

Second 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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Lake Dauphin Fishery

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

To help ensure the sustainability of the Lake Dauphin fishery, it is essential that spawning fish in the lake and its tributaries are not disturbed during the critical reproductive cycle.

A seasonal moratorium on the harvesting of fish in Lake Dauphin and its tributaries may help to create an environment that will produce a natural cycle of fish for Lake Dauphin, therefore ensuring a balanced stock of fish for all groups who harvest fish on the lake.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to consider placing a moratorium on the harvesting of any species of fish on Lake Dauphin and its tributaries for the period of April 1 to May 15 annually.

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship to consider doing regular studies of fish stocks on Lake Dauphin to help gauge the health of the fishery and to consider determining any steps needed to protect or to enhance those stocks.

This petition is signed by Jim Bell, Stacey Storozok, John Martin and many, many others.

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

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Bev Affleck, Ian Affleck, Dean Isaak and many, many others.

Pharmacare Deductibles

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The NDP government has increased Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent each year for the past seven years, with the curious exception of the 2007 election year.

As a result of the cumulative 34 percent hike in Pharmacare deductibles by the NDP government, some Manitobans are forced to choose between milk and medicine.

Seniors, fixed and low-income-earning Manitobans are the most negatively affected by these increases.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider reversing his decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in budget 2008.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider reducing health-care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

This petition is signed by Shauna Hamm, Angelika Stoesz, Pat Dick and many, many more fine Manitobans.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Tribute to Captain Richard Steve Leary

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to commemorate the life of Captain Richard Steve Leary. Captain Leary was a platoon commander with the 2nd Battalion Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry based in Shilo, CFB Shilo.

We learned of his tragic death today after his patrol came under fire west of Kandahar. On behalf of Manitobans in this House, we extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Captain Leary. His loss is felt both in Shilo and in his native home town of Brantford, Ontario. We are reminded of the daily sacrifices that members of the Canadian Forces and their families make to bring peace and stability to a country torn apart by decades of war.

Mr. Speaker, after other members have made their statements, I would ask that this House join in a moment of silence to recognize the sacrifice of Captain Leary.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for that statement. We are similarly saddened to learn of the death of Captain Richard Steve Leary today in Kandahar. We would certainly support the Premier's request that this House have a moment of silence to commemorate the sacrifice that he's made on behalf of all of us as Canadians and on behalf of the people of Afghanistan and those other people in that troubled region of the world.

We're very proud every day to learn of the sacrifices made by Canadian soldiers, men and women, and those who support them in Afghanistan. We know what an important job they're doing to not only bring human rights and opportunities for all

citizens of that country but to bring stability to a part of the world where stability is required.

So we'll support the call for a moment of silence and, again, extend our condolences to the family of Captain Leary.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join other members of the Legislature in mourning the passage of Captain Richard Steve Leary. It is a sad day when we lose a soldier who's been at Shilo and represents not just Manitoba but all of Canada in an important effort in Afghanistan.

We applaud those who serve so bravely, and we mourn those who die in this fashion. I would like to extend condolences and best wishes to the family and to the friends of Captain Leary, recognizing the effort that he has made and the contribution that he has made and hope that this will not be in vain, and he will go on to a more peaceful world. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for a moment of silence? [Agreed]

Mr. Speaker: Okay, please rise for a moment of silence.

A moment of silence was observed.

* (13:40)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today a delegation from Midwestern Legislative Conference of Council of State Governments consisting of Senator Tom Dempster, South Dakota and chair of MLC; Senator Jay Emler from Kansas, first vice-chair of MLC; Senator Stephen Beuhrer from Ohio, who is the second vice-chair of MLC; Michael McCabe, director of MLC and Ilene Grossman, assistant director for planning and development of MLC.

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

Also in the public gallery we have exchange students Nathaniel Valk from New Brunswick,

Isabelle Dion from Québec, Jonathan Hamel, also from Québec.

Also in the public gallery we have from Niakwa Place School 100 grades 7 and 8 students under the direction of Ms. Kristen Morris. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby).

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

Also in the public gallery we have Jean Altemeyer who is the mother of the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer), Sean Altemeyer who is a nephew and Claire and Larry Morse from Greensboro, North Carolina.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Power Line Development Location

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, apart from Conawapa, the next bipole transmission line will be the largest, most expensive and most important strategic asset that this government will undertake perhaps in our generation, so it's vitally important that we get it right. The legacy either of debt or of having a great asset for Manitobans rides on the decision to be made by the government.

As Manitobans know, we take a different view from this Premier and this government as to the appropriate location of the next bipole transmission corridor. But since this debate began with an under-the-cover announcement made in September of last year as to the location, the Premier has dispatched as his official spokesperson on this issue the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer), who on several occasions has gone out and defended the decision. October of 2007, he went out and spoke on the issue; March of this year, and, again, more recently, at a University of Manitoba forum.

The Member for Wolseley, Mr. Speaker, has spoken out strongly that there will never be a transmission line, a major bipole transmission line, down the east side of the lake. I want to just ask the Premier: In light of all of the evidence that he should be reconsidering this decision, is he still aligned with the Member for Wolseley on this critical issue?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: I want to thank the Premier for the uncharacteristically brief response. He makes the case for a different way with leaders' latitude.

The reason I ask, Mr. Speaker, is that the Hydro minister on May 9, speaking to the Association of Professional Engineers in response to a question, indicated that there will be bipoles 4 and 5: There will be additional bipoles required as we fill out our energy development, but, generally, I would say, we want to protect the east side. He went on to say, and I quote, I don't think we have any intention of reverting back to the east side at this stage of the game.

He opened the door, and many of the engineers present were surprised that the government was adopting a more flexible position, opening the door to an east-side bipole corridor. We happen to agree with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). We think that the Minister of Finance is adopting a sensible, pragmatic and flexible view as to where the next bipole transmission line can go.

I want to ask the Premier whether he will reconsider his alignment with the Member for Wolseley and actually adopt the position coming from the sensible wing of his party represented by the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger).

Mr. Doer: Well, I'm with all my friends, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad the member opposite has put such wonderful words on the record on the Minister responsible for Hydro. We'll find them very effective and useful in debating Bill 38, I'm sure, probably in a couple of questions from now. Or maybe the next question; I digress.

But, certainly, I actually believe that if ever there was a proposed bipole down the east side of Lake Winnipeg, notwithstanding the 80 meetings we had with people residing in those communities, that we'd have this transmission held up in court longer than Karlheinz Schreiber's extradition hearing, something like eight years right now in front of the Mulroney issue of the past. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry, the former Prime Minister, I might say.

Mr. Speaker, certainly we had the governor of Wisconsin just here recently. He visited the great hydro assets in northern Manitoba. He was extremely impressed with the balance between economic development and sustainability. He is aware that in his own Legislature, as is the case in Minnesota, political decisions are made based on different environmental issues.

In fact, when I was at a Midwestern governors' meeting and members of the chamber's governors were here—and I'd like to welcome them here today—there was a strong feeling by Minnesota utilities that 10 years ago the environment wasn't an issue for dealing with energy, but now one-third to 40 percent of people in their own states consider environment as important as price and reliability. So these are changing demographics, Mr. Speaker. They mean that the decisions you make 10 years, 20 years out have to predict the future.

Members opposite condemned us for having a climate change plan in '03. The editorial board said we shouldn't have this climate change plan. In fact, the editorial boards predicted that Russia wouldn't even sign the Kyoto Accord.

So you have to predict things. You have to move ahead of the necessary views of people, but I'd ask the member, instead of looking behind, always look ahead, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: We are looking forward to one thing and that is some clarity from the government as to what their position is on the bipole issue. We've got two different positions, one represented by the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer). He and the Premier are two peas in a pod on this issue. They're perfectly simpatico soulmates on this issue, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to them using my comments about the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) to show how he is different from the Premier and the Member for Wolseley on this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has made reference to environmental risks and other such issues. I know he looks to Governor Schwarzenegger as something of a role model in California, as there's a similar debate taking place in California. Governor Schwarzenegger wants to build a transmission line on the shortest, most direct, most environmentally friendly, cheapest route, even though it happens to run through an area that is being looked at as a cause célèbre by certain Democratic celebrities like Clint Eastwood and others. The Republican governor said, I'm determined to move ahead with the right decision, the shortest, most efficient line. He called those opposing it hypocrites who are trying to block clean energy projects. The Republican governor, showing his characteristic strength of purpose, went on to say that they say they want renewable energy but they don't want you to put it anywhere. That's what he

said about Clint Eastwood and the other celebrity opponents of this direct transmission line.

