in this regard. I have to compliment the staff of Green Manitoba because I think they're doing a good job. I know it's hard to remain leaders in the country, but these guys are not just leaders of the country, but they're leading the world in a lot of the ways they're delivering programs.

Mr. Cullen: So the minister, then, felt it was better to set up a separate operating agency altogether, as opposed to running it through the department.

Mr. Rondeau: It offers better flexibility, more flexibility and different options. By doing a government department you give one package. If you offer a special operating agency, it gives you more options and better options for delivery.

Mr. Cullen: I'm just wondering how many staff might be involved in this particular agency and, as well, they must have a physical address, if you could supply that to me.

Mr. Rondeau: I was going to say, just down the street to the honourable member, but it's at 270 Osborne. It's just down the street from the Leg. There are nine staff and none are vacant right now, no vacancies in that agency.

* (10:30)

Mr. Cullen: Reading through that report, there's a few specific questions I have regarding some of the programs there. The one that caught my eye was the green building policy for Government of Manitoba funded projects. I know in some of my communities involved in building buildings for the public use, and of course trying to seek some provincial funding for it, they're coming up against the lead—what would you call this?—standards, I guess you could call it.

An Honourable Member: Right.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you. And I'm just trying to get my head around what Manitoba's trying to do here in terms of the green building policy and the lead standards.

So if he could give me a little direction in terms of where the Province is headed in this program.

Mr. Rondeau: I'll go through a little bit of the policy. But, basically, when we're looking at buildings, we're looking more at life-cycle costs and what's it cost to operate and own the building, not just build it. This goes a little bit to my own personal situation where I put in a geothermal heat pump in my new house. I did it, but I knew it was going to cost me about \$8,000 to \$10,000 more than just putting in a furnace and an air conditioner. But what I do is I save between \$800 and \$1,000 every single year. So in about eight to 10 years I break even and from then on it's a benefit.

So what we did was when we set up the green building policy we looked at ways that it might cost a little bit more up front, but over the life cycle you save money. So, on the operating, you save money. It's a really interesting way because, if you put in more insulation or geothermal or any of the energy-

saving things, they do have a very good cost benefit if you look over the life of a building of eight, 10, 20 years. So you might put 5 percent or 10 percent of the building costs more, but what you do is you save over the long run. I think it's incumbent among government not only to look at the green, in other words, the energy efficiency, which saves money. But you also look at it saving fossil fuels, doing less damage on the environment and also looking at the imprint it leaves on the whole ecology of the province.

So it's a policy to build it right the first time, use less fossil fuels or energy, save money for the organization, and do the right economic thing long-term for government. So I like the policy, and it's been really well accepted in public so far.

Mr. Cullen: There's talk about the strategy going forward here, and I'm just wondering how this is going to benefit Manitobans. When the average Manitoban is having a look at how they're going to design or modify their house or if it's a public building, obviously there's extra costs involved there.

Where will a Manitoban go to for some help and guidance in terms of if these are actually going to be of benefit to him or her or a municipal corporation?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm glad that the critic mentioned these things, because you've got one of the areas of huge interest of my own. I'd be pleased to provide any guidance on it. There's lots of information on our Web sites about this. Basically, because what happens is that, if you are building something from the ground up, so you have a new plan for a new renovation or a new building and you work with people, you work with the lead consultants, you'll work with engineers or architects, it doesn't cost you a lot more up front. In fact, it could almost be the same type of costs, but your life-cycle costs become hugely different.

In the case of my own house—and, again, I like using that because at first I was a little cautious about spending the money—it was for the geothermal heat system, but then I didn't have to put in an air conditioner, I didn't have to put in a new furnace, I didn't have to have the same type of hot water heater and I save about a thousand dollars a year. What happens is that they cost me \$8,000 more than an existing system. However, when I built my new house, I put in better insulation. I put in better insulation in the roof. I made sure that I did the right things. Did it cost me 5 or 10 percent more for my house? Absolutely. Did it pay back? I've been in my

house for six years and I believe that I've broken even already, in six years. So you put a little bit of money up front, you work with the architects, you work with lead engineers—and we've been conducting a lot of workshops among people, architects, engineers, builders. We've been working with different people to make sure that it's out there.

So, if you're planning a new building, it might cost you 5 percent more and I'm not going to say the exact figure, but it might cost you 5 percent more. It might cost you around the same. It might cost you a little bit more, but if you can save a large part of your operating costs, then that's huge. If you take and you save operating costs, not just for the first five years, you save it for multiple years. So, in other words, after five years or 10 years, you might break even. From then on, you're saving money and you're saving energy. You're better for greenhouse gases, and I think that it's a huge market for our construction industry, our architects and our engineers. They can actually market the skills around North America and around the world. So it's a huge economic opportunity and I'm pleased that we're doing it because whatever happens or whoever is in government in another 20 or 30 years, they'll still be saving money then on investments we make correctly today.

Mr. Cullen: I'm trying to establish what role Green Manitoba then plays in this program. Will Green Manitoba be there as a resource if people have specific questions regarding their project? Is that the role for Green Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: Green Manitoba has more of a co-ordinating role. What they would do is they would direct people who had questions or individuals who had questions, they'd direct them to resources, either within or outside government. So their role is more co-ordinating. They make sure that the policy, the green building policy, is adhered to. They make sure that people know about it. As far as the resources throughout government, they might be throughout a few parts of my department, our ministry, or they might be outside. So the Green Manitoba would sort of say, if you have questions, we'll provide you the answers.

Mr. Cullen: I just wondered, maybe the staff would be able to get me the phone number for that office as well so that I could pass that along to various individuals.

Mr. Rondeau: They nodded. They'll get it to you.

* (10:40)

Mr. Cullen: Another reference in the Green Manitoba report here is the Tire Stewardship regulation. So there's been a new regulation put forward there. I just want to get the minister's comments on that. What kinds of changes are being brought forward under that particular Tire Stewardship program?

Mr. Rondeau: The interesting part about this is the tire regulations. They used to be where government ran and regulated the recycling efforts. We're moving that to an industry-led producer responsibility. So we've done a transition from what was to where we're going, which is from government run to industry led.

The government regulatory role will be and is in Conservation. So they're the lead on this part of the file, on the regulatory file. As far as Green Manitoba, they will be assisting the new industry organization to meet its objectives in the regulations and in the business plan. So what they will be doing is Green Manitoba will work with industry to make sure that they follow the regulations as set out in Conservation and follow their business plan, which will have certain percentages of tires being recycled and things like that.

Mr. Cullen: Another, I think, very important initiative that was brought forward over the past year was the electronic waste initiative. I know it was established just as a pilot project, and I think there was a lot of material collected. Maybe the minister would be able to provide me how much material was collected under that particular program. I'm kind of interested in where that material ended up, and, I guess, even more importantly, is that particular program going to be continued into the future?

Mr. Rondeau: I was thinking that the critic would want to see some of the waste material, electronic materials that we got in the collection; I was going to have to bring them in. That was in jest. We collected 300,000 tonnes in the latest recycling effort that was held over the summer. What could be used, reused and recycled was, in the province, and the rest of the material that couldn't be reused or recycled within the province was disposed of using recycling in other parts of Canada. I can let the honourable member know that we are planning yet another collection period in the new calendar year. I can also let the honourable member know that we are planning to move it more toward a system like the tires.

Mr. Cullen: Now you talk about a system like the tires are. Are you talking about a potential levy on electronic type equipment, or just what's the intent going forward, and what is the long-term strategy for dealing with that type of waste?

Mr. Rondeau: This whole process would lead to the industry-led program which takes the producers and retailers leading the program. It would be a government-regulated model which sort of says you have to do a certain percentage of waste or work towards collecting a certain percentage of waste, and the industry-led group would develop a business plan on how they would undertake to meet the requirements for a certain level of recycling effort. They would then detail a plan with the costs. They would then discuss whether or not there would be fees. They would present the plan to government to see how they would meet the objectives and the requirements that government would set out.

So, if government said we want you to do a certain amount of collection and recycling of the waste stream, the industry then takes it, works among themselves to set up a plan, to implement a plan and how they are going to finance the plan. This doesn't necessarily say that there will be fees.

I know currently the cell phone industry has got a plan all around the province. They have these depots where you drop your cell phone in a plastic bag, put it inside, and then they ship it out, and they recycle it. I was very, very pleased to be at the announcement of that enterprise, and that is financed solely by the cell phone companies with no fee or added fee on that.

So we're not going to tell the industry how they can carry out their plan. We just set out the regulations and the targets for how much is recycled.

Mr. Cullen: I just want to clarify again the amount of waste collected, and I'm talking just the electronic type of materials. I think you said 300,000 tonnes. And that's an accurate figure?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes. The number is accurate of 300,000 tonnes. Yes. It is a lot. And so when people start talking about the recycling issues, one of the things we want to do is make sure we follow the normal pattern of reuse it if you can. So we have the computers for schools and libraries and communities which reuse equipment that hasn't reached the end of its useful life but can't be used for the current purpose that it was purchased for. So we have the reuse.

We also recycle, and that is what we want to take and recycle what we can to make it effective in the province. So what you don't want to do is you don't want to just throw it out in the garbage. You want to reuse it, recycle it, and of course you want to reduce the amount of stuff that you are throwing in the landfill. So we are using that. But one of the things is that it's not the government telling the industry how they implement their plan; it's industry-led. Government sets the targets and the regulations, and industry decides how they're going to achieve those.

* (10:50)

Mr. Cullen: My question is, then, what would that program cost the Province of Manitoba? Did the Province receive any funding from the industry to offset the cost of that program, or was it strictly an expense that the Province incurred?

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to introduce Jim Bakken, who's the chief operating officer of Green Manitoba. He's just joined us at the table. I'll just confer with him and we'll respond to the honourable member in a moment.

I'll try to get this absolutely accurate. What we have is we have some money from UDI, WRAPP, Thomas Sill Foundation and HP that contributed to the money that led to this initiative.

Mr. Cullen: I see Green Manitoba also operated a household hazardous waste program there. I'd just like some of the details on that particular program, and, again, is that an ongoing collection program, and, again, does the Province pick up the cost for that? Again, I'm not just clear on how much, then, at the end of the day, the Province is paying for those two particular programs.

Mr. Rondeau: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, we did have an inaccuracy and we just corrected it. The member was right. We have 300 tonnes at \$300,000, not 300,000 tonnes. I have to correct the error in the interests of accuracy and I'm doing it right now, \$300,000 for 300 tonnes, although 300 tonnes is a lot of equipment.

So we were very, very pleased at how much was collected, and \$300,000 is not a bad price to run the program considering the fact that we wanted to make sure that all the material was handled properly. So 300 tonnes, \$300,000.

Mr. Cullen: My follow-up question was, then, you recovered some money to operate that program.

What was the portion that wasn't funded through other sources of revenue? What portion of that \$300,000 was the Province on the hook for?

Mr. Rondeau: About 75 percent came from government; 25 percent came from other sources. But what we did was we got together about \$588,000 for an electronic waste recycling program. So what we did was we spent about \$300,000 over the summer. We have another one that's coming up in the future, and we have about \$288,000 to conduct that next one.

So far, 75 percent has been on the government, 25 percent other sources, and we had 588, which 300—about half has been expended so far.

Mr. Cullen: Another important program for Manitobans is the Household Hazardous Waste program. So, again, I just want to make sure that that particular program is going to be carried on into the future. Again, if you could give me a bit of a breakdown in terms of what the Province is on the hook for in terms of expenses.

Mr. Rondeau: The Household Hazardous Waste program is run through a contract from Green Manitoba to Miller Environmental. It costs about \$674,000. It has depots throughout the province. So it collects and then disposes of the hazardous waste appropriately.

Mr. Cullen: I'm always interested in terms of bringing new technology to Manitoba to try to deal with some of the waste issues that we have here, and maybe some of the conservation initiatives that we bring forward. I'm just kind of trying to get clear who in your department would be responsible for going out and seeking some of that technology and bringing it back. Is that a role for Green Manitoba or is that somebody else, another area of your department?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm pleased to let the honourable member and the entire committee know that we continue to move forward in the use of technology. We just finished working with Emerge Re-TRAC, which is a made-in-Manitoba solution to track solid waste. What I understand, Miller Environmental is using this program to track online appointments.

We're also using the tire portion of this program to talk about how many tires there are so that we can deal more effectively and manage the tire recycling program.

So there are more and more emerging technologies. We try to keep abreast of them. We try to incorporate them into our plans. I always am looking forward to how we can make things more efficient, how we can grow the economy in Manitoba and where we can move in the future, because when you're looking at waste reduction and reuse and recycling, it's becoming more and more of an issue in every jurisdiction, but every issue then creates the opposite side which is the opportunity side.

*(11:00)

So we want to work with Manitoba firms to see how we can grow them, how we can work with them and see if we can bring new businesses to Manitoba in this whole area because every jurisdiction is dealing with this issue. So, if we can work with the companies to grow the companies to export those technologies or create jobs, that's where we want to go.

So I encourage the honourable member, if you have any ideas, talk to the staff at Green Manitoba, because they're very, very good, and they really want to grow the industry and create opportunity for companies in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that response. I see, obviously, Green Manitoba is looking at waste minimization, water conservation and energy efficiency, and I also see that Manitoba Hydro is mentioned in the department book in several areas. I'm just trying to get a feel for your relationship, your department's relationship, with Manitoba Hydro, and how the two departments and the Crown corp, what kind of interaction is there?

Mr. Rondeau: Our relationship with Manitoba Hydro—and as far as energy policies, we set the energy policy as government, which then could have an impact on Hydro. So, we set the policy and it does have or could have some impact on Hydro. As far as other initiatives, we often find that through Green Manitoba and other parts of the department, we have to work as a key partner with Hydro on initiatives.

So, a perfect example is energy efficiency, where we build on the Power Smart programs, and Green Manitoba would build on Power Smart programs to develop comprehensive programs. So, we might be looking at low-income energy efficiency initiatives. We would work with our department and other departments on a comprehensive sustainable approach using parts of Power Smart and Hydro, but also using government

initiatives. So, they become a partner. I know that people have often looked at the Centennial project where foundations, non-profits, community groups, Manitoba Hydro, the government through STEM, CTT, we all worked together to create a huge win. In that program, we also had private industry donating things like boilers and stuff like this, high-efficiency boilers, so it was a comprehensive program, and they become a partner.

Mr. Cullen: I think, like the Power Smart program you talked about with Manitoba Hydro, I think it's certainly catching on, and I'm just wondering, does the department then provide any other subsidization, any subsidy programs, similar to what the Power Smart program—would it be involved?