I want to ask the Premier: On this issue, is he with the "governator" or is he with the Member for Wolseley?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I was on a call just recently with the aforementioned governor. The governor certainly is concerned—and I would concur in his concern—that in the Mohave Desert, they're building a solar energy facility and they're going to displace coal, I believe in San Diego, and they're having difficulty with getting transmission. In fact, people were saying at that meeting and, in fact, at the western premiers' meeting last week that getting any transmission approved anywhere is becoming a real, real problem.

In fact, in Alberta, they've had to pass legislation in this last session to deal with the fact that a transmission line proposed as a straight line from Edmonton to Calgary was blocked after four years of proposing and represents a real risk to Calgary in having long-term, reliable energy. The Premier of British Columbia mentioned the fact that after three and four years of having a proposed transmission line in British Columbia, it was again stopped for environmental reasons.

So we're very aware of what's going on in California. We're very aware of what's going on in Alberta. We're very aware of what's going on in British Columbia. We're very aware of the lobby efforts by citizens in Minnesota and by Wisconsin. The only people not aware of it, Mr. Speaker, are the members opposite that want to deny that the environment ever will have anything to do with making the proper long-term decision on transmission in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Minnesota, Wisconsin and California.

* (13:50)

Bill 40 Effect on MPI Rates

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): To the Premier of the province today talking about the transmission lines, I think he's in for a shock as he goes through the pristine forest of southeastern Manitoba, as was transmitted to his Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), that there will be opposition to that as well.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I attended another bill briefing on Bill 40. Once again, the Minister responsible for MPI didn't show up and sent the CEO of MPI instead. We learned yesterday that Bill 40 is going to cost MPI ratepayers \$13 million.

Will the minister tell the House: Is this why he's in such a rush to pass Bill 38 so that he can justify this \$13-million raid on MPI?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'll just indicate to the member opposite that, again, at the western premiers' meeting, along with governors from western United States, we had—*[interjection]* He has a different border; it's south of us.

Mr. Speaker, we discussed the issue of ID and the new technology that's going to be used. MPI is going to provide, on a voluntary basis, the kind of ID that will be able to replace, not replace, but for individuals that choose not to want a passport, will be able to provide that kind of technology. We need approval from the Homeland Security and that's what we're working on. We're doing that with many other provinces.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for the non-answer, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the MPI ratepayers are already on the hook for driver's licences to the tune of several million dollars each year. That's because this government doesn't pay its full share and MPI ratepayers foot the rest of the bill. Enhanced driver's licences are a government responsibility, not an insurance company's responsibility.

Can the minister tell this House how much of a rebate would MPI ratepayers get if this \$13 million went back to the pockets instead of into the government coffers?

Mr. Doer: I wonder if the member opposite has figured out that this is over a five-year period as opposed to the existing one year. So, certainly, I would want him to look at that due diligence in terms of his question.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, if the Tories were ever back in office, you would get no rebate because they would sell off a Crown corporation as they've done in the past. Members opposite, ever since we've been in office, have actually had, since '99, a flat rate structure for eight years. We virtually have had very little increase in insurance costs in over eight years, and that's why the consumer bureau of Canada says that we have the lowest insurance rates for

automobile drivers anywhere in North America, and we're proud of that.

Mr. Graydon: The Fraser Institute of British Columbia has a different view than you do, Mr. Premier.

It's no wonder that this minister has the CEO of MPI stickhandling Bill 40. He doesn't know what he's talking about. Mr. Speaker, \$13 million spent on an enhanced driver's licence could instead be a 2 percent premium rebate for ratepayers. Instead, it's going to pay for this government's feel-good initiative.

Will the minister, today, reverse his misguided decision and stop raiding MPI?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the existing driver's licence is over one year. I haven't got all the briefings the member opposite had, but this is over five years. So right away there are different calculations.

The bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to consumers, this government has put in place the Public Insurance Corporation that has the lowest rates in North America. Members opposite, they're citing the Fraser Institute. They're citing the Fraser Institute. They're on—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some decorum. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fraser Institute is committed to the privatization of Crown corporations across western Canada. That, of course, is the kind of hidden agenda, the under-the-table position of the Progressive Conservatives, feign support for Crown corporations between elections and seldom after.

That's why we're not going to let you get elected. We're going to protect our Crown corporations for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Jordan's Principle Implementation

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): This morning members of this House had a chance to debate the private members' bill on Jordan's Principle. It seems that my NDP colleagues are still missing the point. Jordan's Principle is focussing on children first and dealing with jurisdictional disputes after the fact. This government is still pointing its fingers at Ottawa.

My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin): When will this

government start to abide by Jordan's Principle and focus on care rather than blaming Ottawa?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): At the western—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind members when the Speaker is standing all members should be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence. I ask the co-operation of all members.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Doer: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, at the western premiers' meeting this week—and there's a communiqué on the public record on this—the Liberal Premier of British Columbia, the Conservative Premier of Alberta, the Saskatchewan Party Premier, Manitoba and the three territories agreed to the Jordan's Principle across all of western Canada and commented strongly that it is now costing jurisdictions like the Northwest Territories 33 percent of their Health budget because when the bill comes to be paid, the federal government goes to the bathroom.

So we basically believe in Jordan's Principle strongly, but we also believe there has to be an implementation strategy that deals with the taxpayers of all western Canada.

Mrs. Rowat: That's amazing, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how to respond to that.

Jordan Anderson was a Manitoba child. Manitoba should be taking a lead on this issue because Jordan Anderson needed and his family continues to need to see that this government supports the children of Manitoba. Nobody wants to see another case like what Jordan Anderson had to suffer through. Repeating the situation will be unacceptable, and that is the very reason why Jordan's Principle came about.

Will the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs guarantee today that he will not allow another child to fall through the cracks? Will his government follow Jordan's Principle and focus on providing care for Manitoba children first and settle the issue of who pays for the service after the fact? Enough rhetoric, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and I want to assure all members of this House that on this side of the House we have

been supportive of the idea of legislating Jordan's Principle.

However, there are a few things that must be done first before we can move in that direction and that is to engage the federal government. I understand that as of now, where we're standing, the federal government has yet to come back to us with some sort of a mechanism that would trigger the settlement of these issues when it comes to Aboriginal people being lost in between the cracks.

* (14:00)

Jordan's Principle Status of Committee

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): When we raised this question in the House earlier, there was a comment made by the other side that there was a committee struck between the federal and provincial government.

I'm asking the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs if he would give the House an update on the progress of that committee and where they're at.

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I want to also advise the House that the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) and I know personally the family that the member is referring to, in Norway House. I saw the delegation from Norway House here today and acknowledge the presence of the Grand Chief of MKO and the Grand Chief of KTC, Arnold Ouskan.

Now, I, for one, have always been an advocate of funding the provision of health-care services to Aboriginal people, whether they be on the reserve or off the reserve. I think our government has proven through our work with Aboriginal people that we are willing to work with First Nations people through the rule book, as it were, because in the end the most important thing is that Aboriginal people get health-care services, and that's what we've done since we've been in office.

Child and Family Services Staff Recruitment Statistics

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, on January 10, 2008, 144 days ago, my office filed a Freedom of Information request with the Department of Family Services and Housing. We wanted to know how many front-line Child and Family Services workers had been recruited in the last year and how much it cost; 144 days later and still no response.

Why is the Minister of Family Services and Housing failing to make sure his department complies with existing Freedom of Information legislation?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, they said I've got mail. Indeed, I understand that there were 166 requests under FIPPA to the department in the previous year, but I'll certainly ask questions of the department as to the status of that reply.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that his department is well aware of, and the Ombudsman has already been contacted, so he should know that too.

Mr. Speaker, this minister is developing a habit of trying to hide the truth. He wouldn't call an inquest into the death of Gage Guimond. He knew about serious problems in the northern CFS agency for nearly a year and failed to act. He won't release the section 4 review on the Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency.