Mr. Rondeau: What we've done to help and support Power Smart initiatives is that through Green Manitoba we've accessed other sources of funding, like federal funding, for energy efficiency. We've accessed programs like in CTT for training; we've helped support management support to put these programs together, because it sort of was strange to me that you had some of the poorest people living in some of the most energy inefficient houses paying the highest energy bills. So then what would happen is you could go in, in a very co-operative place, have non-profits and community groups train people who are unemployed, train them into the skilled workers. You can have different groups pay for different components, like the insulation or the new furnaces. You could then save money on the energy, and you could be better for the environment by having less greenhouse gasses.

So often in government you're looking at a win-win situation. This was wins in every component. So you're bringing in a lot of the different partners, you know, the different foundations, the feds, the Province, different departments. You bring them together through Green Manitoba; you put together a package. So you win environmentally; you win on energy bills; you train new people who haven't been employed and get them employed; and you improve the community overall. So it's just a wonderful, wonderful thing.

I can remember sitting with Tom Jackson in a nice lady's kitchen, and it was probably one of the best announcements I've ever attended, because there were no losses whatsoever. There were wins all around. What it was was just co-ordinating, getting everyone to the table, saying: Here's your ultimate

goal. How do we work together to get there? And that's what they've done.

In Centennial, when you look at the energy bills that are saving now and forever, when you talk about life-cycle costs, it's huge money.

Mr. Cullen: It looks to me like part of the department's mandate is to look for sales on behalf of Manitoba Hydro. Could the minister just respond to that if, in fact, part of the role of his department is to determine if there are some markets for Manitoba's electricity?

Mr. Rondeau: It's an interesting line that the critic is discussing at this point. We work with Manitoba Hydro on major power sales in Canada if we're talking to other provinces, et cetera, but we don't work to establish new markets. That's Hydro's own bailiwick. So, in other words, if there's discussion between provinces, we may be involved. If it's export sale, Hydro does most of that—all of that themselves.

Mr. Cullen: To clarify, then, any sales to the United States, Manitoba Hydro would look after themselves. Your department would be involved if there are any potential sales or looking at sales to Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, that sort of a situation. If that is, in fact, the case, do you foresee any future sales or any potential contracts for electricity into Ontario?

* (11:10)

Mr. Rondeau: That took a moment, Mr. Chair. What happens is we're in discussions with other provinces and other jurisdictions, whether it's Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, we're in discussions because what we see is energy and electricity is indeed very, very bright in Manitoba. I use that word very strongly because I think that it is our future. I think that we have green energy, it's dependable, et cetera. So we think it's a huge advantage. We are in discussions with other provinces about the sale—Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta—about the sale of electricity because they are looking at needing electricity and we're working on it.

But we're also discussing things like grid and transmission. One of the interesting parts is you can't just build the dam; you also talk about a transmission grid around the country. We are in strong discussions with the federal government, with Ontario, with Saskatchewan and Alberta and other provinces. We've brought it up at Energy ministers' discussions because we think that if we had a grid it would solve a lot of the energy problems, whether it's connecting wind. If you have one tower in wind, it becomes an

issue. If you have lots of wind towers that are connected together with a grid, it becomes more of a base load.

As far as a grid, well, it's hard. You can't just build the dam, you need the way to get it to places. Certain governments and certain jurisdictions haven't invested in transmission. So, even though we build a dam, we can't have a sale. So you have to really look at the opportunities, and I think an east-west grid is necessary, it's timely and I'm glad that it's now on the national agenda.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's response. Obviously, electricity's going to be very hopefully valuable to all Manitobans. In terms of export sales we think there's lots of potential because it is a relatively green resource. Hopefully, we can tie in electricity with other forms of energy as well and hopefully we can move that forward in the province over the next few years.

Obviously, with Manitoba Hydro, their announcement this past week or last week in terms of wanting to go around on the west side of Manitoba—and there has been some talk about export sales to Saskatchewan and Alberta. My question would be, given that line is going to be running down the west side, or the potential to run down the west side, I'm assuming there must be considerable discussions about export sales to Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Is that part of the reason why that line would be running down the west side of the province?

Mr. Rondeau: One of the important parts, Mr. Chair, is that it is a Hydro line. As they said, they'd like another line to ensure reliability or greater reliability. But the location of a line does make a difference. As I mentioned earlier, we are in discussions with Saskatchewan, we are in discussions with Alberta, we are in discussions with Ontario, and there's other discussions Hydro's having with other jurisdictions. We are a large electricity exporter. We see it as a huge opportunity in the future. I would never turn down any potential market that makes sense. So part of the third line, I understand, is continue to make sure that we have a reliable grid. I think that all you have to do is look at the statistics on what happened in Ontario when their grid went down, for nothing. A small issue caused their entire grid to go down. We have to make sure that we have reliability. As we get more and more interconnected with other provinces and states and territories, this becomes essential, to have reliability, because you can have all the capacity in the world,

but, if you don't have reliable, dependable electricity, it won't work. So the line is for reliability. It makes sense.

Do we see export sales in Hydro as our future? Absolutely. We're very proud of Hydro as a Crown corporation, and we look forward to what it can do for all Manitobans in the future.

Mr. Cullen: I think the east-west grid certainly has the potential to be very important for us, and I would assume that whole discussion would hinge on what Ontario needs for us as well. So I'm just kind of curious, in the minister's comments, if we're going to build a line down the west side, and assuming, hopefully, that we will have some kind of a contract with Ontario, that to me would indicate that we're going to need another line on the east side of Manitoba. I just want to get the minister's comments on that.

Mr. Rondeau: There have been no sales contracts, I understand, that have been concluded. We're looking at lots of markets. We're looking at Alberta. We're looking at Saskatchewan. We're looking at Ontario. Hydro's looking south of the border. I'm not going to presuppose who's going to sign what when. The good part about Manitoba is that if you look at the energy needs and you look at the prices, I looked at all the prices from all the different provinces, and I now understand Manitoba's advantage. It has a true advantage in having dependable, green, cheap, reliable, good power.

I look at Alberta and they're worried about the price and availability of power. They were even talking about nuclear. You have Ontario who's got major problems with coal-fired plants, with nuclear plants and trying to get those done. Again, they're having trouble with the amount of electricity they have and their supply. I look at us as having a huge opportunity for markets.

I'm not going to predict where the sales go, but the east-west grid does two things. One is it allows us to transport electricity from all across Canada. That becomes important because electricity is essential. I know that I've had discussions with people in Asia, and they said that, basically, electricity, or power, and water are the natural constraints on their growth. Well, we have power and we have water and we have green power. I'm not going to presuppose where the next sale is going. I know we're in active discussions with many jurisdictions. But the east-west grid does two things. It connects everyone, so, therefore, you can have the

movement of power from one jurisdiction to the other. Right now the major constraint with Ontario and other places is there isn't the connectivity to sell the power. So, if we had an east-west grid, we would probably be able to export faster. We are proponents to it. We think it's a good national unifying project, and we encourage the feds and other provinces to continue to move forward on this very, very important project for all of the country.

Mr. Cullen: The federal government, obviously, there's some discussion about an east-west grid. My understanding was the federal government actually came to the table with some money for grid development. Can the minister discuss that particular situation, if there was any money allocated for Manitoba or given to Manitoba for development of an east-west grid?

* (11:20)

Mr. Rondeau: The federal government has announced two announcements, one the eco-trust fund which provided the Manitoba government as well as all governments money for green initiatives and the transmission. It's also done an eco-technology fund. Those two funds, some money could be used to do it. So, we will continue to talk to the feds and other jurisdictions.

The difficulty with a project like this is it's not in the millions of dollars, it's in the billions of dollars to create an east-west grid. The trouble is, is that when you're building a new dam to transfer the electricity, you have to figure out the economics. What we believe is that the whole country could benefit from an east-west grid. So it's not just a Manitoba issue; it's a national issue, because, if you don't have enough power to power your economy, you have a major problem.

So we're saying that this could be a national economic strategy. Yes, it would be good for Manitoba, but the east-west grid could be important. So, even though we got some money into the province, I don't think the total would do much as far as the grid costs. When you're talking about a national project, then you're trying to get everyone to agree that it's their priority.

So it's going to take more work to get everyone on board, and it's going to take more work to sort of get the project moved forward. I just encourage all governments and all people in this Chamber to understand the importance of transmission as well as new dams to produce electricity or wind towers.

Mr. Cullen: Specifically, regarding the transfer of money from the federal government, then, how much money was transferred from the federal government? The second part of that: Was there a specific amount of that to be allocated directly for an east-west grid?

Mr. Rondeau: The eco-trust transfer was about \$53.8 million. It was done through the normal transfers of the federal dollars to the Province. There was no requirement that it would be used for transmission. It can be used for green activities. The difficulty is that when it is open for each province to decide how they use the money, then this might not be their No. 1 reason for using the eco-trust dollars. So we may try it, but we have to get all the provinces and the feds on line to make sure that this is.

So there was no requirement to use the eco-trust money for transmission. A couple of provinces said that that might be a priority, but they didn't say it was the priority. When you're dealing with green initiatives, energy-efficiency, when you're dealing with all that, certain provinces might find that as the priority. Other provinces might not. That's the trouble with transmission. You need the line right across the country in order to get the most benefit out of it. If you don't, or if there's gaps, or if there's difficulties, then that becomes a huge problem.

So we will continue to be champions for the east-west grid because we think it's something that builds the country, gives us ability to export our excess power and is good for the economy of the province. We're champions on it, but it is hard to get everyone on the same page.

Mr. Cullen: To clarify, then, the Province has not set aside any specific money for the development of an east-west grid.

Mr. Rondeau: During the election campaign, Mr. Chair, we committed \$40 million to the initial construction and the studies for the east-west grid, so we've committed \$40 million toward that. I know it won't surprise the critic to know that this is just an early deposit, that the cost of the line would be considerable, depending again how its built. I can't tell you the exact cost of the line for your next question because it depends on the location, depends on the land, depends on so many different things that I can't presuppose the costs, but the \$40 million would have been talking about the initial studies, routing, things like that.

Mr. Cullen: So, in terms of this money that's being set aside for studies, is that an undertaking by the Province and the federal government, or is that somewhere where Manitoba Hydro wouldn't be involved, or is this strictly a government undertaking?

Mr. Rondeau: The studies would always involve the utilities in each jurisdiction. You couldn't do a transmission line without involving the utilities. Whether it's in Manitoba or Ontario or whatever, utilities would be involved, governments would be involved, because it's not just a siting; it's where you need to use the electricity; it's your transmission, it's your integration into—it's a very complex thing. The short answer is, absolutely, Hydro would be involved, and I would assume every utility, whether it's in Ontario or Alberta or Saskatchewan, every single utility would have to be involved in order to make it a useful process.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Just a quick question regarding the process that would be followed by government when you would be going into a community to form mining exploration. I believe that, when I was in Thompson recently and attended the MKO AGA, discussions were taking place regarding the Province going into a First Nations community for exploration, and there was concern that there wasn't proper consultation occurring with that First Nations community. Can you indicate to me, give me some background on the specifics of that incident and what would be the general process government would follow when they go into a situation like that?

* (11:30)

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to, Mr. Chair and honourable members, introduce John Fox, who is the ADM of Mines branch—Mineral Resources—I knew I'd mess up. Mineral Resources joined us at the table and we'll work through that right now as far as the process.

Basically, what happens, if there's a mineral exploration application, we will have the company do a request for a permit and then—just hold on. Basically, once a company wishes to apply for a permit to do exploration, what they will do is they will request a certain territory. We will then send a letter, a notice to the community, to see if there are any issues, any concerns, whether they have any comments about this. If they have any responses or questions or comments or issues, we will follow up with the First Nation that's involved. We will then set up some sort of a protocol depending on the issues

involved. Our department will talk to them as far as dealing with the issues through a consultation at the beginning of a section 35 and then we'll move forward. If there are concerns, we will be able to put certain conditions on things like the exploration of work permits. So that's how we deal with it.

I know the department's been very, very busy going out to communities to talk to them about the mining process. What's the difference between exploration, advanced exploration, mining, et cetera? I know that the staff is taking this very, very seriously, as am I and our government.

Mrs. Rowat: I also welcome Mr. Fox to the discussion.

My question then is: Has there recently been a situation where a First Nation community has indicated concern that there wasn't proper process followed in consultation or discussion with them before individuals have gone into a territory?

Mr. Rondeau: In each case we follow the same process that I outlined earlier. One of the difficulties with mining versus other projects like hydro is that it's more of a continuing process. So, in other words, you can't do a section 35 consultation as if you have a mine when you don't have a mine; you're just doing exploration. So we believe it's a dialogue with the First Nation. We continue to consult with numbers of First Nations. We continue to work through the process. In each case, if there's an application, we send the letter to the First Nation involved saying this company wants to do this; do you have any questions, do you have any concerns? If they do have any concerns, we endeavour to consult and continue dialogue with them to make sure that we do bring their concerns, deal with their concerns, and work with them.

So we have done that. It's more of a continuous process rather than a one-shot deal because there's a big difference between the impact of, say, early exploration versus a mine. You don't want to do a one-shot deal because approximately one out of every thousand exploration projects may become a mine. So you do a different level of consultation on exploration but you still want to make sure that you understand any impacts that the exploration can have, and you endeavour to make sure that you can accommodate any issues that are out there.

Mrs. Rowat: I do appreciate the minister sharing the process.

My question again is: Has there been a First Nation community that has approached government indicating that they believe that proper process and consultation did not occur when a territory and area was being considered for exploration?

Mr. Rondeau: We have followed the same process in every case where we've sent notice, listened to them. As far as one of the issues that are out there, we right now have ongoing discussions with Northlands, who have said that they now have issues. So I've actually met with the chief and the council. My staff has regularly met with the council. We're working through any issues they have, and we're working through protocol to discuss their issues and deal with any of the issues that they may bring up.

One of the difficulties with any consultation is that, if something is new, you want to make sure it's on the table and you're working through it. So my staff is currently working through a protocol with Northlands. I have been in discussions with the chief. In fact, the last time was yesterday. So we have been working through this issue.

One of the concerns always is, is there enough consultation, is there enough process? And how you deal with any issue that's raised. That's why when you start talking about any First Nation or any group, in mining you can't do a one-shot and go away. That's why we've adopted the process where it has to be continuous. Let's say you have an early advanced exploration and, all of a sudden, it wants to go into more of a development. Well, then you have to have more of an open book. You have to talk to people. You have to keep the lines of communication open so that you can, not only listen to what their concern is, but deal with it, as the mine may proceed or may not proceed.

That's why the dialogue is there with Northlands. I think that the staff has done an extremely good job in trying to communicate with and work with Northlands, as well as a number of First Nations. I know my assistant deputy minister was talking about all the different community presentations that we've done, the different organizations we've worked with.

A good example is just recently I've been to Moose Lake, and I've talked to Chief Philip Buck in Moose Lake. There was starting to be some exploration there. I met with him, discussed some issues. I talked about how the community can benefit with it, some potential benefits of potential mines, or advanced exploration projects. So it's working with the community to see, not only their concerns, but

also how they can benefit from this proposed economic activity.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide to me the exact concerns and issues that Northlands have presented to the minister?