Why is this minister denying Manitobans the truth about the chaos in his department?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member said he was looking for information on the hirings. Under Changes for Children, as the member well knows—and maybe this was the answer that he was looking for, but I understand that 91.5 positions have been approved and have been filled or are in the final processes of being filled.

That was the answer to his question which he explored, I think, further in Estimates as well. So we're more than happy to be forthcoming on the overhaul that's taking place in the child welfare system, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Briese: That may be part of the numbers we're looking for, but why can't we get the response through the FIPPA request?

Mr. Speaker, the minister is responsible for the care of vulnerable children in this province. He can't pass the buck. He can't shift the blame, and he certainly cannot hide the truth. I know he was put in the portfolio to clean up the mess made by the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) and the former Member for Fort Rouge, but Manitoba families and children deserve to know what's going on.

What is the minister really trying to hide?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I say, the workload relief is up to 91.5 positions approved so far. We're moving to 150. That was the number that we've been advised is what we should aim for, and we've put in place the budgeting commitments in order to deliver that.

So, we're not done yet, Mr. Speaker, and that information is certainly available. As well, I understand that we did give information not only in terms of the numbers but the kinds of positions, front line, supervisory and assistants and so on.

I remind the members opposite that the caseload under their watch, according to the judges of Manitoba, was anywhere from 45 to 80 files per worker, Mr. Speaker. We're moving in the right direction.

Bill 34 Government Priority

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): The safety of children in the Child and Family Services system has been under this government's watch for nine years, and we're still seeing chaos in the Child and Family Services system because of the ramming through of the devolution process in the Child and Family Services system without putting the safety of children first.

Mr. Speaker, now they've created chaos in their legislative agenda by trying to ram through Bills 37 and 38 at the last minute while Bill 34 sits, Bill 34 making the priority, the safety of children, coming first. It's taken a backseat again to their chaotic legislative agenda.

When will the Minister of Family Services start to put the safety of children first and make sure Bill 34 is their first priority?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked in committee, it was the opposition that was bringing in all of their presidents and their former candidates, one after the other, in a concerted effort to slow down the legislative agenda that's a priority for all Manitobans in many [inaudible]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: The filibuster, Mr. Speaker, rests with members opposite.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But it's clear that with Bill 37 they're more interested in lining their own pockets

than they are about protecting the safety of children in care.

Mr. Speaker, will they forget about Bill 37 and lining their own pockets and put Bill 34 as a priority which is the protection of children in care?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a priority and I wish it was for all members. This shouldn't be an issue of partisan bickering. I went to committee expecting to see that legislation get support and get through. Instead, I just saw one president and one candidate after another from the Conservative Party come to the microphone, tactics and speeches endlessly.

It's called a filibuster, Mr. Speaker, and it's not on this side. Indeed, I find it bewildering that members opposite would ask such a question when there are so many serious issues that are before the standing committee and before this Legislature.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We would like to see Bill 34 a priority. We're supportive of Bill 34, and we're asking the government today to set aside Bill 37 that lines their own political pockets and set aside Bill 38 which guts balanced budget legislation and put Bill 34 at the head of the list, and we will pass it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I think what anyone who was present witnessed in committee was a tactic, not only that didn't prioritize the safety of children but also the safety of the health-care system. We had questions about the freedom of information law [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: –the freedom of information law of Manitoba, legislation to enhance our stewardship of our environment, many issues that members opposite are prepared to sacrifice for their filibuster.

Nurse Practitioners Practicum Experience Needs

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's very ironic that while there's a shortage of both nurses and doctors in southwest Manitoba, I have a constituent who wants to be a nurse practitioner but can't find a doctor to oversee her work experience so she can complete her education.

What's the Health Minister doing to educate doctors about the benefits of working with nurse practitioners?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): One of the things that we're doing, of course, to help educate really the entire health system across regional health authorities is funding more positions for nurse practitioners.

The single best way that any health system is going to learn the benefits of a nurse practitioner is, of course, by working with one. That's why we have worked very diligently to fund across the regions nurse practitioners that are endeavouring to bring excellent primary care. That's why we passed legislation to enable nurse practitioners to work in the first place. That's why in 2005 we expanded their scope of practice to be really the broadest scope of practice in the country. The best way to know about nurse practitioners is to work with one.

* (14:10)

Mr. Maguire: Well, we've got one in the whole region of the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority and that's split into two half positions.

Sheryl Evett recently returned to Boissevain after nursing for years in Canada's north. She wants desperately to work as a nurse practitioner but is unable to get the practical experience she needs to complete her degree.

Will the Health Minister assure Ms. Evett that she doesn't need to pack up and go to Ontario or Alberta where there are jobs and practicums waiting for her? Can she assure Ms. Evett that Manitoba is open to nurse practitioners?

Ms. Oswald: Once again, I can assure the member opposite that Manitoba is, of course, open for business for nurse practitioners, which is why we continue to fund the positions. I can assure members opposite that Manitoba is open for business for training nurses. We currently have almost 3,000 nurses in-flight as we speak, triple the number that were being educated in the '90s.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Oswald: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. I can understand why Conservatives would be a little sensitive when I mention the word "nurse," having fired a thousand of them. But they did ask me the question; they can't blame me for answering it.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, having one in the whole Assiniboine Regional Health Authority doesn't sound like open to business for me.

Will the Health Minister contact Ms. Evett and help her realize her goal of working as a nurse practitioner in rural Manitoba? Will she help someone who wants to contribute to ending the shortage of health-care professionals in southwest Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: I feel confident that the member opposite is acutely aware that when he brings casework to this House or to our office that we're very happy to work with him and with his constituents to build our complement of health-care professionals.

I can let the member know that, as of this month, when we added our funding for 30 more nurse practitioner positions, it now brings our total to 76 in Manitoba. We're not finished yet. We committed to bring 40 in the last election.

I might ask the member opposite: How many nurses did they commit to train a year ago? The answer to that question is zero.

Liquor Bottle Warning Labels Implementation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): In the United States, alcoholic beverages are labelled to indicate the risk of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders should a woman who consumes alcohol become pregnant. Indeed, our own Crown Royal from Gimli, when marketed in the United States, carries a warning label.

The NDP government in Manitoba have shown such disregard for protecting the unborn fetus from the lifelong effects of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders that such labelling is not required in Manitoba.

I ask the Minister of Healthy Living: When will she act to require labelling of alcoholic beverages in Manitoba to warn women against consuming them when they're pregnant?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): We are constantly providing information, public awareness to all Manitobans about healthy living. One of those aspects is how to care for yourself when you're pregnant. We do that through information through Healthy Child Manitoba, through our prenatal information that we share and through all the number of health-care providers that are out there.

FASD is an issue that we are facing in this province, but many other jurisdictions face the same issue. Together, with these jurisdictions, we look at what is best practices. How do we get that information to women to ensure that there is no stigma, to make sure that we are protecting the children? We have a strong program here in Manitoba, one that is nationally recognized as one of the best that includes prevention, education and also, treatment.

Mr. Gerrard: Yesterday the minister was saying, oh, that's the federal government's responsibility, as if she couldn't do anything. The Premier (Mr. Doer) today has been blaming the federal government, saying, oh, we couldn't do anything about Jordan's Principle because it's the federal government's responsibility. When is this government going to take charge and say we're going to get things done in this province because it's time that we stand up for the people of Manitoba.

The sad fact is that all American alcoholic beverages require labelling. The minister literally, in order to get a bottle of wine or beer from the United States to Canada, the minister must literally rip off the U.S. warning label and replace it with a label which has no warning. Shame on this minister.

When will she get her act in order? When will she require labelling for alcoholic beverages in Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, we have been taking action. We've taken action since 1999 when we were elected, and in 2007 Manitoba spoke. They saw what we've been doing. When will this member notice what we've accomplished?

We continue to work with Manitobans. We continue to take the issue of FASD extremely serious. We work with partners across jurisdictions, across departments and look at solutions that look at prevention and education, that look at treatment and diagnosis and ensure that we provide the proper continuum of service for individuals and their families.

We do have partnerships and we do have programs. One such one is called Stop FASD. We also have a partnership with the Manitoba Liquor Commission, With Child Without Alcohol, and that, in itself, provides the information, the prevention and the education that's required.