Mr. Rondeau: I think where we are now is we're working with the First Nation to develop a protocol on how to discuss each of the issues. So, although I'd gone to Lac and had a community meeting and discussed it with them, some issues started to be raised. But, more importantly, what you want to do is make sure that you develop a protocol so that you can raise all the issues, so that you can hear from the people that you need to listen to, and so that you can then take appropriate action.

* (11:40)

At the community meeting we had a nice discussion, but what we're doing with the First Nation now is trying to figure out the process by which you can hear the concerns and issues that the community is raising so that we can take appropriate action. Right now we're working with the First Nation to develop a protocol. It's not easy to work through, because, again, section 35 consultations, not just in Manitoba, but around the country, are evolving, how you do it, the process you follow. What you want to do is you want to make sure that you are working with the First Nations appropriately.

But I also look at mining as a way of growing the economics, creating wealth. When you look at the north—I spent 16 years up in the north and I know that you can make good money as a miner. I think it's got good economic potential. So we set up a program like the Aboriginal prospectors' program. We've set up other programs where what we're trying to do is get the First Nations who live in the communities able to benefit from some of these developments.

So what we're trying to do is set up a relationship, a dialogue between the First Nations and government to look at the issues and concerns, but also look at the opportunities and where we can go in future in partnership.

Mrs. Rowat: Were the concerns or issues presented by Northlands relevant or reflective of their culture or spiritual issues? Were they environmental issues? Were they economic or revenue-sharing issues? Can the minister please be specific in the concerns that were being presented by Northlands?

Mr. Rondeau: What we did was we had a community meeting. Basically, I went up there to listen to what the community had to say, period. So, we didn't set up a formal process to communicate as we would in a section 35. In other words, it was not meant to be part of the section 35 consultations which is meant to hear the issues from the community and then respond by government.

So what we did was I went up there to start, as I said to the chief and the community, I wanted to build relationship building. Part of the communication is to set up a protocol, a protocol to listen and formally hear what the First Nation believes the impact of the exploration or mining or whatever, is on the community. So the government's focus, our focus in the department is get a protocol to hear officially, to listen to the community officially, about what their concerns are, that's what section 35 is all about, and then be able to respond to it.

So, my meeting up there was not a formal section 35 consultation. What it was was building a partnership, opening the door and moving it forward. So that's why I went up there. It would not be appropriate for me to say that that was a section 35 consultation process because I said it wasn't.

So, it wasn't a formal process where the First Nation was reporting to me about their concerns. It was an open public discussion to say we, as a government, are listening. We, as a government want to be active partners and we, as a government want to be responsive. So that was it.

The discussion about the section 35, we will look at developing a protocol with the First Nation, because I would like to do that. The chief would like to do that, and we're in the process of working between the government and the First Nation to develop that. I know I've met with the chief. I've met with the Grand Chief Sidney Garrioch. I've met with different people on this and it is a priority to try to get this protocol agreement set up and get the communications started.

Mrs. Rowat: One further question on that Northlands-specific question. When you said you met with the community, was this a community meeting that was set up and advertised within the community as a whole, meaning all citizens within the community were invited and in attendance, or is this a meeting that was with the community leaders only?

Mr. Rondeau: The meeting was done in the school gym. There was lots of movement in and out of the school gym that day, but there was a lot of people in the community that were present. We actually had a meal there. We actually had a very open and blunt discussion with community members where lots of people provided their discussion about mine questions and issues. I think that what was good about that is it gives us an idea of how we can start dialogue and how we can start the section 35.

So there was lots of people there. It was a great day, a beautiful day to be up north. I think it was a good way to start it, because what often happens is that if you start it off right, you try to work together. Any relationship is tough if you try to do it by paper. So, I believe in setting up face-to-face communications. I believe in setting up relationships. I think, then, what you can do is that you can work together toward something that you can agree on, and that's what we try to do. I told the chief, and I have repeated, that it was not part of a section 35 consultation. It was part of a relationship building between Manitoba and Lac Brochet.

Mrs. Rowat: Are there any other communities that have come forward indicating issues and concerns regarding exploration on their lands? Are there any communities that are, right now, publicly indicating concerns and issues with exploration or within their lands?

Mr. Rondeau: That's the whole part of the continuing consultation process. What happens is, let's say you have an exploration project that is then going to add advance exploration or to a mine. Well, what will happen is the entire process is designed so that if someone has a question or concern they bring it up. So let's say that we have a development somewhere. Well, the whole process is, is that, say, if it's gone for exploration where no one has any issue and then they're developing a mine. What I hope, as minister, is that they do ask questions of the government, that they do ask questions about what's happening. Then what happens is, let's say there is a mine going next to a community or a First Nation. Exactly what'll happen, they've done through the exploration, they might not have any concerns. All of a sudden, there's a mine. Well, this section 35 consultation and the community consultation does exactly what the member says. They'll sit there and say, oh, what are you doing with the environment? What are you doing with the water? What are you doing with this? How will it affect us? That's exactly, exactly what we want to do. We wanted to go there

as a government, say: Here's your issues; you have an issue about what mining did in the past. Well, we as a government made sure that we cleaned up all the mines through the abandoned mine process. We're making sure that mines have a plan before they start on how they're going to clean up. We'll deal with that. If someone has a concern about the water supply, we'll deal with it.

So we must listen to their concerns and act as a government. That's exactly what we want to do in the future. I know that there are proposed mines around the province. We will be beginning consultation processes with the First Nations and in the communities around: (a) to look at their concerns, (b) look at opportunities, economic opportunities, how they can get involved in them, training, and also make sure that the dialogue continues.

So I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question because that's exactly where we're going to go. We want to listen to the issues because every person who has an issue or a question needs to be heard and then we need to respond.

Mrs. Rowat: Obviously, the minister is not going to tell me if there are any other communities out there that are raising concerns with him, so I guess we'll just move on. We will definitely be coming back to this through other avenues within the Legislature.

I would like to now turn to an issue, or a topic of interest, within my constituency. It's regarding a biofuels project in the community of Souris.

I want to thank Mr. Fox for providing some guidance, and I'll move on to the next area, if you don't mind.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce Jim Crone, who's the director of Economic Development in the Energy Development Initiative. What a title. I thought "Energy Guy" was it.

* (11:50)

Mrs. Rowat: I have one of Mr. Crone's business cards, and, yes, it should go on both sides of the card. Anyways, thank you, Mr. Crone, for attending.

My questions will be fairly brief, but it's more just to put some things on the record and just ask for clarification.

In the community of Souris, we have a biofuels equity drive currently taking place. It's an excellent initiative, community driven totally, great community leadership on that project. I guess in the

community perspective, they're really looking for government support, some kind of a signal that will show that the government is behind this initiative. So I'm just looking for some clarification and maybe some advice from the minister on how we can ensure that this project does become a success. The community has worked very hard on this initiative for several years, and, like I had indicated earlier, are into an equity drive.

The question that I have with regard to this project specifically is the challenges that they are facing with regard to some of the necessary components of setting up an industry. There's an environmental assessment piece that the community is responsible for, and that type of a process is in the range of \$40,000 to \$50,000 to complete. It's an obvious need when you're looking at developing projects such as this. However, as you can appreciate, this community project is trying to raise money through it's equity drive and is actually between a rock and a hard place because it would also like to be moving forward on raising money towards the assessments and other things that need to be done to move the project forward and to strengthen the activity on this initiative.

So I'd like to ask the minister: I understand through your department that you are the regulatory body, but I'm looking more for your opinion and probably comment as Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, too, to provide the community with some suggestions on how or what you could do, or your government can do, to look at this challenge and see if there is some way that government can provide a stronger support behind this project.

Mr. Rondeau: There are two parts to the question that I'll respond to, to try to put it together to see how we can divide it into the pull for the industry and also the support for the industry.

The pull for the industry becomes more creating a demand for the biodiesel which is more making sure that the fuel is consistent, so therefore we set up the testing facility in Selkirk. What that means is that the diesel is of a certain standard. We introduced the biodiesel act yesterday which says that we can maintain the standard. Basically, we can make sure that the companies are licensed so people can depend on the supply, and we can encourage people through financial supports, through Finance, to pull the biodiesel into the market.

The other part of the response would be our support for business. We do have feasibility support. I know that I had met with the company just recently with staff. It was a very good meeting. We talked to them about our feasibility support to help move the process along. We also directed them towards the feds. I'm pleased that staff worked very, very well with the company. It was aware of the situation. It actually helped to facilitate moving it towards the feds for certain supports that the feds offered. So we have some provincial support. We have some federal support. As far as the program, we really believe that it was a group that really thought out their project well.

We also believe that biodiesel is a very, very important thing in the future, especially for not only rural economic development but energy development and the green environment. We think there's a huge win. I know that we were pushing biodiesel when everyone else was talking ethanol. We think that there's a win in a lot of these regards, in both ethanol and biodiesel.

I was really quite impressed by the proponents as far as how well they've been pushing their plan.

Mrs. Rowat: In all due respect to the minister, you've put the cart before the horse. This community isn't operating. They're running into problems with trying to raise the equity, the dollars, to move their project forward. As I indicated earlier, it's a double-edged sword. They're raising money through an equity drive. The people that they're trying to entice to be part of this equity drive are looking for some activity. The activity can't happen because there are costs that need to be covered with regard to environmental assessments, et cetera.

The feasibility was done. The community did that on their own, Mr. Chair. So what we're looking for is some leadership from this government to show that they are behind an initiative such as this that is working very hard to get the capital or the equity together to move the project forward.

I'm going to ask a question. The recent announcement regarding the biofuels initiative, I do know that there are going to be some dollars available there, and we'll turn the question towards the equity drive. Can the minister share with me what he knows about the potential of that funding to be used as supports for marketing their equity drive? What I mean by that is the community would love to show potential investors the importance of this co-operative. Would the biofuels announcement be

available for the community should it want to take potential investors with substantial amount of dollars behind them to, say, Minnesota, where they have a functioning co-op? Would that be something that would work for this community as an opportunity to drive the equity drive, to push the interest in the community for this biofuels project? They need to see something that is going to show that this is and can be a success story but just need the supports.

* (12:00)

With that I'll also ask: Are there ways that this can also be a guarantee on the shares, something that shows the support of the community? So, if that is the intent of this announcement that was recently made, communities are not getting the full message. They need to know what the small print is in announcements such as this. I think when announcements are made like this, communities need to know what is available for them in these announcements, how it benefits the community. They have ideas. They know what they want. They are creative. So, if these things are available through the recent announcement, then communities should be made aware of how best these types of programs can support them and go forward.

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to let the honourable member know where we're heading as far as a provincial government. One of the things we have looked at is we wanted to create a market. When you're looking at supplies or producing something, you don't want to sit there and create something that can't stand without government's assistance. So what we did was we looked at how we could support the industry, and by supporting the industries, we thought the biggest role government should play was to create a market, not create cash up front, not create artificial supports up front, but look at where we needed to go.

So, although we had the feasibility study to make sure community groups and co-ops, or whatever, could move forward, what we thought we'd do is move forward to make sure we would create a market. So, the market that we created is that in the 2006 Manitoba Budget we removed the 11.5 percent fuel tax on the biodiesel portion of the biodiesel-petroleum blends, and so that became very, very important, taking out the road tax. The funding of approximately \$1.5 million on the equitable trust fund in Ag's R&D program will provide support for production, distribution and market development. But more of that is not creating—the government should not be guaranteeing shares. We're not into

guaranteeing shares. We aren't into guaranteeing or marketing equity drives. I know that there have been places in the past where some governments tried to do that. We actually ended those practices of advertising for a third party.

We think that our place would be to come up with the pull and that would be to make sure that you have a market, make sure we guarantee the safety and quality of the product. I have been attending a number of events. We went to Winnipeg One where we had a biodiesel bus. I know the mining industry is exploring biodiesel in their productions because not only is it better, but they can actually save money because they don't have to keep on heating the air and pumping it down into the mine shafts. We're trying to create a demand.

In fact, I even bought a little Smart car that runs on diesel, which I hope to convert to biodiesel. Part of it is to create a demand. So, what we're doing is creating the pull, the market pull. We're working with others to advertise it and push it, and we've worked very, very hard to make it so that the people know and have a predictable market. I think that it's getting there. I know that we've had four or five companies that are nearing production. We're moving it along, and I'm very pleased with that.

But we looked at other jurisdictions. We looked at where they stumbled in other jurisdictions. People were able to market without an assurance of quality. Well, we made sure that we looked at the quality. We worked with the feds to establish a lab. We have a lab up to now assure the quality.

No. 2, we actually have the market pull because of the removal of the road tax. It's more equitable as far as being able to produce it and produce it at a profit. The other thing that we looked at, and I'm very pleased with this because we led this initiative where we looked at it as it wasn't just a green fuel, although it's a green fuel. We looked at it as the economic benefits for local industries and for the farming community.

So, in the case of biodiesel, if you don't have food-grade Canola, you can use it for biodiesel, and then you can use it for other things. You're not just throwing away the crop. There are opportunities here. We looked at it as an economic development thing. We looked at it as improving the prices for farmers, and we looked at it as a green fuel.

So we think that's where we need to go. I don't believe any government would be appropriate to

guarantee shares or equity. We've never done that in the past, and I hope that the member opposite understands that that would be very, very inappropriate for any government to guarantee a specific share. The closest thing we come to is when we're working with Hydro, and we're working with the bonds. That would be the Hydro bonds, but that is a Crown corporation; that's not a third party.

Mrs. Rowat: You know then, what I'm getting at is to clarify your programs to the economic development boards within the communities, because I believe that this community is looking at ways to help their project, and they're looking at ways to move projects forward. You know, in the States, and you know people are looking at what other jurisdictions are doing, and they are guaranteeing shares in other jurisdictions, and that's not my initiative; that's something that has come up from one of my communities. So when you're saying that, you know, for me to be cautious, then I'll share your caution with the communities that are desperate at getting their projects to move forward.

It's great that you're providing markets or looking at markets. That is your job as government, to ensure that there are opportunities for industry, whether it's in rural Manitoba or Winnipeg or other northern communities. That is your responsibility, and I'd be very concerned if you weren't doing that type of research and support. But I believe that there are communities that are looking at providing opportunities for diversification within the agriculture sector, they're looking at opportunities to grow their communities through economics, and I think that when announcements are made regarding initiatives that are related to communities and to projects such as the biofuels project, I would strongly encourage the minister to be a little more clear and clarify exactly what these initiatives are.

And just so you know, some of the direction and some of the comments that I've been sharing earlier did come from people that work within the government system. So you might want to make sure that the directive from government, from the leaders such as yourself, the ministers, are very clear in the parameters and the criteria, because mixed messages are occurring within the communities.

So I'll leave that one with you regarding biofuels.