Jordan's Principle Implementation

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, Jordan was a young child who died in a hospital here in Winnipeg. He died in Winnipeg as opposed to being able to go into his own community in Norway House where he would have been able to have the medical treatment and be in his home environment. The problem was that the different levels of government couldn't come to an agreement. They couldn't decide who was going to pay. The child was placed second.

Jordan's Principle puts the child first. The government talks, Mr. Speaker, about putting the child first, yet this morning they failed on taking action that would have put the child first.

My question to the government is: Why would the Premier (Mr. Doer) not do as he talks and put the child first and accept Jordan's Principle?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member opposite has been for the last year.

We were the first jurisdiction to step up and say we support Jordan's Principle. We were the first jurisdiction to go to the federal government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I don't know if they heard, but where have they been? One year ago we stepped up to the plate and said we support Jordan's Principle. We said to the federal government, let's work together. We appointed a person to the committee to start looking at dispute mechanisms and start looking at a [inaudible]

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was yesterday when the federal government sat with provincial officials, and they decided that they would appoint a person to this committee and start getting to work. That's after many, many letters. That's after members and ministers going to Ottawa and talking about Jordan's Principle. We have been taking action.

We have concrete things, such as Norway House, where we're looking at modelling a project that will be used across the province of Manitoba.

Breast Cancer Screening Government Initiatives

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I know that all members of this House are on the same side on the fight against breast cancer. I understand that today, on the eve of the world breast health conference being held in Winnipeg, the ministers of Health and Healthy Living announced an expanded strategy for Manitoba.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to update the House on the provincial government's investments in the fight against breast cancer.

* (14:20)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand in the House today and inform all members of the House that we were very pleased to join our partners at CancerCare Manitoba in partnership with the Canadian Cancer Society to announce an investment today of \$982,000, so that we can increase breast cancer screening by 10,000 appointments. We also know that we're going to be making additional investments in providing additional ultrasounds. With this additional money, we're also going to be providing increased services for patient navigation.

Dr. Dhaliwal was very pleased today at the announcement to say that this announcement does, indeed, set the stage for Manitoba to not only be No. 1 in radiation therapy and the first on the ground in colorectal cancer screening but to be the best in Canada for breast health.

Bill 17 Government Intent

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in concurrence, I repeatedly asked the Minister of Conservation to provide some scientific evidence to back up the permanent hog moratorium on production in the province of Manitoba. He could not provide one single document for this House.

The Clean Environment Commission did not recommend a moratorium, yet Manitoba farm family livelihoods are on the line here.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Conservation finally admit Bill 17 is only about politics?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, this is clearly about a government that wants to protect water and an opposition who hasn't got the courage to stand up and protect it, period.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jordan's Principle

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate story of Jordan Anderson's short life reverberates throughout Manitoba, at the same time wrenching our hearts while simultaneously calling attention to the clear deficiencies in the handling of First Nation children in Manitoba.

If there had been a divide separating the red-tape-laden realm of public administration from issues of social justice and human dignity, Jordan's case has blurred all possible distinctions. The principle that has emerged in the young boy's name holds that social justice, human dignity and the importance of a family in a child's life are ultimately contingent upon the timely fulfilment of their basic needs, without waiting to determine which government is responsible for the costs.

Jordan Anderson died at the age of four, never having experienced the comfort, safety and warmth of living within a family home. Instead, he was left in an institutional setting while government bureaucrats disputed responsibility for the most trivial of expenses.

In the United States, they use the expression, we hold these truths to be self-evident. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, not unlike life or liberty, Jordan's Principle requires no further justification.

As I speak, it is estimated that hundreds of other First Nation children face circumstances dangerously similar to Jordan's and, while there has been considerable moral support expressed for Jordan's Principle, both from government, First Nation organizations and many others, the matter is simply too important, too fundamental to rest upon a fragile foundation of popular sentiment and public support.

Jordan's Principle is an urgent matter, and the children who would benefit from its legislation do not deserve to suffer from the cruel irony of having to wait endlessly for such a bill to pass. The purpose of this bill is precisely the opposite.

Mr. Speaker, Jordan Anderson's unfortunate passing was a tragic loss, but one that does not have

to be in vain. The best form of remembrance for Jordan is work in his name to make sure that it never happens to a child in Manitoba again.

Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): I rise before the House today to highlight the work of the Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council which is active in my constituency. The Resource Council provides programming for all members of the community but especially those who require a little extra assistance and care.

Seniors in my community are well-served with programs, like an Escorted Transportation Service which supplies transportation for community elders to medical appointments, grocery stores or leisure activities; the Call Me program, a computerized check-in program for seniors living alone in the community; or the Congregate Meal Program which provides full-course meals to seniors five days a week.

The Resource Council recently held its annual general meeting and paid tribute to its approximately 30 volunteers.

One volunteer in particular was honoured for his long-standing service to the organization. Mr. Wesley Thompson has been a member of the Resource Council's board of directors since its inception in 1993. After 15 years of faithful service to the organization, Mr. Thompson is retiring.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the value of volunteers and the work they do in our communities. I would like to thank all the volunteers at the Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council for the countless hours they put into ensuring the success of the programs that are run at the organization. In particular, I ask all honourable members to join me in congratulating Wesley Thompson for his many years of volunteer service. As the representative for a constituency they serve by their Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council, I feel privileged that Mr. Thompson and all the other volunteers at the council are part of my community. Their work in Wellington and the surrounding communities is invaluable and they are an inspiration to us all. Thank you.

Duke of Edinburgh's Awards

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, this morning, June 3, I had the privilege of attending the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award of Achievement ceremony at The Fairmont. Eighty young Manitobans were presented with their certificates by His Royal Highness, the Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, KG, KCVO, SOM. Virden residents Ms. Miranda Galvin and Mr. Joshua Walker, graduates of Virden Collegiate Institute, were two honoured recipients.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award was founded by His Royal Highness Prince Philip to encourage personal development and community involvement for young people. There are three levels to the award: bronze, silver and gold, and it is open to any young person between the ages of 14 and 25. Participants achieve the award by attaining personally established goals in the areas of community service, skill development, physical recreation and adventurous projects. First established in the United Kingdom in 1956, the award program is now active in over 120 countries, with over 33,000 young people engaged in Canada, 1,500 from Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, this award is an exciting self-development program in which only a few people have the stamina and determination to give so much of themselves in order to achieve these leadership goals. Ms. Galvin, who now attends Brandon University, has achieved her Gold Award through the Girl Guides of Canada program. She has spent many hours of volunteering in her school, becoming involved in the Impact and Peer Counselling programs. Miranda has also instructed first-aid courses, Canadian CanSkate courses and Canadian garden clubs. She has taught an HIV-AIDS awareness program to approximately 130 girls and women at an international camp in Guelph, Ontario, to which His Royal Highness was most interested during his personal conversation with Miranda after the formal presentations.

She spent months doing expeditions in England, Newfoundland and B.C. Her residential project was performed in Guelph, Ontario, while volunteering as a lifeguard. Her physical activities included figure skating, camping and biking. Her skills included achieving her lifeguard certificate and learning how to operate various farm machinery and developing a large garden which included freezing and canning the produce.

Josh Walker started the award program while he was involved in the 12th Manitoba Dragoons army cadet program in Virden. Josh has completed 90 hours of community service, 50 hours of physical recreation, and spent 18 months learning skills which included army cadet instruction, marksmanship, an instructor adventure course which included white-water rafting and wilderness camping. He completed a 355-kilometre canoe trip on the Yukon River near Whitehorse in the Northwest Territories. His community service included being involved in the Virden Collegiate Institute Impact group and helping seniors in his town.

Mr. Speaker, Master of Ceremonies Mr. Joel Jamieson, a 2002 Gold recipient, following "God Save the Queen," introduced Manitoba President Barbara McManus and national President Tom McGrath of Newfoundland for welcoming and opening remarks.

Thanks on behalf of the recipients were provided by 2008 achiever, Michelinne Gagné, and Mrs. Heather McFadyen was presented with a framed recognition plaque for her volunteerism and commitment to the Duke of Edinburgh program by His Royal Highness.

To close, I would once again like to congratulate Josh and Miranda, who are very worthy of this award, on their achievements and wish them much success in their personal endeavours and academic goals in their futures.