I would like to speak to the minister on the ethanol project in Minnedosa. It is nearing completion, and I believe that there is still no

settlement on the manufacturing agreement. That is my understanding. Can the minister clarify? If I'm wrong, then that's great. That means that there is one less hurdle for that community and industry. But can the minister give me the status on the manufacturing agreement, and if there are challenges, what are they?

Mr. Rondeau: In response to your prior question, we will continue to work with companies. We have met with the company from your communities earlier. We're seeing success in Arborg, Beausejour, speedway in Winnipeg and continue to work with others. And I agree with the member that this is something that we have to work with our partners.

* (12:10)

My department continues to work diligently with people to improve the biodiesel program. You'll note that in the bill that was presented yesterday, it was presented in the House. I'd be happy to provide the member with another copy. It has what's going on in it. It's talking about the licensing, the regulating, the quality. It's talking about the supports. It has a long-term view of what's going on. So, please, I'd be happy to provide copies of that bill and have discussions about it, because we do want to make sure that the industry is successful.

We do wish to not only make sure the industry's successful but work with economic development in other communities and also work with the farmers to make sure the farmers get the best benefit. We think it's a triple win if we proceed. Well, it is a triple win, and we think that we can do all those things in partnership with the companies.

As far as the discussions about ethanol, we are still continuing discussions with the company involved. I understand my staff will be in Calgary next week and hopefully will finalize all the issues with them and finalize all the transition issues.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what exactly are the challenges that are stalling the signing of the manufacturing agreement?

Mr. Rondeau: It's more the timing of the mandate. The trouble is a plant of that size doesn't come on instantly, and so what you want to do is time the mandate and work with the company on how to roll out the mandate.

Mrs. Rowat: Can you explain that to me, please, in simpler terms?

Mr. Rondeau: Because of the vast amount of construction and things that are going around at the Province, you can't guarantee something's finished exactly on time because you're ramping up production of ethanol from 40 million to 130 million, 140 million litres. That takes you a little while because you don't start it at 140 million litres. You start the process, you get people familiarized, so what you want to do is make sure that the production equals the mandate over the period of time that the plant's ramping up. So the day it opens, you don't produce 140 million litres of ethanol. So you ramp up the production. That's why there's discussions with the company on how fast they ramp up production and how we talk about the mandate in relationship to the production, so we don't have a bigger mandate than they have production.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you. We'll just leave that one. Can the minister indicate to me if there are any other agreements that are outstanding with Husky?

Mr. Rondeau: We're still working on a licensing agreement with them right now.

Mrs. Rowat: What is the issue with the licensing agreement?

Mr. Rondeau: I believe, Mr. Chair, there's discussion between the lawyers. There are no issues outstanding; it's just the finalizing of the agreements.

Mrs. Rowat: With regard to wind power, can the minister indicate to me when the RFPs—I know that will be announced and confirmed, we've had several dates come and go over the last two years, or year and a half. Can the minister firmly, or give me a date that would be firm in when these proposals or these individuals who are waiting patiently for government to make an announcement?

Mr. Rondeau: The member might not know that basically, with Hydro, Hydro's in charge of this. It's a different ministry. It's in the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Selinger) bailiwick. It's clearly in their sector, because Hydro issued the RFP, and they are working through the issues, I understand, and will come up with the decisions as they come up. It's not something that's influenced or directed by this department.

Mrs. Rowat: Okay, then, maybe we can talk about specific functionings of the wind power. For a current wind farm, at what level or capacity does the wind farm currently run on an average? What is the capacity?

Mr. Rondeau: The only operational wind farm started in St. Leon was started a few years ago, and it's operating at about a 40 percent capacity. I'm pleased that our government has moved forward with a wind file, and I'm pleased that we've seen some wind development in St. Leon.

Mrs. Rowat: In discussions with one of my community groups who are very actively pursuing one of these initiatives—Mr. Crone would know them quite well. I think they spent some time in Québec together in the last few days.

I know that they are talking about Hydro's policy of size of wind power being 4.5 megawatts. Can the minister indicate to me or can he have staff share the reasoning behind Hydro's decision just to have that capacity? Is that something that you could do or will that have to go to the minister responsible?

Mr. Rondeau: It's a Hydro policy. It's not a government policy.

The difference between Hydro and us is that we as a government would look at saying that we would like to develop wind, okay? So we would set up the policy that we would like to develop wind. We would set that as a policy. The actual implementer would be Hydro. When the critic was talking about the difference between government and Hydro, we set the policy as a government. Hydro might be an implementer or a partner. That's how it would work.

One of the interesting parts is that we're pleased that we do have wind generation in Manitoba. We're pleased that we have monitoring all over the province to see whether it's economically possible, to make sure that there's some potential economic development.

We're also pleased that with the process we actually have communities involved, developers involved, Hydro involved. It's not just us mandating it but we actually have the involvement of a lot of partners.

Mr. Cullen: I wonder if the minister would know how many proposals came forward when that request was put out by Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that to Hydro there were 17 proponents with 84 different options on how it can roll out. But what happens now is these proposals went to Hydro. Hydro's got to look at them, see how they fit into their system and they make the decisions.

Again, we make the overall wind; we try to push wind as far as a government policy. As far as the actual implementer of the decision, Hydro is the one who makes the decisions. They're the ones who put out the RFP and they're responsible for dealing with and evaluating the proposals.

* (12:20)

Mr. Cullen: I'm just wondering if the minister is comfortable with the transparency level that was involved in those requests for proposals, if he really feels it was an open and honest request.

Mr. Rondeau: It was not a departmental RFP. It was done through Hydro. I have no direct influence on the RFP. This ministry sets the policies that we're moving forward and when. It doesn't direct the RFP.

Mr. Cullen: What does the government's policy say in terms of time line when the next 300 megawatts will be brought on line, or does the minister know when the next 300 megawatts will be announced?

Mr. Rondeau: The timing of the 300 megawatts depends on the outcome of the RFP and the evaluation of the RFP, and so it's not something where we have mandated the time line to Hydro. What Hydro's doing is looking at the RFP and trying to see when they move forward.

Mr. Cullen: The government announced initially 1,000 megawatts of wind energy for Manitoba, but, just to clarify, the government does not have any time line in terms of when that level of power will be brought on line.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chair, there are 100 now; well, 99 now, not 100. There are 99 now in the St. Leon project. We've announced the 300; that has now gone to the RFP proposal and is being worked through by Hydro. We have stated Manitoba's interest in developing other projects. We'll be looking at an additional 600 megawatts as targeted for development starting 2012-2013.

Mr. Cullen: Can the minister confirm that either through government policy or through Manitoba Hydro we will continue to be using private developers in terms of wind energy production, or is it something that Manitoba Hydro themselves may become involved in terms of the actual ownership of those particular wind turbines?

Mr. Rondeau: The first 100 at St. Leon, they were not involved at all, Hydro. The next 300, they stated that they would not be involved, but we haven't looked at the future and made specific requests or

haven't specified anything in the future as yet. So the first 100, not involved whatsoever; next 300, not involved; 600—I can't predict the future, and what we'll do is see what's happening in the future.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, we do know that wind energy has some questions in terms of the fact that we don't have a constant supply of energy generated by wind turbines, and my understanding is that Manitoba Hydro has to have a bit of a—call it a backfill—or kind of a guarantee that that amount of electricity is going to be in place. Just for clarification, is that in fact the case?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chair, part of when I talked about the east-west grid and when I talked about looking at the future, one of the reasons why we're very supportive of the east-west grid is because, if you have a small wind farm, you can have the wind farm off grid or on grid, depending on whether the wind's going. If you have a huge number, say, all the wind farms across western Canada, being able to be connected through an east-west grid, then you have a constant supply of power general. So it becomes much easier to manage if you have a larger, well spread out supply of wind farms, because then it can become base load. So when we talk about the benefits of the east-west grid, that might be one of the benefits of the east-west grid because, if you are dealing with a small geographic area, the wind can be blowing or it could not be blowing and then it's harder to manage. If you have a diverse over a wide, spread out area, then you have a better constant flow which means that you have less difficulties of having the wind farm turn on or turn off.

Mr. Cullen: I'm always interested in terms of new technology that might be applicable to the wind farm installations as well. I know there might be some opportunities out there in that regard.

In terms of storing electricity that's produced by wind turbines, is your department involved in any of those investigations?

Mr. Rondeau: We're right now involved with hydrogen fuel cells, which might be a very interesting future way of storing the energy that's created by Hydro because hydrogen becomes a storage device. All you need is water and electricity to make hydrogen. So it might be a very, very interesting technology in the future because then you can use it for multiple sources, and hydrogen is a clean-burning fuel source. So the hydrogen fuel cells become very, very interesting. I know there have been some demonstration projects out there.

Mr. Cullen: Just to clarify that a little further, so your department's actively involved in—now are those private companies that are undertaking some of this research work and whereabouts is this research work? Is it being done in Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: Not wind projects to hydrogen in Manitoba. What we're doing is we're working with companies that are involved with fuel cell research. So there are opportunities using technology in the future, using new energy sources and new methods and technologies in the future, and we are exploring that because we truly believe that Manitoba has a huge bright future, especially in energy. So we think we can be a green energy superpower; hydrogen may be an answer; wind may be an answer. What we want to do is we want to explore multiple areas to see where we can be of benefit. We truly want to be of benefit and we believe that we've gone a long way, but we can be truly world leaders.

Mr. Cullen: In the last few months there have been some issues raised around wind farms and wind farm developments from the public. I'm just wondering if the minister may be looking at any changes in legislation or regulation that may be required around the development of wind farms in Manitoba.

Mr. Rondeau: My department's been working with municipalities, been working with CanWEA about setbacks, about setting up regulations for wind farms and all the rest. So what you want to do is you want to try to do the economic benefits in the communities. You want to make sure that the industry can succeed but you also want to make sure that you're receptive to listening to what the local people would deal with. You want to make sure that you don't damage the environment. You want to make sure that people are aware of what's happening. So you want to listen to the issues and you want to concern the consumers.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12:30, committee rise.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

* (10:00)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 139 of the Estimates book. As had been previously agreed, a global discussion on the department is taking place.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Chair, I think we agreed yesterday that the minister would provide me with the list of all the board members listed in the Estimates book this morning.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes, I have that information for my critic. I'd just like to take opportunity to introduce Melissa Whiteside, who is a financial officer, who has joined us this morning.

I have the list of all the boards that the critic asked for yesterday. So I'd just like to give that to her.

I also have the information that the critic asked for yesterday in regard to the staff in the minister's office and the deputy minister's office. So I wanted to provide her with that information as well.

I realized yesterday when we were chatting about who worked in my minister's office. I was realizing that the critic across the way was doubtful about the answers that I was giving her. I realized last night when I was thinking about the questions and the answers that she may have met, in my office, a gentleman called Gary Alexander.

Gary Alexander does not work directly in my office. He does work in the Legislative Building. He is the person that is responsible for doing WCB casework. WCB, because it's an arm's-length agency, I'm not allowed to intervene or talk about any issues about WCB casework. I'm responsible for the administration of the act. But I do get a lot of people that come to my office and want me to intervene in their cases. Quite often, it's situations that have been long-time clients of the WCB. Quite often, upset, concerned, not sure of the process, the appeal process, not sure of the advisory council. I believe this is long-standing practice to have an individual attached to the minister's office that does WCB casework and liaises directly with the board, liaises directly with Dan Holland, who does casework at the WCB, who's absolutely terrific. That individual is paid for by the WCB.

So I just wanted to clarify that because I think I saw some doubt yesterday, and I just wanted to be open with that information and was hoping that that would provide clarity for the critic.

Mrs. Taillieu: I thank the minister for that. I wonder if I could just pursue that a little bit further then. Could you tell me what his title is and where his office is and what his duties are?

Ms. Allan: His actual title we will get for you. His office is on the main floor of the Legislative Building. Actually, a couple of years ago, because the space was so tight in the building, someone in the building, I can't recall who, talked to me about moving him out of the building and I resisted that because I thought it was very, very important to have him here in the building. We have a lot of people that come to the building that are upset; they're concerned. We also have a lot of people that you may have seen come to the building out front and "camp out," so to speak, and Gary does a terrific job of meeting with those individuals and talking to them and trying to get them to understand the process and to get them help from the WCB and try to steer them through the appeal process, try to get them to understand what their rights are in regard to their claims.

But his mandate and his job function is to do WCB casework. He's the executive assistant.

Mrs. Taillieu: Just to clarify, the executive assistant to the minister?

Ms. Allan: No, that's just his title. It's executive assistant to WCB.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think that when there are these long-standing cases with the Workers Compensation Board, I recognize that some of these people have been unsuccessful in trying to settle their claims and often they come to the opposition as well. So I guess, then, that we in opposition have the same access to this office and can just directly liaise with them with cases that come to us.

Ms. Allan: Absolutely. There is a process in place in regard to information, in regard to clients. If clients sign off and provide the MLA with the right to have a look at their case, then Gary can work with the MLA and work with the constituent and Gary has done lots of that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, I would just like to ask the minister if she has any new staff in her office that she has hired in the last year.

Ms. Allan: No. Same as the trips.

* (10:10)

Mrs. Taillieu: Does the minister have any vacancies in her office at this time?

Ms. Allan: No.

Mrs. Taillieu: Are there offices for Labour and Immigration or Workers Compensation, other than in Winnipeg, around the province in different locations?

Ms. Allan: We have Labour offices in Brandon, Flin Flon and Thompson, and we have a WCB office in Thompson.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just looking through the annual report actually, and I had some questions in this. Under human resource services, it's in the annual report on page 21, it talks about human resource services to a number of departments: Education, Citizenship and Youth; Advanced Education; Training; Labour and Immigration; Manitoba Gaming Control, as well as two special operating agencies. What are those operating agencies?

Ms. Allan: Well, our special operating agencies, the office of the commissioner, and what the other one would be, we're not sure. We know it's not ours, but what that is, is a clustering of departments. So it would be a special operating agency that would belong to one of the other departments.

Office of the Fire Commissioner. Sorry, I missed out a word.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm not quite sure what the minister means by clustering.

Ms. Allan: Well, we don't have our own human resources staff in the Department of Labour. What happens is there is a clustering of departments, and they're staffed by human resources officers. So those departments that you read off would be the cluster that the HR staff would work with, and that is a practice that was set up by the previous government.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm still wondering about these special operating agencies. I know that the minister mentioned Office of the Fire Commissioner, but what's the other one?

Ms. Allan: It's not in our department, So it would be a special operating agency that would belong to perhaps one of the other departments that she listed off that is part of that clustering exercise.

But you know what? We could get that information for the critic, and we'll provide her with that information and find out which SOA it is to which department.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yesterday, I was asking about any expenses that may have been incurred from travel or any such thing through the Premier (Mr. Doer) or any other departments. I'm wondering today if the Spirited Energy campaign, if any monies or donations in kind came from the Department of Labour and Immigration or Workers Compensation Board.