I must say I appreciate the leave, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:30)

Northern Forest Fires

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday I was privileged to join the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) on a trip to Norway House and Cranberry Portage to witness first-hand the status of several forest fires in the region.

Fortunately, the Norway House forest fire was well under control, thanks to the excellent co-operation and experience of the Department of Conservation and the local band. We flew over the huge Grand Rapids fire which was threatening to cross Highway 6. From the air, we also saw the extent of the Sherridon fire which, at that point, was burning at the outskirts of the village of Sherridon-Cold Lake. Over 50 people from Sherridon had been

evacuated to Cranberry Portage. We met with the residents in the gymnasium of Frontier Collegiate Institute. We were extremely impressed by the professional and expedient manner in which the evacuees from Sherridon were accommodated. Within 40 minutes after being notified, the response teams had set up food and accommodation. I am proud of the efforts of many volunteers from Cranberry Portage and the surrounding region, whose efforts made life a little easier for people already under stress, worrying about the potential loss of their homes, belongings and pets.

Fortunately, up to this point, Mr. Speaker, Sherridon has suffered only a few minor losses to the fire. Regarding the Sherridon evacuation, I would like to thank, particularly, EMO Rep Cameron McLean and EMO Communications and Information Co-ordinator Larry Johnson. Larry is also part of the LUD of Cranberry Portage.

Also, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Red Cross volunteers and the public health nurse. As well, I would like to thank the Frontier School Division personnel in Cranberry Portage for the exemplary volunteerism. Thank you, Superintendent Kathy Fidierchuk, Administrative Officer Doug McKenzie and Residence Administrator Dale Cowan, and many others.

All volunteers that participated in hosting our Sherridon neighbours deserve accolades. Well done, Cranberry Portage.

Finally, I would like to thank the provincial forest fire team headed by Tom Mirus. I thank the many professional firefighters right across this province who are battling numerous fires and are protecting our lives and our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Israel's 60th Anniversary

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I want to take this opportunity to extend best wishes and congratulate the State of Israel, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary. In that short period of time, Israel has done so much in terms of contributions to the world in a multitude of the many different industries that are before us, and to acknowledge the efforts of organizations like Bridges for Peace, which has gone all-out in terms of making it a higher sense of awareness of why it is so very important that we all acknowledge and recognize the State of Israel for doing what it is doing in terms of this special

celebration and, indeed, this special year. Thank you very much.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Could you please call the committee of supply for concurrence and, if there's time, it would be our intention to call The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, before you formally call committee of supply, I wonder if I could table the ministers to be called for concurrence.

For tomorrow, Wednesday, June 4, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), the Minister of Competitiveness (Mr. Swan), all of whom shall be questioned concurrently, and Thursday, June 5, the Minister of Child and Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh).

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Ministers to be called for concurrence for Wednesday, June 4, '08: Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice, Minister of Competitiveness, all of whom shall be questioned concurrently. On Thursday, June 5, '08, the Minister of Child and Family Services. That's information for the House.

Order of business, orders of the day, we will deal with concurrence first and, if there is time, then we will deal with concurrence and third reading of bills.
[interjection]

Okay, we will be dealing first with concurrence and then, if there's time, we will deal with second reading of BITSA.

But, right now, we will move into committee of supply.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please come and take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

The Acting Chairperson (Ms. Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The committee has before it for consideration the motion concurring in all Supply resolutions

relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

On May 12, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Hawranik) tabled the following list of ministers of the Crown who may be called for questioning in the debate on concurrence motion: Conservation; Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives; Education, Citizenship and Youth. These ministers can be asked questions concurrently.

The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): My question to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), and I just may start off with a little background to this issue first, but it has to do with a constituent of mine where next door there is a family of raccoons living in the chimney. I know that I had passed off an e-mail that was sent to me by my constituent to the minister. Essentially, people in the community and my constituents are very concerned about the family of raccoons living next door. They're concerned about the safety of their children. They're concerned about the safety of children in the community where these raccoons are sort of running rampant around the community.

It's a pretty serious issue. We don't know what kind of diseases these animals are carrying, and I think it's something that I'm hoping that the minister will deal with as quickly as possible. But, to date, my constituent has received an e-mail, not from the minister's office but from the department, basically stating that there's nothing that they can do about this, that it's sort of outside their jurisdiction. That concerns me because right now the house is a vacant house where the raccoons are living and breeding. There are a lot of people in the area that are very concerned about this.

* (14:40)

I think it's just one of those things where common sense should be able to prevail, and the common sense, to me, would be to have someone from the department go out and look at what is going on with the property because, again, no one is living in the house, as I understand, right now.

When it comes down to it, I think that the safety of children who want to go out into their backyards and play—many times, it's with their families. Sometimes it's after dark, and that's when the raccoons tend to come out. They end up going into other people's yards and, obviously, there's not garbage everywhere in their yards, but the garbage is

in the back lane. The raccoons are getting into garbage all down the back lanes and throughout the community.

People are concerned. They're concerned that their children will not be able to play out in their backyards and be able to live the kind of life—and, obviously, we want to encourage children to be able to play in the backyards; it's all part of ensuring healthy living and so on.

I'm wondering if the minister could update us as to where this situation is at and if he would, in fact, agree to have someone, maybe in his office, contact directly my constituent about this issue, because I received an e-mail as early as this morning and she's still concerned that nothing's being done.

I think it's something, obviously, that the minister would want to take care of. I don't want to make a political issue of this, but I just thought I would ask if you could give us an update as to where this situation is at.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Madam Acting Chairperson, I read the information that the member has passed on to me. I could sense, even just through the e-mail, the frustration of her constituent. We know that whether it's raccoons or any other critter within this—within Manitoba, but we also know that Winnipeg is our busiest wildlife region because of a whole lot of different reasons.

I will have somebody from my office contact her constituent. I've read the information that she gave me. I've asked the department to follow up on this and they are in the process of doing that. I'll have someone contact the constituent directly.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister very much for that. I will let my constituent know to expect a phone call from your office, hopefully, sometime this afternoon or in the morning would be great just to follow up on that issue.

Again, there is great concern. It's not just the one constituent; it goes beyond. I think she's somewhat representing people in the area. My concern about this is, if it ends up being precedent-setting, that we're not going to look after these wild animals that are breeding and creating havoc within the community. That would affect other communities, obviously, across our city and our province. I appreciate the minister's effort to have someone from his office follow up on this.

Just moving to another series of questions, I'm wondering if—[interjection]—well, from raccoons, we know the deer population is running rampant in the Charleswood-Tuxedo area as well. Actually, having said that, I'm wondering if the minister can update us as to what is happening with the overpopulating deer population, specifically in the Charleswood forest and Tuxedo areas.

Mr. Struthers: The numbers of deer and the number of complaints about deer got to such a level that we actually conducted a fly-over survey of the deer population within the Capital Region. Madam Acting Chair, we determined through the count—which is unprecedented—we determined through that count that there were two very-populated areas in the city for deer.

Madam Acting Chairperson, one is in the area that the member has mentioned—in the Assiniboine Forest, the Charleswood-Tuxedo area. The other one is up on the northeast part of Winnipeg in that stretch of highway that leads out to Birds Hill Park.

We have been in contact with officials from the City of Winnipeg. We've been in contact with officials from Manitoba Public Insurance. We've worked with a whole group of people to, first of all, first and foremost, get some information in the hands of people who live in the area. I'm very pleased that there is an association of people in the Charleswood area who have been meeting, have met in the past with officials from the Department of Conservation.

We try to find ways in which we can exist, somewhat peacefully at least, with deer that do exist in that part of the city. We don't want people to be setting themselves up for a situation. I heard from one person who thought it was nice that a couple of deer were in her backyard, and she had fed them. Next thing you know, she's got about 20 deer in her backyard, and that's a lot different than the two that she thought were cute. So people have to, I think, become educated as to what the do's and the don'ts are when it comes to deer.

The City, I can say, has been very helpful and working with us on this. I'm looking forward to continuing to work on getting information in the hands of people who actually have to put up with deer in their backyards, in their driveways, and on the roadways leading to this part of the city. We've been working together with MPI to try to prevent and try to educate people in the first place.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, thank you very much, and I thank the minister for that response.