Ms. Allan: Well, I can certainly tell you that none has come from the Department of Labour and Immigration.

In regard to the WCB, they're an arm's-length agency with a tripartite board of directors, and I don't get involved in the management of their financial affairs. So I'm sorry, I couldn't speak on behalf of the board.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is the minister aware that the Workers Compensation Board has contributed to the Spirited Energy campaign?

Ms. Allan: No.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yesterday, I did ask the minister regarding the four new Workplace Safety and Health division employees. I noted that, in the annual report, there had been a delay in hiring four Workplace Safety and Health officers. It seemed to be to manage some of the other expenses that there was a delay in hiring these people, according to what it says in here and the way I interpret it, and then she said that, no, these were four new people.

So what is the full complement then because there were four people that had not been hired; now there are four people that have been hired. Does that mean that those four vacancies were then filled and now four more were hired? Is that what that means? Or are we just filling the four vacancies?

Ms. Allan: I thank the member for the question to provide clarity. We have turnover in our Workplace Safety and Health division all the time in regard to Workplace Safety and Health officers. This seems to be an emerging area for Winnipeg and, I believe, the province, in regard to creating a safe workplace culture. So we try to keep a full complement of Workplace Safety and Health officers on board at all times. So the new positions that we have created are in the budget this year. Of course, our preference would be to have all of those positions staffed at all times. The total complement of Workplace Safety and Health officers at this particular moment is, I know this sounds weird, but 74.7.

Mrs. Taillieu: So there are no vacancies then at this time? These positions are all filled?

Ms. Allan: This is where we're at in regard to hiring. We have a Safety and Health officer in the process of being hired. It's been vacant since the 3rd of September and should be filled by the end of October. Actually, two positions that have been vacant since the 3rd of September, and we hope to have filled by the end of October. We have a position, as well, that has been vacant since the 13th of August and will be filled by the end of October. June 3, we are in the processing of hiring; that's the new position that was created this year. July 1, a position that is in the process of hiring. July 1, '07, we're in the process of hiring. An OSH program engineer, that's Occupational Safety and Health, and it's been vacant since the 9th of July. That one will be filled by the end of October as well.

* (10:20)

Mrs. Taillieu: So am I to understand then that these vacancies, these are the brand new positions that have been created or these are the old ones that aren't filled yet and then there are four new ones?

Ms. Allan: It's a combination of the two. Some of them are the new positions and some of them are the old.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then just for clarity then, at this point in time, how many are not filled?

Ms. Allan: Seven, all of which we hope to have filled by the end of October.

Mrs. Taillieu: So there were four that were not filled. There were four new ones, and of those eight, only one's been filled.

Ms. Allan: The critic is reading from the '05-06 annual report. There has been a lot of turnover since that time, so it's difficult to compare the information that I gave her just now to the information that is in the annual report. This is the current situation as it is today and there is always constant turnover.

Our goal, obviously, would be to have all of those positions filled all of the time, and we made an election commitment to increase our number of Workplace Safety and Health officers by another 20 officers and we're going to do that. So it will always be in flux, but our goal would be to have all of those positions filled at all times.

Mrs. Taillieu: It does always present a problem when you get information that is outdated, but that's just the best that we can do.

Another point I just wanted to question about talks about overexpenditures. It's right in the same explanation on that page 33, and it talks about relocation costs of an employee. What does that mean, relocation costs of an employee? Is that standard to pay the relocation costs of an employee?

Ms. Allan: That is standard practice, I believe, in the government across all departments. If we have to move an individual that is employed in the department perhaps from Brandon to Thompson, we would pick up that individual's moving costs, and in this particular case it was actually a Workplace Safety and Health officer that we moved up north to Thompson from Brandon.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just wondering again in the Workplace Safety and Health division, and I'm still looking at the annual report, but I don't think it's specific to a year; it may be. It says at the bottom of the page there on page 31: The office of the assistant deputy minister's salaries and expenditures are included under Inspection Services.

Why is that?

Ms. Allan: Well, the office of the assistant deputy minister is quite small, and it's just the way the Estimates are structured. So they're bundled together. I believe it's standard practice just to put all of those lines together under the assistant deputy minister. That would be Don Hurst, who's our Assistant Deputy Minister of Workplace Safety and Health.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just trying to acquaint myself with how this works, but Inspection Services branch, Prevention Services and partnerships branch, and the office of the assistant deputy minister are included in the salaries and expenditures of Inspection Services. Where is that exactly? I don't see where this falls.

Ms. Allan: I'm not sure I understand the question in regard to where it falls.

Mrs. Taillieu: Where could I find that information? It says that it's included under Inspection Services. I don't see where that actually indicates the salary of the assistant deputy minister that is supposed to be listed under Inspection Services. So I'm just wondering where I can find that line.

Ms. Allan: Any individual salary that is over \$50,000 is listed in Public Accounts, but also in regard to the appropriation for Workplace Safety and Health, all of that financial information that relates to the annual report is in our Estimates book that the critic has on page 36.

I don't blame the critic for trying to sift through all of this information because it's technical and it's cumbersome because it's in different reports and those kinds of things. If there is any kind of information at any time that the critic would like from us as a department, and you know it doesn't have to just happen during Estimates, we'd be more than happy to provide that information because she is new to our portfolio and our department, and it's certainly something we'd want to provide to her.

Mrs. Taillieu: I appreciate that.

Ms. Allan: The Assistant Deputy Minister of Workplace Safety and Health, his salary is \$111,000, and the other special operating agency that the critic was asking for earlier is the Manitoba Text Book Bureau, and that would be with the Department of Advanced Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Mrs. Taillieu: You know there are a few things when I read through here that seem to come up from time to time in each area, whether it be Inspection Services branch or the Prevention Services or the Mechanical and Engineering, or whatever, but it just seems that there are vacancies under expenditures which are vacancies so that the money can be used to do other things. For example, it says: Under-expenditure reflects implementation of vacancy management strategies to offset staff turnover allowance and operating overexpenditures.

Are there vacancies created purposefully to allow for overexpenditures in other areas within the department?

*(10:30)

Ms. Allan: All of the expenditures, and sometimes there are expenditures particularly in that particular branch that you may not know about. One example of an expenditure would be legal fees for an inquest. We did have an inquest up north in regard to a workplace safety and health accident at a mine. That is an ongoing issue for us so we have to keep a line in the budget for those kinds of expenditures that we may have to deal with at any particular time throughout that particular fiscal year.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm wondering with the safe work advertising that's done by the Workers Compensation Board and the Workplace Safety and Health division—there have been a number of advertisements on television and billboards and literature.

Can the minister say how much that advertising campaign cost?

Ms. Allan: Those expenditures are undertaken by the WCB. That was one of the recommendations that came out of the report of the review of workplace safety and health. One of the things that was recommended in that report is that the WCB work in partnership with all of the stakeholders in regard to reducing injuries. So they've launched a very effective campaign which has been adopted by all of our stakeholders, employers and labour. It's something that is probably one of the key factors and one of the biggest tools in regard to us getting our injury reduction down because education and awareness is so important in regard to workers getting killed on the job. Our recent ad that was unveiled by WCB was the ad that you may see on TV right now where it talks about young workers. Because we have so many young workers entering into the work force right now, we're really trying to do a lot of education in regard to what their rights are.

Mrs. Taillieu: I understand the need for the advertising campaign and the way the educational process is going to prevent workplace injuries. I'm simply wondering what the cost of that would be. So I guess the minister is saying that she doesn't know the cost.

Ms. Allan: That is correct. The campaign is managed by the WCB. There is an opportunity to find out all of those details. I'd be more than happy to come before the Crown corps committee with the WCB officials. All the staff are there who manage those campaigns and manage the financial affairs of the WCB. We've been in committee before and been asked those questions and been open and transparent—the board has been open and transparent about all of those costs.

Mrs. Taillieu: Does the minister know when we'll have that opportunity to speak to the Crown corporations?

Ms. Allan: That is something, I believe, that is negotiated by the House leaders.

Mrs. Taillieu: As the minister knows, there has been an ongoing issue with the migrant farm workers, which saw the forced unionization of workers at

Mayfair Farm in Portage la Prairie. I know that there were discussions with the Labour Board and a ruling and whatnot, but I'm wondering why they would not have an opportunity to appeal this process, and why the minister hasn't really taken their complaint seriously that they were communicated to in a language which they didn't understand. They claimed to not have understood the process, and now they have no recourse. Further to that, is there any plan to try and do this further into the agricultural sector?

Ms. Allan: Well, the Manitoba Labour Board is an adjudicative body that is arm's-length from the minister, and it would be completely and totally inappropriate for me to intervene in any matter that was before the Labour Board. I certainly hope that the opposition isn't asking me to intervene in any way, shape or form because, first of all, I have no mandate and, if I did such a thing, you should be asking for my resignation. The board did decide on the matter and it is before the courts. The case still may be brought before the courts on an application for a judicial review. So it is certainly something that would be totally inappropriate for me to comment on.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I suppose if it's before the courts, then, it's not quite settled yet. I know there was some indication, though, that there might be movement by this government to look at trying to unionize farm workers, and I'm wondering if the minister is intending to pursue this.

Ms. Allan: I think I have to have that question repeated to make sure I totally understand what I'm being asked.

Mrs. Taillieu: In the labour code amendment—let me get that clear what that's called, The Labour Relations Act—I think there was some indication of including farm workers under that act and then there may have been a pull-back and I'm just not sure where that stands right now.

Ms. Allan: Thank you. I think I know now.

First of all, I think what the MLA is talking about is The Employment Standards Code. We have a Labour Relations Act and we have an Employment Standards Code.

The Employment Standards Code lays out the basic minimum rights for workers who are not governed by a collective agreement. The Employment Standards Code was reviewed. It was the first review in 30 years and the legislation was passed last December, and it was passed unanimously in this

House. I want to thank the MLAs across the way for supporting this legislation because it was important legislation, and it reflected the unanimous recommendations that were made by the Labour Management Review Committee. The code became effective on the 30th of April.

We did consult around the whole issue of agricultural workers in the code and, at the time, because the members of the LMRC, when they had a look at this, didn't feel that they could move forward with any recommendations in regard to including agricultural workers in the code. Because of the unique nature of this industry, they wanted more time to look at that matter. So what we did was we didn't move forward in regard to any recommendations around ag workers. We provided them with an opportunity to have more time to consult. The LMRC wanted to consult with their stakeholders. I have had two meetings with KAP, the Keystone Agricultural Producers, and one of them was as recent as two or three weeks ago. They want to consult with their commodity groups in regard to how we might move forward.

* (10:40)

Ag workers in Manitoba have the broadest exclusion of any jurisdiction in Canada. There have been no changes to this since 1957, and I've been very, very clear that there are going to be some changes. I don't know what they look like. It's not my decision. I want those recommendations to come forward from the stakeholders and from the community groups, and I want something worked out at the LMRC.

They asked us to provide them with some more information and a further opportunity to dialogue, and we are walking through that process with them because we want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to have a look at this. Farming is a very unique industry in our province and an important industry in our province, and we want to make sure that as we move forward there's lots of opportunity for dialogue with the stakeholders.

Mrs. Taillieu: I understand that there may be interpretation of what consultation means, whether that's input directly from people bringing it forward themselves or whether it's, this is what we're going to do; what do you think. I think there are two different ways to think about what consultation means.

But I know that in the farming community, I'm hoping that it's not going to be just certain groups that are given a piece of legislation and say, what do you think of this, how does it look to you, because there are certainly a lot of farmers that would be affected by this.

They have very low margins here and it's very—the nature of the work, as the minister knows, is such that you have to work when you need to work. It's not a nine-to-five job. It's not a Monday-to-Friday job. Overtime is always required in farming. It's just the nature of the way the business is. Whether or not farms are classified as industrial or commercial or family farms or family businesses, it's still the same for the people working in that occupation.

So I'm certainly hoping that the minister is committing today that she will not bring forward any legislation before it's actually been discussed with the stakeholders at the grassroots level. I guess I would just ask if there is any proposed legislation drafted.

Ms. Allan: No, there's no legislation drafted, and I think it's very important to know that the Keystone Agricultural Producers asked us for a document. They asked us for a discussion document so that they could do further consultation with their commodity groups, and that's where this is at right now.

So we plan to do the due diligence on this. We understand the importance of the whole issue around family farms and farms that are more industrial in nature. We understand the complexity of this, and we'll continue to dialogue with the groups through this process. We understand how difficult it is.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think that it's very reasonable to expect that, when anybody talks to another group of people about becoming members in their organization, they understand why they're being asked, what they're being asked, how they're being asked, what expectations are placed on them, and then, what the ramifications are going forward.

We plan to introduce a bill to, and it was introduced before; we plan to bring it back in regard to making sure that, when information is given to employees in regard to union fees or membership or anything like this, they be provided in a manner in which the people themselves would understand what is being asked of them. Is this something that the minister will entertain?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I think it's really important to understand that, in The Labour

Relations Act, under Part II of the act, Certification and Bargaining Rights, there already is a requirement that information be provided to the employee and the employee understand that information. It's sections 45(3.1) and 45(3.2), and we can provide that information to the member if she would like. Therefore, the bill that was introduced in the Legislature, Bill 213, by the previous Labour critic is redundant.

I think it's also important to clarify around the case that went before the Labour Board. The Labour Board's decision was around the whole issue of whether or not the migrant employees were employees or not. That was the decision that they wrote. That was the determination. I believe that decision is a public decision, and I believe the member could get a copy of that and read through it. So I think it's important to clarify those two particular areas.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Again, just a continuation, some questions from yesterday.

On several occasions, I'm approached from individuals that have received a provincial nominee certificate in which, once it begins process, in my case 90-percent plus is between the Philippines and India. On occasion, there would be an issue of misrepresentation that is brought up and, therefore, the certificate is voided from the embassy's perspective. On occasion, I've attempted to try to seek clarification on the misrepresentation allegation. Periodically, what'll happen is, I'm told, that well, we're waiting for the Province to be able to give further indication whether or not the provincial nominee certificate is, in fact, valid.

I'll cite a specific case. I'll provide the minister's office with, if she requires, a copy of it. I don't necessarily want to use the individual's names, but this would be a typical, if there's such a thing, e-mail in this case that I would have received.

Of course, it's addressed to me and it comes from, in this case, the embassy in India. It states: Please be advised that the following field investigation, the applicant was informed of our findings and was given the opportunity to disabuse us of our concerns with regard to his work experience. The applicant responded to our request, which was reviewed by the visa officer, and informed to the provincial authorities in Manitoba. We are currently awaiting a response from the provincial authorities with regard to the validity of the applicant's provincial nominee certificate. For

now, we do not require any action on the part of the applicant. The next steps in processing will be determined after we receive a formal response from the Province of Manitoba. Until then, we would not be able to provide any additional information regarding this file.