As a matter of fact, when I was driving my children to school—I think it was yesterday morning—in the Charleswood area, driving down the street, I had to slam on my brakes because a deer came running out of the forest and crossed the street. There were other cars behind me and other cars coming the other way, and you know, we had to wait for this deer while—you know, the deer sort of came out onto the road and lingered for a little bit and wouldn't move, and people get frustrated. They get late in the morning and so this can create problems in terms of traffic in the area.

But I think also—and I watched the deer as it went off into someone's backyard—I think the other concern and why, it could be that, you know, some people are having upwards of 15 or 20 deer in their backyard is because they've planted gardens. I mean, they're trying to plant vegetable gardens for sustenance for their families. The deer are coming and actually eating some of the gardens, and, you know, they sort of pass the word and spread the word in the forest that here's the garden to be coming to. There are a lot of people in the Charleswood and Tuxedo areas that use their backyards for—and even for composting as well, and various recycling initiatives that I'm sure the minister is in favour of when it comes to having a green environment in our province. I think that some of these initiatives, we want to encourage them; however, if people in the communities go to the effort to planting the gardens and so on, only to have, sort of an entire deer population come and eat everything, I mean, I think there are some serious issues.

People have talked about it. I know there's an association that has been brought up. This actually has come up in schools, as well, when I've gone to—during I Love to Read month and spoken to, I think it's, you know, to grade 2, grade 3. They were doing a project at one of the schools and talking about the deer population in the Charleswood area. You know, they were coming up with some of their own solutions as to what they think should happen to the deer. You know, they're very concerned about deer being killed by cars and, potentially people taking, putting the deer population—taking it into their own hands and trying to kill them off on our city streets which, you know, can be dangerous.

* (14:50)

So I'm wondering what the solution is. Some of the solutions that were brought up were relocating some of the deer outside of the Charleswood area. I'm wondering if the minister has heard of, and what sort of some of the options are that are out there right now in terms of dealing with the overpopulation of deer. Maybe, if he could put those forward for us and we could take those back to our constituents and, maybe, having some public hearings about this and allowing people from the constituency to come out and have a say as to how this situation is dealt with, because it is a very serious issue within the community, I'm wondering if the minister could just indicate for the House as to what is being done.

What are some of the options out there? Will he agree to hold some public hearings with respect to the overpopulation of deer or, even in the case of raccoons and other animals that are running rampant in areas and potentially carrying some diseases, if there is a solution that we could come to and bring some people from the communities together to help educate them on this but also to help give them—consult them on what we're going to do to deal with these overpopulations?

Mr. Struthers: Those types of meetings have occurred already. The association that has been working on this—the residents' association has been organizing public meetings. We've had our staff attend those public meetings to talk predominantly in those meetings about deer and the kinds of problems that we've seen arise because of the deer population.

We have had staff looking at other jurisdictions to see what they've been doing. There are a number of different programs that we can learn from all around North America, some very extreme programs that I don't think would have the support of either the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) or me or anybody else.

What we've learned in looking at other jurisdictions is that the most effective way to deal with this problem is through a concentrated, very-specific, education strategy in which the Province and the City, the association of residents and everybody helps to make sure that we get some very practical tips out to homeowners.

We have seen some, and I've heard from the residents in the area of some success stories, whether that be a repellent that can be used—I know the member mentions gardens. Of course, we want to encourage people to grow gardens and to grow vegetables; we want people to grow flowers that

beautify our great city here, capital city. We don't want to set it up so that it's simply a smorgasbord for a herd of deer to come through.

There are ways in which we can either, through repellents that we can put out, which have had a certain amount of success—some fencing that has taken place that has been somewhat successful. Now, essentially, those sorts of things are up to the homeowner to step up and say they'll do it. You don't always want to have a nice flower garden and then plunk a great big ugly fence up in front of it. I can understand that if you're a homeowner, but then the alternative is to have a herd of deer end up in your backyard. That's not a very good alternative either.

So we need to continue, as we have been, working with homeowners, working with the city and with MPI and working with the residents' group to educate people more and more. I'm told that there are fewer examples of bird feeders that are being left out, that inadvertently attract deer to an area. There are bird feeders that, I'm told anyway, you can put up that will attract birds, but not deer. I'd rather fill a backyard up with American goldfinches rather than a herd of white-tailed deer.

So we work with homeowners to make sure that all of that kind of information is available. Those are just the things I can, off the top of my head, think of. I give a lot of credit to our department and to officials within the city of Winnipeg who have been working with homeowners to get even more of those very practical kinds of tips available to people that live in the member's riding and in the neighbouring area in that quadrant of the city.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister can indicate if there are any sort of compensation programs available to Manitobans for any damages on their property as a result of the wild deer population coming in and eating their gardens or those types of things or any other kind of damages.

Where would people go in order to help with compensation? Are there any compensation packages or anything out there that they could—where would you send them?

Mr. Struthers: The only type of compensation programs that I'm aware of—and, again, this is just me speaking off the top of my head—would be through the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation. If, for example, the farmer has a herd of elk that do damage in his crop or a flock of Canada geese lay waste to an area of a farmer's crop, that is available

for compensation, but I'm not aware of compensation programs having to do with deer.

My friend across the way the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) has brought this to my attention as well with a case outside of the city of Winnipeg in his constituency where deer have—*[interjection]* I don't want members opposite to leave the wrong impression. I mean, the streets are still safe to walk on without being mauled by a herd of deer or raccoons or, heaven forbid, beavers, as has been the topic of discussion in this House before.

But there are some very serious concerns here in the city of Winnipeg and, as the MLA for Emerson has pointed out, in communities in the countryside where deer have nibbled their way up the side of people's trees that they plant and make a farmyard look very unattractive. *[interjection]* Yes, we still have Beaver Deceiver, for the information of the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese). We find that these pond levellers work very well, and we use them whenever we can to avoid that oh-so-nasty circumstance of either having to put up with flooding or get rid of a beaver altogether.

We're always, whether it's beavers or raccoons or deer or whatever the critter that we're dealing with, we want to be able to work with the local R.M., in this case, the City of Winnipeg. We want to be able to work with other stakeholders and homeowners to, first and foremost, educate as much as we can and put in place as many preventative measures as we can so that we're not dealing with a situation where we have to talk about compensation.

That's a bit of a long-winded way to say that I'm not aware of any compensation programs.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I would encourage the minister to actually look into that because I think that it's one thing in terms of our agricultural community and we want to compensate farmers for damages that are done to their crops and their fields and so on, but I would say that in a society that we're in now where people are also growing their own vegetables and fruits for their own sustenance in their backyards and in the city limits, Madam Acting Chair, I would encourage the minister to look at ways of compensating individual homeowners who do grow their own vegetables, as well, in the backyard if there is no program out there to help with that as well. So I hope the minister will look into that as well.

The minister commented on the Beaver Deceiver program, and he and I have had various back-and-

forth discussions on the program. Of course, it was brought up in the 1990s, and I know, certainly, we're tired of going back to the 1990s, but I think it's worth mentioning that that is a very successful program that has come out. The minister has carried on with that program, and certainly we appreciate that, but maybe there are other programs we can look at.

* (15:00)

I mean, we've got the Beaver Deceiver program. Are there other ways of deceiving other kinds of animals like deer? I don't know whether you'd call it a deer ducker program or what you'd call it, Mr. Minister, but whatever it would be to sort of repel or prevent the deer from coming into the backyards, other than having to put up fences around. But there are other animals. There are raccoons and how do we sort of keep them out of people's homes and the communities and out of garbage.

The minister's also talked about his Bear Smart program. Certainly, I was looking the other day at one of the brochures on that, and No. 1 on the list—and, forgive me, I don't have it in front of me now but it says, do not feed bears. I don't know if it has a picture of a boy going up to feed a bear or something. I just thought, yeesh, you know, that's pretty basic stuff, but let's hope that common sense prevails out there and that people don't do that.

There is a serious issue with deer and with other animals. Certainly, in the city we've seen it, particularly in our area, in the Charleswood-Tuxedo area, but I know I was driving out to the Whiteshell area a few weeks back and was going out for a friend's surprise 40th birthday. It was around dusk and I couldn't believe it was probably upwards of 100 deer that I saw between Winnipeg and Falcon Lake area, West Hawk area. Unbelievable. I've never seen so many deer. It was very dangerous, and I'm not sure why that would be.