* (10:50)

Now, the concern I have is that I know that, for fact, that there are a number of people that, through time, run into the same sort of situation. I believe a number of those might have been—there was nothing wrong. Through an investigation, maybe a mistake was made over at the embassy, maybe there was an unintentional mistake that was made by the would-be immigrant, but the issue is that the Provincial Nominee office needs to provide clarity in regard to its certificate.

My question, specifically, to the minister is: What should someone anticipate in terms of time for a response to the embassy in something of this nature?

Ms. Allan: This certainly takes the whole concept of a global discussion on my Estimates to a particularly new level. I would encourage the member, anytime he has these kinds of questions in regard to his constituents' applications, that he contact my department.

First of all, I just want to reiterate, as the Minister of Immigration, I do not get involved in people's individual cases. It is critically important that the whole movement of people be non-political. That's why we have a fair and transparent process in our office in regard to our immigration strategy. I also believe it's one of the reasons why we're the best in the country.

In regard to the question that I was just asked, I've been informed by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration that the procedure around this is that the federal government has the final approval on all of our provincial nominee applications. What the MLA for Inkster is talking about is procedural fairness. An applicant in the situation that you're talking about is always provided with an opportunity to respond. The embassy verifies the application. They are on the ground; we are not. The embassy provides the applicant with 60 days to respond.

Mr. Lamoureux: In this case, and I've had discussions even with embassies and, again, it's not a specific case, it's more the principle of I have been given the impression where they are waiting for a

response from the Provincial Nominee office in regard to the status of a certificate. Do the embassies communicate with the Provincial Nominee office directly as to any sort of follow-up on cases that have, maybe, reached some sort of bump that needs to get that extra push over? Is there any communication between the embassy and the PNP office?

Ms. Allan: I think it's very important that the MLA for Inkster understand the process because he has the responsibility to be transparent and accountable in the information that he provides his constituents. This is very important. The applicant in this particular situation is given 60 days to respond. Then the embassy evaluates and they make the decision in regard to whether or not the applicant is accepted or refused. If the embassy refuses, then the Province withdraws the application.

Mr. Lamoureux: In this one particular e-mail, it indicates: The next step in processing will be determined after we receive a formal response from the Province of Manitoba. Until then we would not be able to provide any additional information regarding this file.

So can the minister just comment on that?

Ms. Allan: The federal government informs us in regard to the intention to refuse, and then that's when we withdraw. They inform the applicants.

Mr. Lamoureux: Are there any incidents within the department where a certificate is reissued after it's been withdrawn?

Ms. Allan: It is possible only when the federal government changes their decision.

Mr. Lamoureux: When the minister makes reference to federal government, you're really talking about the embassy, or is it Ottawa?

Ms. Allan: It's the federal government. The federal government is responsible for running the embassies.

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister is right that it's very important that I have a good understanding of this because I deal with this on a regular basis or an ongoing basis. This type of case, not that often. But am I to tell this individual, then, that he no longer has a certificate, and he's going to have to re-apply for a certificate, or does he have some sort of an appeal based on the e-mail that he would have been provided from the embassy?

Ms. Allan: I have to be really honest with the MLA for Inkster. I'm very uncomfortable having this conversation about this particular situation because, obviously, this is an individual case. I would prefer that he get in touch with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration, Ben Rempel, and I'm quite sure he'd be happy to resolve it with our staff in the branch. I think I've laid out the process, and I don't want to get into technical details about someone's application.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes. Madam Chair, I'll respect that and will follow through on it.

In January, I'm anticipating in going down to the Philippines to visit with the embassy, amongst doing some other things, and one of the issues that is raised with me is the whole idea of, is there preferential treatment that's provided in any form at embassies dealing with immigration? You know, it's one of the issues that I'll raise while I'm down there. It leads me to ask the question in terms of, even people concerned, as the minister emphasizes the importance of transparency, can the minister comment on the process, and what checks are in place to ensure that we minimize any sort of perception of preferential treatment for a provincial nominee certificate?

Ms. Allan: One of the most important aspects of our Provincial Nominee Program that I believe, one of the reasons that makes it the most successful program in Canada—I just wanted to remind the member opposite that Stats Canada came out two weeks ago and applauded our government because of any jurisdiction in Canada we do a better job of finding our applicants jobs than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We take our responsibility in regard to this program seriously. One of the objectives of our program is ensuring fairness and transparency, and I talk about that a lot.

What we do in our branch, the process, is the nomination reviews are conducted. When there is a review, the nomination reviews are conducted by two program officers. Where a refusal is being considered, a third officer conducts a review, and an internal appeal is available at the assistant deputy minister level. Federal officials have noted the integrity of Manitoba's nomination process, and they work closely on files to ensure documentation and security measures are maintained.

* (11:00)

So I just want to ensure the member opposite that our program is a bilateral agreement. It's a shared responsibility with another jurisdiction, and because of the working relationship that we have with the federal government and because the federal government has a lot of faith in our program here because of its fairness, its transparency, its accountability, and its integrity, we're actually able to choose our own levels. That's why we've been able to grow our program here in Manitoba. That's way it is so successful. So I think it's very important for the member to know that.

Mr. Lamoureux: All the more reason why it's important that we ensure that we have checks in place to protect the integrity of the system. In a discussion I had with an embassy official, related to similar issues, one of the things he said is that they do is that they time-stamp. They go out of their way to ensure that things are time-stamped and that there are checks put into place to make sure that things are going procedurally in a proper time frame.

I wonder if the minister can indicate what sort of checks does this department have in regard to making sure that there is, in fact, equal treatment.

Ms. Allan: All of our applications are date-stamped when they come in, and the letters that go out to our applicants all have dates on them.

Mr. Lamoureux: The department has been fairly good from what I understand in terms of getting letters out. I just look for confirmation: When a person puts in an application, is it generally expected that they'll get a response within 30 days saying that your application has been received?

Ms. Allan: That is the intention. It does fluctuate sometimes depending on periods of high intake, but that certainly is the norm.

Mr. Lamoureux: But it would be safe to say that, if every applicant that does go in, it's only a question of time. Whether it's four weeks, six weeks, they will receive a letter acknowledging that their application is being processed.

Ms. Allan: That is our policy.

Mr. Lamoureux: Without necessarily talking about the average time right now, if an application is in the queue and let's say it goes beyond whatever that average time is, are applicants informed as to why or provided any correspondence? The reason why I ask that, Madam Chair, is because quite often if no correspondence or nothing is said and a good period

of time goes by, people are naturally wondering what's happening with my file. I know the office does not need the extra burden of having hundreds of people calling, saying, what's happening with my file, because that in itself takes time. So is there any other correspondence after a file hits a certain period of time?

Ms. Allan: Well, we believe our Immigration branch is an accessible public office. We're open to phone calls; we're open to people coming to our office, applicants coming to our office. In fact, we prefer that. We prefer to deal with the applicants directly. We believe that's another strength of our program, and one of the reasons why we are so successful and a model for every other jurisdiction.

Mr. Lamoureux: One of the things I do appreciate is the minister's firm position in terms of her own role, in terms of not directly getting involved in a specific case. A lot of MLAs—I'm sure I'm not the only one by no stretch of the imagination—probably 55 other MLAs are in contact with the Provincial Nominee office, and the question that I have is, what would be the proper protocol for an MLA that wanted to get information on a case.

When should we wait? For example, I'm talking with the embassies. They say: Well, Kevin, wait till the processing time of nine months; give us nine months to process it. If we haven't done anything within that nine months, then you can send us a letter, and we'll see what we can do in terms of providing you an update.

What should I wait as an MLA before I get in contact with Mr. Ben Rempel and say, Ben, here are three cases, or here's a case, what would be the holdup on it?

Ms. Allan: In accordance with our privacy laws, the applicant is only authorized to have one independent third party have access to that information. I would really prefer if the MLA for Inkster would stay out of the process and ask the applicant to call our office directly so that we can deal directly with the applicant.

Mr. Lamoureux: That is, in fact, what we will recommend. But, in many cases, they are approaching and they are wanting myself, whether it's the PNP certificate or an immigration file. There are signed representative forms in different embassies that they want to have a third party look in to find an update, as I'm sure the minister can appreciate.

Again, we can get a letter of release written up. Do we get a family member here that sponsored the person to sign it off as a letter of release? What would be the proper protocol for an MLA to solicit information from the office?

Ms. Allan: Well, the MLA for Inkster just told me that he appreciates my frankness in regard to my independence. I think that all of the MLAs in this Legislature should have the same values. I don't think we should politicize this process. I don't think any newcomer who comes to our province to participate in our economy and in our communities and in our province should think that, because they are liaising with their local MLA, they would have an advantage. We have worked so hard here in Manitoba to have our program transparent and accountable. This is about the movement of people, and it is, in many cases, about the movement of vulnerable people.

So I would ask the MLA to think seriously about this. I would encourage him to have anyone in his constituency that has concerns about their application to call our office directly. We have people in our office who represent almost every one of the countries, every one of our source countries. We have people in our office who speak many, many languages. We've done this for a reason. It's because we want to remove, quite frankly, immigration consultants from the process. We believe that we can do this better than any other jurisdiction in Canada, and we are; we're the model. So I would like the member opposite to adopt the same values that he just contributed to me in regard to staying independent. I would like him to start referring his constituents' concerns directly to our office, his constituents directly to our office.

Mr. Lamoureux: I would think the minister could appreciate, whether it's myself or individuals like Judy Wasylycia-Leis who represents the same area that I do, that there are numerous politicians that feel that they have a role to play. If the minister was to make a policy decision and then expect the civil servants within that administration to say that we will not respond to MLAs or immigration consultants, that's one thing. But to suggest you as an MLA shouldn't be responding, I think, kind of sends a mixed message. With the civil servants present, I think that the minister should indicate in terms of what role does the civil servant then have upon a request. Are they obligated to respond to an elected MLA, or are they not?

* (11:10)

Ms. Allan: I think it's an important discussion because I think it's important to clarify and provide clarity to the MLA for Inkster, and I'm glad he raised the whole issue of Judy Wasylycia-Leis. One of the important services that my department provides—because they understand this whole technical process so well, one of the services that they will provide, and are more than prepared to provide to you as an MLA, is coming out and speaking to your constituents, to your communities, in regard to our program and how it works. In fact, they are in the process of doing that right now for Judy Wasylycia-Leis because she asked us to do that. We have done that in the past for other MLAs. We believe that that's part of our responsibility in regard to our program, that it is to go out and be on the ground in our communities.

Our folks in the Immigration branch do a lot of that and they don't just do it in Winnipeg. They go out to Brandon. They go out to Thompson. They go out and meet with communities, so we would be more than prepared to do that in the MLA's constituency with his communities, if he would so choose.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Minister, I will take the minister up on that and follow through with Mr. Rempel, likely sometime in the next week to do so.

Having said that, it would be my intent, because I don't want to mislead in any fashion, to continue to request updates on files where I believe that there's been an exceptional amount of time in trying to get a certificate issued or ultimately denied. I think that is a role that I have to play, especially if it goes beyond what would be a reasonable amount of time.

That's why I would ask the minister, not necessarily to respond on the reasonable amount of time right now, but to look at what the actual averages are for the streams and the average much based on like what Ottawa or the embassies would do in other countries. They won't say, like between two and four months; they would say, within four months this is what you should anticipate.

I would very much appreciate, and I think it would be advantageous for all MLAs, if there was some sort of a guideline that was provided coming from her department which states something to the effect, and just use this as a hypothetical example, anyone coming under the family support priority stream, if an application exceeds X number of

months, whether it's four months, five months, and you're aware of one, you can refer your constituent directly to the office, which is the preferred route; if you're going to deal with it, this is the individual that you can send your request to.

I don't want to be a burden to the department. What I do require is information as to the waiting times. It helps out immensely because then I know when it is to send, when not to send. It also helps in terms of my being able to tell these clients when they should be calling themselves or when they should be going down, unless the minister believes that a client can go down every other week to say, how's my file going? There's got to be a reasonable expectation.

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I'd like to inform the MLA for Inkster that they do. They can and they do. They come in every week. They can come in every week and they do come in every week. You know what? It's just fine. We don't mind that. You know, we're accessible. We run a great program and that's, I believe, our public responsibility in running the best program in Canada.

That's why we meet our targets. That's why we're doing a better job than any other jurisdiction in Canada. That's why our settlement services funding has increased double in the last year and a half. That's why our retention rate is 82 percent. That is why the recent StatsCan report came out and said we do a better job of finding people work than any other jurisdiction in Canada. It's not about "how fast is it moving" and all of these other things that you seem to be so worried about. It's about outcomes, and we have the most solid program in Canada.

The MLA for Inkster mentioned a word in his statement just now that I think is critically important. He said he did not want to mislead his constituents. Every day he comes into this House during Question Period and he reads out a petition about our Provincial Nominee Program and why we don't allow people in the health-care sector to apply to our Provincial Nominee Program, the same as computer technicians, Madam Chair. I think it is critically important to explain to the member that he is being disingenuous when he does this. He's actually got his constituents signing this petition, reads their names out every day, blah, blah, blah, and many, many others.

I just want the member to know, I want to remind him how our Provincial Nominee Program works. It's an economic program linked to labour market demand, and it's about the skill shortages. If

anyone applies to the Provincial Nominee Program and they are licensed and they have an offer of employment in Manitoba, they will come through our program.

An LPN needs to be licensed. This is very important. There's a very important distinction here that the MLA for Inkster does not understand. A computer technician does not have to be licensed. There is no self-regulatory body. This is critically important for the MLA to understand, because what he is doing is he is going out and he is getting his constituents to sign that petition that he reads out in this Chamber and puts on the public record, and it's not factual. It's not fair to our program, it's not fair to our staff who work so hard to make our program the best in Canada, and it is not fair to your constituents to say that in this Chamber. It's shameful, your getting them to sign that petition.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, sometimes it's difficult and trying on one's patience as you try to depoliticize some of the discussion that we're having when you have a minister that is so wanting to enter into a dialogue that is highly political. I respect the fact that this department and the staff of civil servants are professional, and I hope they will understand what it is that's being said.

* (11:20)

This minister is the one that owes this Chamber an apology. The petition that I table—I understand the program. I understand the difference. It's this minister who really has no idea in terms of what it is that she is speaking about when she makes reference to my petition as being inaccurate and insults the individuals who have signed this petition who do understand and who do want their family—there's nothing in this petition that I table that is inaccurate. The minister herself does a disservice and demonstrates a lack of respect by her comments in regard to a petition that is signed by Manitobans. I don't care if she wants to apologize to me, even though on numerous occasions I think I could justify an apology, but she does owe an apology for the people that are signing this petition. They're not stupid people, Madam Minister. They know what it is that they're signing, and this petition is not misleading.