Maybe the minister has some comments as to why. Is it worse? Is the deer population worse this year than it has been in other years? I've just never seen so many deer in our province and, sort of, why that would maybe be for this year. Why is it that they seem to gravitate towards our highways? I mean, it's a great danger to motorists who are, in particular, travelling with children out to the cottage country.

So I'm wondering if the minister could sort of indicate whether or not there is a larger deer population out there this year and how they track that.

Mr. Struthers: First of all, I'll journey back a little bit to the 1990s if my dear, dear friend from Tuxedo allows me to. She's correct. A beaver control program was put in place. She said that we've continued that program, and she's right except that we've actually made it even better. It was good, but we made it better by recognizing the fact that, if we do both a summer and a winter program, it helps the trapper because in the winter the pelts that they get from the beaver are actually prime. They can get more money on the market selling their prime beaver pelt. Then, in addition to that, would be the money that they would receive through our program, administered by the R.M.s to top up that sale of that pelt.

What it was with just the summer program, you'd take the pelt in which was not any good for turning into a coat or a hat or anything marketable, and you'd just get the money from our program. So what we found is that we've been able to help trappers because now they get a little bit of money from the market, and they get a little bit of money from us, and they can pay now for the increase in gas that they have to put into their vehicles and their snow machines and all the rest. So it was a good program. I agree with the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), and we've managed, I think, through the leadership of the current Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) when he was my predecessor, to make that program even better.

That's the kind of thinking that we need when we deal with all these other animals that the Member for Tuxedo has been talking about. She's put her finger on a real problem in almost every region of our province, and that is a deer population that is very high. It's not just this year. This has been the situation for at least three seasons, for about three seasons now, three years. Just anecdotally, I am starting to get some information from the southwest corner of the province where the deer population may be subsiding a little bit, but certainly her anecdotal information jives with the kind of information that I get from the department and from the people in the wildlife branch.

Especially at dusk or dawn you will see a lot of deer in most, just about all regions of this province. From that we've had more cases of predation, whether that be timber wolves or coyotes. We've seen more sightings of cougars. We've had two cougars that have been shot in the last three years. Previous to that, it was 1973 since we had a shooting of a cougar.

There was a gorgeous picture of a cougar in the *Free Press* here a couple of weeks ago, a beautiful picture. I wouldn't have wanted to have been standing in that yard at Plum Coulee when the cougar went through the area, but these kinds of predators are here because there's something to eat, i.e. the deer population. So we're not only just dealing with the impacts of a deer population, we're dealing also with all of the other natural forces that come with a large deer herd in Manitoba.

We have game hunting areas in this province and we've been able to increase opportunities for Manitoba hunters, guides and lodge owners on the basis of this. We try to use that as the way to manage those deer numbers, but certainly, the Member for Tuxedo is correct. There is a challenge and it is a large deer herd that we're dealing with.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for going through and I think we've talked about a lot of animals here this afternoon and I know we've talked about the fish population in the Dauphin Lake and the elk population. We've talked about many, many different areas and I think I'll have to just leave it at that in the interest of time today, but I did want to ask the minister if he could update us on various recycling initiatives that are happening in Manitoba right now.

Mr. Struthers: To go back to the 1990s again, the stewardship program that was put in place in our province in the 1990s was among the best in the nation. That program has, in almost all the categories, produced the best return rate of all of the provinces.

We have continued that stewardship model for the eight years that we've been in power. We've developed the WRAPP fund, Waste Reduction and Pollution Prevention fund that many small communities and large communities have applied to and received funding to help bolster, or in some cases, even initiate a recycling program.

Some of my best days as an MLA involve working with little communities through the WRAPP fund to start programs like the one right in my constituency, at Rorketon, where a group of students, when I was the principal of that school, got together and started the first Rorketon recycling program. Then, when they needed a bigger shed for all of their recyclables, I was very pleased to be the minister at the time through the WRAPP fund to help them move into a bigger location and enhance their ability to recycle.

* (15:10)

So there are always new communities coming on-stream with their recycling. There are always communities looking to enhance their ability to recycle and we're always looking for ways in which we can recycle more and more all the time.

Just a final point on this that I need to make is that we have to do better than what we are. We have to, and we're doing this, reorganize the framework upon which you recycle so that the industry could take a lot more responsibility for the stuff that they make in the first place. There are many people that have heard me complain that, on Christmas morning or on my son's birthday, I've got to go digging through to find a little gift about this big. I've got to dig through about 40 pounds of cardboard, plastic, Styrofoam and you name it, usually with about 100 little tin ties, and then you've got to get the screwdriver out and take some of the screws out of it. My six-year-old by that time's moved on to some other gift. He's frustrated and dad's frustrated. The company who put this together needs to understand that they have to cut back on the amount of crap that they put in their produce, or we just end up recycling it or have it land in our landfills. We've got to take this whole system, back it up, put the responsibility on the industry and set them loose to come up with even a better recycling program than we have.

I've met with industry. They're keen to do this. They think it'll help their bottom line even, and they want to do the right environmental thing as well, so there're always more opportunities in terms of recycling, and I'm always willing to work with anyone who has good ideas in terms of setting up a recycling program.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that, and, obviously, we on this side of the House would encourage that more recycling initiatives be considered and other jurisdictions looked at in order to come up with not just what we could be, but we could be leaders out there on this. I am not so sure that we are right now. I think we've got huge opportunities as a province to make a lot of headway in this area, so I'd encourage the minister to listen to various stakeholders out there, people who really know what they're doing, and that would be a lot of younger people out there in the high schools and junior high schools that would have a lot of great ideas when it comes to various recycling initiatives.

I want to move on, and one more quick question before my colleague is going to ask some questions.

I wanted to see if the minister could give us an update as to the contamination of the Gimli golf course site and what's happening with that area. I know we've discussed this in the past in Estimates, but I'm wondering if the minister could give us an update as to what's happening with that issue.

Mr. Struthers: The first thing I wanted to do in a very non-partisan way is recognize the good, hard work of the MLA for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), who has brought this to my attention, who—

An Honourable Member: You're biased.

Mr. Struthers: Maybe I'm a little biased on that, but, you know, I've always believed in giving credit where credit is due and the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) has been on top of this issue, has kept me informed on the issue, so I appreciate that very much. *[interjection]* You're welcome.

I want to say that the other people that have been working hard at this are members of my staff, the Department of Conservation staff, who have been working with the municipal officials at Gimli. We want to do what we can first and foremost to monitor, to see whether that contamination is mobile, to see whether it's mobile under the ground, whether it stays where it is. If it stays where it is and we can contain it somehow, that'd be great. If it's mobile and we need to continue to monitor it, then we will be doing that as well.

Another fine gentleman that needs some credit in this is our hardworking Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), who has worked with us to set aside \$39.5 million to use to not just assess the contamination in these sites, but to do what we can to clean the sites up or to contain the movement of the containment. I think we're doing just as good a job as the Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau), who has been working with a larger pot of money in terms of the abandoned mines throughout Manitoba. I couldn't forget the Minister of STEM. He would have really been feeling left out if I didn't work him in there.

So we continue to work with the officials at Gimli. We've put money aside to deal with contaminated sites. We're working very hard to prioritize those contaminated sites before March of '09. Work on this particular site continues. We want to make sure that we make good environmental decisions and we make them together with people, in the area, affected by the contamination.

So thank you very much, Madam Acting Chairperson.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I was wondering if the minister could tell this House what the final results are of the Sale report plebiscite.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): As per the discussion with the member opposite last week on whether or not the results would be public—are we on? Check, check. Okay, we're good to go. There we are.

I thought I might have to use my grade 9 teacher voice for a second there.

As I promised the member last week, once the results were made available, they would be made public, and certainly they have been made public. The plebiscite results, 52 percent voted yes in favour of the recommendations of the Sale report, 48 percent voted no. There were 11,271 votes cast, out of 26,000 plan members, reflecting a 44 percent turnout. That was the yes vote that was received.

Mr. Schuler: These results were conveyed to whom? Were they conveyed to the pension commission task force, MTS, RTAM? Were they all given these results?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe MTS received the results, and I believe they've been conveyed to everyone mentioned. I believe so. I will check and confirm that for the member.