This petition asked for the minister to change her government policy that would enable health-care workers the same opportunity to come to the province of Manitoba as others are provided through this very same program. The minister cannot tell me

a registered nurse in the Philippines has the same opportunity as someone that is a welder. The minister cannot say that there has not been an increase in the backlogs. She made the commitment. It was this minister that said, within three months. That is not the case today. If she actually listened to the civil servants that run the department, that work the department, she would know the truth. It is not within three months. I wasn't born yesterday.

This minister is on some yellow brick road that I don't know where it goes, but she does not understand, or she understands and her intent is to mislead this House. It's one of the two things: either she doesn't understand or she's intentionally trying to mislead this House, and I find that shameful and disgusting as a minister of the Crown.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Chairperson: The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Far be it for me to interfere in the give and take of discussion in the Estimates process.

I think the accusation of intending to mislead this House is not parliamentary, but, more important, I think characterizing somebody going down the yellow brick road, et cetera, does not lend itself to the discourses of people in this Chamber that want to deal with the Estimates, find out their information.

It may be that the member is not satisfied with the information, but perhaps I would suggest in the intercession I'm making that we all move on, recognizing there may be disputes over the characterizations and over the issues. But, certainly, to get into the realm of non-parliamentary language, at this point, is not helpful to all of us who are in the Chamber trying to determine the facts of Estimates. So it's just both an intervention and a suggestion that we move on and try to get as much information out as possible.

It may very well be that the member doesn't like the answer to the question, but let's move on to areas that can be productive to the public at large.

Madam Chairperson: The Member for Inkster, on the same point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: On the same point of order, Madam Chair, I believe the Government House

Leader might actually have a point of order. What I would have suggested to the Government House Leader is that, if you look at the dialogue that has been there for the last 25 minutes, my intent was in a very genuine way to try to get answers from the minister. She is the one that had chosen to try to talk politics or make politics of the issue, as opposed to myself. This is the first time this morning where I raised it in the fashion in which I did, and it's only because my patience was drawing a little bit. I was starting to run out of patience and, to that degree, I would withdraw any remarks that the minister would have found offensive and be prepared to continue on with my question.

Madam Chairperson: I appreciate the Member for Inkster withdrawing his comment. That should end the matter.

I would also like to take this moment to caution all members of the House to temper their comments. Just please temper your comments.

* * *

Ms. Allan: Could I have a two-minute break?

Madam Chairperson: Is there a will for a recess?
[Agreed]

The committee recessed at 11:25 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:30 a.m.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, in keeping with your comments and the Government House Leader's (Mr. Chomiak) comments, I want to ask some very precise questions in regard to multicultural funding.

I'm wondering if the minister can indicate how many grants would be issued through the multicultural director's office, or the grants that her department would be aware of in regard to a multicultural nature.

Ms. Allan: The Ethnocultural Community Support Program is a program that assists immigrants through integration. Last year, in our budget year 2006-2007, we increased that funding by \$100,000; so I believe the total funding is \$207,000. When we increased that funding, what we did was we implemented an approved accountability mechanism. We included a new application process with time lines, directions for applicants and eligibility criteria, along with clarification between the annual operating funding and nonrecurring special projects. Also, we

established a new funding agreement, which formalizes the activity supported by the fund. There's also, now, a requirement for explicit reporting arrangements.

In regard to the actual number of ethno-cultural organizations that received funding last year, that would be 114.

Mr. Lamoureux: Did the minister indicate how many applications would have been requested versus then, 114, I think she said, were approved?

Ms. Allan: Just to clarify, we received 114 applications and 98 were approved.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is it possible to get a listing, unless it's already maybe in the Estimates here somewhere, a listing of the 98 that would have been approved?

Ms. Allan: We'll get that information for him.

Mr. Lamoureux: There are also a lot of ethnic groups or multicultural groups who will often go to the casinos and manage the bingo halls.

Does the minister, through her department, monitor that in any way?

Ms. Allan: Yes, that's monitored through the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation.

Mr. Lamoureux: So those groups that would be approved through her department, those 98, let's say, would they still then be eligible to do the bingos and so forth?

Ms. Allan: Yes, it's a combination of the two actually. I would just like to refer the MLA to our annual report on page 54. I guess I can't refer you to it because we haven't tabled it yet. But I'm sure we'll do that shortly.

In 2006-2007, there were 114 grant requests; 98 were approved, for a total of \$207,500 in cash and \$306,900 in bingos through the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation. So it was a combination of those two pots of money.

Mr. Lamoureux: So the 98 that are being referred to would be for both funds. The minister, you'll get back to me in terms of who those are.

Ms. Allan: Yes.

Mr. Lamoureux: I thank the minister for that.

I did have a couple of questions in regard to Workers Compensation. Just the other day, in approaching the Leg there were some people outside

wearing placards expressing concerns. The minister even made reference that that happens periodically.

I think his name is Gary Alexander is the one who is in the Leg Building who represents Workers Compensation. The question I have, I guess, is just dealing with the appeal process. My understanding of the appeal is something like this: Injured worker gets hurt in the workplace; after, goes down to Workers Compensation, puts in an application; might be on WCB benefits for a month, two months, until, ultimately, he is capable of going back to work. Goes back to work, no problem.

The issue then becomes when the worker says, well, I can't go back to work because my doctor says I can't go back to work. Then Workers Compensation says, well, you have to go back to work. So says the adjudicator. The worker then says, well, I'm going to appeal your decision.

My understanding is that first appeal goes to the supervisor. The supervisor, in essence, does a paper review of what's been done, maybe even talks to some people. I'm not 100 percent sure of that, but I do believe it's a paper review. Then a decision would be made. If the decision is to support what the adjudicator did, then you go into a final appeal. That final appeal is the board.

The way I described it, is that a fair reflection of the process, or have I missed something?

Ms. Allan: No, there is an Appeal Commission. The appeal does not go to the board of directors of the WCB. There is an Appeal Commission that is separate from the board.

Mr. Lamoureux: Okay. So then after the supervisor makes a decision to support an adjudicator's decision, then it would go to that separate commission appeal board, if the claimant wanted to appeal it further.

Ms. Allan: That's correct.

But these questions are best directed to the officials at the WCB in regard to the process, and I'd be more than happy to go to the Crown corps committee at any time with staff from WCB and answer any of these questions, or get them to answer them.

Mr. Lamoureux: I'll try just, again, it's more of a couple of policy things. Then I can move on to Labour, if the minister doesn't feel it's appropriate at this level.

The question, then, I would have is: The board itself, the appeal board, my understanding is that there's an employee and an employer and then a neutral person that would actually meet with the claimant.

Ms. Allan: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Lamoureux: Now I suspect this is where it gets maybe a little bit more technical. I'm not too sure if the minister will have the right staff. She can always just get back to me in writing, if that might be more appropriate for her, or we can wait for another time.

* (11:40)

What I'm interested in knowing is a big question that a number of these claimants have that has been posed to me as, well, am I required to get a lawyer in order to go to these appeal hearings? I've indicated, no, you don't have to get a lawyer. Then the question always becomes, well, hmm, if I don't get a lawyer or I don't get someone to represent me, what are my chances of prevailing? These people that I'm working, the ones that are telling me that I should be back at work have all sorts of expertise and background; they deal with this on an ongoing basis, and they start to question whether or not they should have representation.

In the past, what I would do is I would tell them: Well, you look for a worker advisor; see if a worker advisor can help you. I'm not going to tell someone: No, do not get a lawyer, because if I say to them, do not get a lawyer and then they lose, they say: Well, I should have had a lawyer. Then they come back and say I gave them bad advice. So I never give a person advice not to get a lawyer. I provide them with their options.

What would be nice to be able to indicate is some sense of the lay person who goes before an appeal. What is their probability of being successful in comparison to claimants that do have lawyers and their probability of being successful? I think that that would go a long way in terms of whether or not the mechanism that we have for that final appeal is, for lack of better words, layman-friendly. I can appreciate if she can't answer that question at this time, but I would appreciate if I can get some sort of a sense in terms of how many people go to the board without lawyer representation, and what sort of success ratio they have, compared to those that do have lawyer representation.

Ms. Allan: Well, we have absolutely no idea who goes before the Appeal Commission with a lawyer or

does not have a lawyer, but the individual cases are decided on the merits of the case. There's medical review panels involved. All of that is totally arm's length from the minister's office.

But the best advice you can give anybody in regard to that particular situation is to go the Worker Advisor Office. The Worker Advisor Office is there to assist claimants who have these kinds of situations. They can get advice from them in order to proceed with their particular case. All of these cases are different.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can a worker advisor actually go with a claimant if a claimant wants them to go to the appeal?

Ms. Allan: Yes.

Mr. Lamoureux: I appreciate that, and I'll be sure to pass that on.

What I'd like to do is shift gears again and go towards labour legislation. I know that I did get a message from her office in regard to a briefing on legislation that the minister has tabled, and I will follow through on that. I just appreciate that we're going through the Estimates and we won't be doing bills until a later time, and it's better if I get the briefing a little bit closer to it.

The question that I have is more of a proactive one in terms of labour legislation. Can the minister indicate if she has any, what I would classify as progressive labour ideas that she's looking at bringing forward? One that I've always been a big fan of has been final offer selection. I wonder if the minister could indicate if she's got anything in the works.

Ms. Allan: Well, we believe that all of the labour legislation that we've passed, all eight pieces that we passed unanimously, and the one piece around, the very first piece that I passed in regard to the whole issue around compassionate care leave that was harmonized with the federal government, we believe all nine pieces of our labour legislation have been progressive. I have a piece of legislation that I'm going to unveil in October, not legislation. I wish it was, but you know me, I like to consult on my legislation. I am so excited about this legislation; I cannot wait. We are going to probably announce a consultation around this piece of legislation in October, and we look forward to the MLA for Inkster being briefed on our legislation

I know that we communicated with you by e-mail on the 18th of September, and we have been waiting to brief you on our fair practices legislation, which we believe is progressive. It's exciting legislation. We're only the second jurisdiction in Canada to bring in this kind of legislation, and we believe it will provide transparency and a code of practice to allow our newcomers that come to Manitoba to have their credentials recognized in a more timely manner. I'm quite sure the MLA would be interested in that legislation. I'm actually quite surprised that he's waited three weeks to come and learn more about that legislation. I want to thank the MLA for Morris for taking us up on the offer to brief her within about 36 hours.

So we believe we have some very exciting pieces that are coming up. We also have an interesting piece around the construction labour relations act. We're working on some stuff that we believe is going to be very, very exciting for our province, and actually for our country.

Mr. Lamoureux: That's why I had indicated in my comments that I did receive an invitation, and I will do the follow-up in terms of having that presentation on the legislation.

The question I have for the minister is, again, it's going to be on the final offer selection. Does the minister see any value in terms of working with labour and management to see if, in fact, there might be a mood to accept final offer selection in the province of Manitoba?

Ms. Allan: The parties that are at the bargaining table can have access to final offer selection now. I do consultation with my stakeholders all the time, and no one has raised this issue with me, because I believe that they believe that the system is working the way it is now.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, I look forward to her announcement at the end of October to see what type of legislation she's looking at.

The last couple of questions I have are just in regard to the Live-In Caregiver Program in which there's a component that's required in terms of finances from the employer. Does the Province play any role?

I know on the federal Web site it says as an employer you should get in contact with the local, I believe it's the Department of Labour, to find out some financial requirements, or something of that nature. Can the minister indicate, again, it's for the

live-in caregiver for the would-be employer, are there recommendations or thresholds that are established by the department at all?

Ms. Allan: That is a federal program. As you know, it falls under the whole complex area of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. But I have to tell the MLA for Inkster that we are in dialogue with the federal government in regard to that program. We think that we will be making an announcement with the minister very soon in regard to strengthening our relationship with the federal government in regard to those particular individuals.

* (11:50)

Mr. Lamoureux: The reason why I ask is that I do think there is just phenomenal potential with the Live-In Caregiver Program. Just the other day I was at someone's home on Burnell where they were hoping to be able to get, I believe it's a niece over. This is someone that has disabilities and health concerns, and the niece would be a welcome addition in terms of providing care. By allowing something of that nature to occur, we're going to be marginalizing our own costs, let alone the real benefit of being able to have someone, a family member, come and provide that quality care.

So I think we can do so much more with the program. I have had someone that's been turned down because they were concerned about wages, a household income of \$45,000, yet they have three kids, but they virtually own their own home. The embassy was concerned about affordability. Can the individual afford to pay the employee?

I've always thought that this particular program, in essence, could be replaced through a certificate program through the Provincial Nominee, Madam Chair. That's why, in part, that I raise it. But, in the interim, does the department provide any information to would-be employers of live-in caregivers.

Ms. Allan: Well, once again, this is a program that falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government. At the present time, we do not have any information in regard to who these employees are. We are working on that with the federal government because, when they come in, we would like to see temporary foreign workers in this particular category covered by provincial labour laws. But, if we don't know who they are, and where they are, and we can't find them, how can we provide protection? That's one of the issues that we are actually talking to the federal government about right now. It's federal

privacy legislation that prevents us from knowing that information, but we believe that we are very close to resolving and having a very exciting announcement around that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, I still have a few questions that I'd like to ask. I notice again in the Estimates book that there's a Worker Advisor Office. I'm just wondering, it says here that they're employees of the Department of Labour and they're independent of the Workers Compensation Board, but it sounds to me as if what their duties are, are the same as the executive assistant that the minister talked about who was an employee of the Workers Compensation Board. So how do these two relate? Are they in the same office or do they do the same duties?

Ms. Allan: I thank the member for the question in regard to providing clarity. They're not in the same office. The Worker Advisor Office, I believe, is in the Norquay Building. Just to provide clarity, Gary Alexander does actual casework and works directly with individuals. The Worker Advisor Office has a mandate to provide people with assistance in regard to appeal procedure, which can be quite technical. As I said earlier, they can actually attend an appeal hearing at the commission with the claimant. So the roles are actually quite different. Gary would explain to them the process and help them with that and try to determine any information that they required in regard to their particular case, but he would not be able to assist them in regard with the actual appeal. That would be the responsibility of the Worker Advisor Office.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, so they would be involved in the appeal process for someone in a particular claim. It appears, though, that there would be some consultation between Gary Alexander, what his role and this role because it may be the same cases.

Ms. Allan: Yes, it's entirely possible that somebody may go to the Worker Advisor Office and may have more questions, may want to know more, may be concerned about how their case is being handled, and then they may come back and talk to Gary Alexander about it as well. There is nothing preventing anyone from having contact with either/or, or both.

Mrs. Taillieu: So, if a person were to speak to Gary Alexander and talk about their situation and he is employed by the Workers Compensation Board and then he might go, or she might go, to the Worker Advisor Office and speak to someone that's

employed within the Department of Labour and Immigration, I'm wondering how much information would be shared between these two. Would there not be a conflict of interest possibly arising there, where one is representing the Workers Compensation Board and one is representing the appeal process?

Ms. Allan: All Gary Alexander is doing is providing them with information in regard to how the act works, what the appeal process looks like and trying to assist them with those kind of procedural matters. The Worker Advisor Office actually assists them with the actual case.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, so just for clarification, Gary Alexander would just be, okay, here I am at the office and I can advise you to go to the Worker Advisor Office.

Ms. Allan: Yes, if they want to appeal their case, that's the information he would give them.

Mrs. Taillieu: So, again, then, he would not participate in any kind of discussion in regard to their particular case.

Ms. Allan: Well, I don't know exactly what Gary says to everyone that comes into his office because, of course, I don't know whom he deals with because I'm not, as the minister, supposed to get involved in WCB cases. I think Gary has many conversations with many individuals in regard to their case, cases, and that information is shared freely amongst the two individuals. I can't comment in regard to exactly what those conversations are.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just imaging that there could be a conflict-of-interest situation if a person comes in and speaks to Gary Alexander about their particular case, and then, because he is employed by the Workers Compensation Board, that person is directed to the Worker Advisor Office where they are told how to make their appeal, but they may have left information with one and then gone to another. There is a perception of, a possibility of, a conflict of interest arising for a person who wants to appeal, but has already given some information to the Workers Compensation Board through Gary Alexander. Is that not the case?

* (12:00)

Ms. Allan: The majority of people that actually show up at my office have already been through the appeal process, a lot of them. They just, quite frankly, need someone to talk to and are trying to

understand exactly what has occurred. We don't believe there is any conflict of interest whatsoever.

Mrs. Taillieu: As the minister knows, I have a particular interest in the sharing of personal and private information. I think that there is a need to protect a person's personal information, and I certainly know that that would be governed under FIPPA legislation in the public sector. But I do note that in the annual report that Research, Legislation and Policy branch, part of what they do is collect, develop, disseminate information on statistical data, on work stoppages, provisions of collective agreements, labour organization, union memberships and others. So I'm wondering when you have sensitive personal information, there is a need to make sure that people whose personal information is collected know why it's being collected, they've been given permission to have that information collected, know why it's being collected, know how it's going to be used and disclosed and how it's going to be protected and stored. Certainly, when you have information regarding who's in a membership or who's in a union membership, that information is something that people may not want to be disseminated, and certainly this appears that it could be collected from a number of sources.

I want to also say that there is, I think, a misconception, or there appears to be a misconception, about what privacy means in terms of being able to disclose personal information or hide behind the big catch phrase of privacy laws because privacy is meant to protect third-party interests, but it's not meant to harm those people that personal information has been collected upon. By that, I mean, for example, a family member who needed some personal information on another family member to help them in a particular situation is not meant to harm that person by not allowing the family member to have access.

So I just wanted to put that in there because there is a misconception, I think, about that. But I am wondering about the ability of the Research, Legislation and Policy branch to collect information, whom they're collecting this information on, what they're doing with the information, and how it's being disclosed if it is being disclosed to other organizations.

Ms. Allan: Well, none of the information that we deal with in our department is personal information. It's all statistical data in the research area, and we take the information from the Stats Canada, the

labour force survey. We do an analysis of that information, and it's all statistical data. There is no personal information of individuals that is collected or dealt with in that research branch.

Mrs. Taillieu: So, just so I'm aware, I'm sure of what's been said here. When it talks about union membership, what the minister is saying is there are no names on a list of who is involved in what union or are a union and who's associated with that union?

Ms. Allan: That's correct. It's all information from Stats Canada. It's Stats data.

Mrs. Taillieu: I know that the minister and I have had this conversation before about personal information, and I know she's aware of the fact that, in the FIPPA reviews in 2004, some of the recommendations coming forward that there should be a provision to provide for protection of personal information of employees. I certainly think that it's a small step to just fill a bit of a gap in the legislation here in Manitoba. I wonder if she might agree with me on that.

Ms. Allan: Actually, that particular matter doesn't fall within my portfolio. If she'd like to have a dialogue with the minister responsible, it would be Minister Selinger.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate whether the Manitoba Federation of Labour has made this recommendation to her office, or to the FIPPA reviews?

Ms. Allan: They've never raised it with me. I don't know if they've raised it with any other minister, but they certainly haven't raised it with me.

Mrs. Taillieu: I noted when the minister was responding to the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) that she referenced the annual report which hasn't been tabled yet. I'm quite distressed because I've been looking over the old annual report. I'm wondering why the annual report is sitting with the minister and she hasn't tabled it, and we've had to look at year-old information. So I know that it's available. I just wondered why it hasn't been tabled.

Ms. Allan: Because we got it yesterday after Question Period had already started and the opportunity to table it wasn't there.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I thank the minister for that, but I did need to ask that question, because she did reference it.

I know that the minister prides herself on consulting with all the pieces of legislation that she has passed, and I think that she has, but I need to ask about the consultation process with small business owners, or businesses in general, in regard to the stat holiday. I think it's widely received and appreciated. But I wondered about the consultation process with business organizations, because it did seem to come through rather quickly. I wonder if she can indicate today what discussions took place, the number of people that she consulted with, and what were their concerns.

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I'd just like to kind of roll tape on the stat holiday process, because the MLA for Morris was not the critic at the time. So I think it's very, very important to talk about how the statutory holiday came into being.

When we reviewed the Employment Standards Code, because the code had not been reviewed for 30 years we really didn't believe that we could get at all aspects of the code, because the code is so huge and so broad and hadn't been looked at for 30 years. So what we did was we put together a discussion document to frame the dialogue with employer stakeholders, and with workers, and with the general public. The statutory holidays, that particular matter was not in the discussion document. Although, lots of people tried to raise it when we were consulting.

In January of this year, I was in my office one day, and I was informed by my Cabinet communications person that Mary Agnes Welch from the *Winnipeg Free Press* wanted to interview me about what I thought was changes to the Employment Standards Code. I got on the phone with her and we were talking, and she said, well, when are we going to have a stat holiday? So I walked her through the whole process of the changes to the Employment Standards Code and how it wasn't part of the changes that we had made. I said very clearly in that conversation with her that I would have to consult with business and labour, that was my preference in regard to making policy in this province.

* (12:10)

Well, the next morning I woke up and I opened up the *Winnipeg Free Press*. On the front page of the *Free Press* was your leader who said: I think we should have a stat holiday. I'm going to go tobogganing on the floodway, and I don't believe we should have any consultation.

I went, wow, whew. That's really quite interesting. This changes the whole dynamic around this quite tremendously. I was in the newspaper being called a party pooper. I was called quite a few names over the next couple of weeks while your leader was on CJOB saying, no need to consult. Let's just tallyho here with the stat holiday.

I said on national radio a couple weeks ago when I did an interview, you know, there are some days, as a politician, you don't always get to choose the issues that you manage. Sometimes they just kind of roll in the door and you have to deal with them.

I remember phoning my Manitoba Employers Council rep, Bill Gardner, whom I talk to on the phone probably on a weekly basis, and said, I think we've got a real problem here. He agreed with me, so I tried to manage the issue as best I could. While the opposition leaders were naming the holiday, I was saying, wait a minute here, folks. I think we need to consult with business and labour.

So, on the 8th of February, I sent a letter to the Labour Management Review Committee, and I asked them: If there was a holiday, what should it look like in regard to shopping? Obviously, we had a option here. We could have gone with a complete prohibition on shopping, or we could have done the Sunday shopping hours, which required a change to the retail and business holiday act, I believe it's what the name of it is.

While I was going through that process, I had 92 CITI FM churning out T-shirts and tens of thousands of names on a petition. I consulted with the Labour Management Review Committee. I also had letters from employers in this province saying they thought a stat holiday was a great idea, particularly employers in the tourism industry.

I was actually at the 20th anniversary of the Manitoba Film and Sound last night, and I had an employer in this province come up to me. She was ecstatic about the stat holiday because they've already started to put in place a whole package of information and a whole package—it's the Louis Riel hotel, so you can imagine how much fun they're going to have with this. They're putting together a whole business package for their clients at the hotel.

Not everybody is against this particular holiday, and, you know, I have been very, very clear about this from the very, very beginning. This wasn't the usual process for developing labour legislation in my office. It was quite unique. I can tell you, in my

conversations with employer reps, they may be mad at me, but it's no comparison to how mad they are at your leader, the Leader of the Opposition, who grabbed this issue at the same time he was waxing his toboggan so that he could go tobogganing on the floodway. He's the one that really let the cat out of the bag and was completely and totally disrespectful to our employer community in this province.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think the minister is just having a little bit of a hissy fit because she's jealous that our leader got the top billing here. Now, of course, she's trying to take all the credit for it, but you know, you can't have it both ways, Madam Minister. You can't blame the opposition when you get criticized for something and then take credit when other people applaud it. You just can't have it both ways.

I basically asked her if she consulted with business, and sure there are some businesses that would like this because it gives people an opportunity to have time and off and participate in their business, but there are other businesses in this province that it's going to impact upon, and it's going to impact on the economy.

I can quote from Shannon Martin who said it was going to cost the economy upward of \$157 million. So that's significant. I think that there are a number of businesses out there that felt they would have liked to have had more input into this.

Now we are going to have a stat holiday, it is going to be called Louis Riel Day, and I know that the minister will take full credit for it, because that's what she wants to do. If she's getting good accolades for it, she'll say it was her idea, and, if there's criticism, she'll blame it on the opposition. I don't think it can happen both ways, Madam Minister.

With that, I would like to give the Member for Portage the opportunity for a couple more questions, and then I'm prepared to move to line by line.

Ms. Allan: Well, you know, I have never really taken credit for the stat holiday. If you want to talk to your employer reps about that, you certainly can, because I think it would be a valuable conversation.

I do want to tell you, though, that another employer rep that I know the member knows quite well told me that the stat holiday was a fabulous idea. It was Chris Lorenc.

At the end of the day, I think Manitobans deserve a holiday in February. We are still at the bottom of the heap in regard to stat holidays in

comparison to every other jurisdiction in Canada. But I think, probably, the real credit goes to 92 CITI FM, as Tom Brodbeck said in the *Winnipeg Sun* article.

So I'm more than happy to answer questions from the MLA for Portage.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): I do appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Labour Estimates this day.

Just wanting to update the minister a little bit in regard to the new statutory holiday. I have been promoting the installation of that holiday for almost five years now, since the legislation. I know most members have had correspondence from myself. I have the fax listings of who I sent it to and spoke with as well on it.

I will say though that I had hoped that the statutory holiday would reflect the same naming as our sister prairie provinces have utilized, that being Family Day. In regard to calling it Louis Riel Day, by all means, a very historical figure, and paramount involvement in the creation of our province. But Family Day is all encompassing, all inclusive, and it is in keeping with the other prairie provinces.

Now I would like to ask the minister in regard to a workplace-related exposure that takes years upon years for incubation, is there within your department a contact point to which I can refer persons? They are having a great deal of difficulty in regard to a workplace contamination and are finding it—they've gone to Workers Compensation, and, basically, that entry into the Labour Minister's portfolio has not been very successful. It is, as I say, many, many years. The incubation for this particular exposure is upward to 35 years. So I ask the minister if she could provide today a contact person that I can refer to. I bring it up at this time because it is very, very substantive.

* (12:20)

Ms. Allan: We have a very skilled individual that I would recommend the MLA for Portage get in touch with. His name is Dr. Ted Redekop, and he is Chief Occupational Health Officer in our department of Workplace Safety and Health. He's a very knowledgeable individual, and I'm sure you'll find him helpful.

Mr. Faurichou: I thank the minister for that response and I will follow up with that.

The other is the Provincial Nominee Program has been discussed extensively, and I know the minister has responded on numerous occasions in that regard. But one area to which I would like to ask the minister is that in specific terms the City of Portage la Prairie and the R.M. of Portage la Prairie entered into a labour needs study earlier this year and have identified areas of deficiency as far as available trained professionals. As it pertains to the provincial immigration nominee program, is there an initiative by the department to actually liaison with a community such as Portage la Prairie so that the department would then be able to fully comprehend and understand and appreciate the needs of that community and would then endeavour to promote contact with potential immigrants with the needed skills?

Ms. Allan: My department has been actively engaged with the community in Portage la Prairie. They have met with them on a regular basis and have met with the immigration committee in Portage and have invited them to join our initiative. So we look forward to, you know, anything that we can create that would be exciting for Portage la Prairie.

One of the things that we really pride ourselves on in Manitoba in regard to our Provincial Nominee Program is that we are one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that has people come through our PNP that settle outside of Winnipeg. You obviously know about lots of success in the Morden and Winkler areas and Steinbach, but we're also getting other programs happening in other urban centres. So we would really look forward to that opportunity, and our staff are on it.

Mr. Faurichou: The final point that I want to raise with the minister, who is abundantly aware of the situation facing one vegetable producer in Portage la Prairie, that being Mayfair Farm, as it pertains to a Labour Board ruling that supported a union membership sign-up and has drawn nationwide attention and the situation that has unfolded, the minister's very aware of.

But what the bottom line of all of this is, is that workers' rights have been trampled on as far as the democratic process. Is she considering that the legislation needs to accommodate the ability for workers to actually vote on whether or not they intend to join a union? We could discuss this issue until the cows come home because it just is extraordinary that a non-work-related, non-workplace-related incident has emanated in this

fiasco of unionization of farm workers. It is beyond anyone that I talk to, their comprehension to understand how it has gone this far over a complete misunderstanding and, in fact, a use of the wrong terminology in promoting the union sign-up because the words used in the Spanish language were different from that of the intent of the workers that signed the cards.

So the bottom line is: Is the minister considering changes to the legislation based upon the democratic process to which her own party has incorporated in their name?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, Madam Chair, workers have had the right to join a union for more than 100 years in Manitoba. The Labour Relations Act was passed here in Manitoba in 1948.

In regard to the whole matter at Mayfair Farm, it is a matter that I'm not going to comment on because the case still may be brought before the courts on an application for judicial review. So it would be completely and totally inappropriate for me to make any particular comments in regard to that particular matter.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, we're ready to proceed line by line.

Madam Chairperson: Members of the committee, yesterday, during the consideration of the Estimates of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, I read into the record the wrong dollar amount when passing resolution 10.1. The amount of \$2 million was stated instead of \$4 million. To ensure that the correct dollar amount is passed, I am going to put resolution 10.1 to the committee again with the correct dollar amounts.

The House leaders have been advised of this and are in agreement with this. So, therefore, I will now put the question on resolution 10.1 for the Estimates for the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Resolution 10.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,263,200 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Now, the resolutions for Immigration and Labour.

Resolution 11.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,904,200 for Labour and Immigration, Labour Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$26,084,900 for Labour and Immigration, Immigration and Multiculturalism, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$753,600 for Labour and Immigration, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 11.1. At this point we request that the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Seeing none, Resolution 11.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$767,100 for Labour and Immigration, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the committee is the Estimates of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Bonnie Korzeniowski): The hour being 12:30 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Tuesday, at 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, October 5, 2007

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