Mr. Schuler: Now that the minister has these results, what does he plan on doing with the Tim Sale report?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I think the House has been given an opportunity here to consider. I know that we will certainly seriously consider legislation.

I do realize, of course, that we did have an agreement and that agreement dealt with the passing of legislation that was introduced within a certain time frame. I realize that that deadline has passed, but I would hope that we, as members, given the opportunity and given the serious consideration of this matter, have an opportunity to do what's right for retired teachers.

Mr. Schuler: Was this the result that the minister was looking for?

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, it was a yes vote. Here we are in the fifth anniversary of the day that I was first elected to this Chamber to represent the fine constituents of Gimli, and I want to say happy

anniversary to all of my colleagues from the class of 2003. This is a democratic process and on the anniversary of that first election in 2003, for me, personally, I certainly believe in the democratic process. This is the process that has been undertaken and these are the results that teachers, both retired and active, have conveyed to us for consideration.

Mr. Schuler: So the legislation that the minister is presenting, or plans on presenting to this House, will be the exact mirror of the Tim Sale report?

* (15:20)

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, I think it's an opportunity where we can seriously consider introducing the legislation. Hopefully, members opposite would consider the passage, as such, and doing what's right for the retired teachers of Manitoba, and to take this opportunity to double the COLA for teachers in this calendar year, if members are so inclined to support legislation that we would consider bringing in, as such.

I know that it's been just over a year now since the last election and, at that time, members opposite had proposed a solution that would be a two-thirds COLA and they supported that position then. The Sale report, through the Teachers' Pension Task Force, supports up to two-thirds, so I would hope that the members opposite would consider supporting it if indeed legislation were introduced.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister confirm for me that the difference between the two sides—it was 5,848 yes, 5,351 no, which is a difference of 497 votes. Is that a strong enough mandate to proceed with the Tim Sale report into legislation?

Madam Chairperson, Bonnie Korzeniowski, in the Chair

Mr. Bjornson: It is a yes vote, and the yes vote is an endorsement of active and retired teachers for this plan to proceed. If the member had heard on the radio this morning, the Teachers' Society was very delighted with the results and are imploring us to move forward.

Mr. Schuler: So, out of 26,000 plan members, and I take it that's probably just a round figure that the minister gave us, 497 votes decided which way this plan goes. Again, I just want to be very clear; the minister is under the understanding that is a clear mandate to proceed with the Tim Sale report.

Mr. Bjornson: Certainly, as politicians, we value the democratic process and we value the value of

each individual vote. I don't need to look very far to my left here, to my colleague whose political career started three terms ago with a three-vote plurality. It's not about 400—I don't recall the number the member mentioned—it's about 11,271 votes that were cast in a democratic process, and the result of this democratic process is a yes. I think it's an opportunity for us here in the Chamber to do what's right for retired teachers.

If legislation were introduced to enact the recommendations of the Sale report, the COLA for teachers would double this year, and I think that's very important that we would give this due consideration and we're seriously considering those possibilities. And I would hope that the members opposite, including my friends in the Liberal party, would be supportive of this.

Mr. Schuler: Again, that's sort of what we—I think most people—want to know from the government, is, do they view—it's actually 51.8 percent who voted yes, or, the spread between the two results is 1.9 percent. Less than 500 votes decided this.

The minister has indicated he views this as a mandate to proceed. When does he see legislation coming forward? Is it drafted already? Is it something that will be introduced in the next week and a half? When exactly is he going to be presenting his legislation?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, I know the member's aware that we did have an agreement of this House with respect to bills that would be introduced, and I would hope that he would talk to his colleagues about the potential for the legislation to be introduced, and certainly support the introduction of a bill if one were to be introduced. I think it's incumbent on us, given the yes vote, to give this serious consideration. Again, it's not a matter of 400 votes deciding this. There were 11,271 votes that were cast to make their opinions be known on the recommendations that had been brought forward.

Mr. Schuler: I don't think there's anything that prevents legislation from being introduced. It can be introduced. It might take a matter of leave. The thing is that, by agreement—and I know the minister wants to be careful he doesn't break rules. At a certain point in time, any legislation introduced after that wouldn't proceed on to committee and then on to royal assent. The minister doesn't have to be concerned that he would somehow be denied leave to introduce it.

I would ask him if he could point out to me where it's listed on the Order Paper, because I

understand it has to be on the Order Paper for a while. So if he could just point out what bill number it is and where it might be on the Order Paper.

Mr. Bjornson: As the member knows clearly, it isn't listed on the Order Paper at this time. I do know that there's nothing preventing me from introducing the legislation.

In order for retired teachers to receive double the COLA this year, and it was very clearly stated on the CJOB interview this morning with the president of the Teachers' Society, Pat Isaac, the mechanism needs to be in place in a timely fashion.

So, yes, I'm aware that I can introduce it. I would just hope that we would have unanimous consent of the members opposite to move forward and pass this legislation so that teachers can receive double the COLA that they are currently going to receive under the existing provisions in the act for The Teachers' Pensions Act. That is my hope, and certainly we have to seriously consider the introduction given the yes vote. Certainly, we have to seriously consider the interaction of legislation. Again, Madam Acting Chair, it's an opportunity for members unanimously to support this legislation so that it can go forward in that COLAs can be doubled for teachers this year.

Mr. Schuler: Is the only way that this can be implemented by legislation, or is there not an opportunity for the minister to do this by regulation, or is there not a mechanism that he could just do this already? Is it something that must be legislated?

Mr. Bjornson: The Teachers' Pensions Act would require legislative amendments, legislative changes that would enable TRAF to adjust the pension adjustment account to pay twice the COLA that the Sale report or the recommendations from the Teachers' Pension Task Force has proposed at this time.

So, yes, it does require legislative changes. It is not something that can be done simply through regulatory changes.

Mr. Schuler: Can the minister tell us, is the legislation written?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, certainly, there's been due diligence in this exercise with respect to the recommendations that had been brought forward from the Sale report. The member likely knows the history where the Retired Teachers' Association had not endorsed those recommendations.

In anticipation of the time lines, the sensitivities of time lines and the work that had been done, we're prepared and ready to move forward. Again, the plebiscite and votes that have been cast tell us that teachers are prepared to move forward as well. So, yes, we're prepared to move forward, and we believe that the "yes" vote supports that.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I just want to point out to the minister, he's taken the opportunity to compare a plebiscite to a general election. For a plebiscite, which was a very defined group of individuals, I understand from what the minister said, that the ballots were mailed out, there was a return envelope. It went out to 26,000 people. Voter turnout—again, individuals did not have to leave their place at which they received their ballot. They just had to vote, put it in an envelope, throw it in the mail, which they could have done at work, just throw it in the mail basket.

A 44 percent voter turnout on a plebiscite, is the minister comfortable with that kind of result in which there are less than 500 votes between the two sides?

* (15:30)

Mr. Bjornson: I think, when you consider the time frame within which the plebiscite was conducted, and I know as a teacher myself that certainly this time of year is a very busy time of year, but I think the member will agree that having 11,271 teachers, both active and retired and soon to be retired, expressing their opinion on this matter through a democratic process such as a plebiscite is a very significant vote that has been cast.

It's not a matter of 440 or 460 vote differential. It's a matter of 11,271 people exercising that right to vote.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'm sure we'll be debating this issue in the next months ahead. I know the government will probably want to call the session back early in the fall as they should.

The minister says the problem with the poor result is the fact that this whole process was rushed. It was far too hasty. We would agree with him on that. It was, again, very ill-conceived. It's kind of like the entire government's legislative agenda. Everything seems to be done at the last minute. Everything is crammed through. If they don't nail it down with closure, they just want to really abuse the whole situation of committees, where they force committees, first of all, to sit till 1, 2 in the morning,

and that somehow is supposed to be good for the public.

They did the same thing on this particular issue. They could have taken their time, organized it properly. The minister said it was just far too rushed and we would probably agree with him. Forty-four percent voter turnout on a plebiscite, you know, that's fairly low. That's not something I would necessarily go out and crow about, that this is a really stellar turnout. We would agree with the minister.

We would caution him to be careful, that unlike Bill 37, Bill 38 and several other just appalling pieces of legislation which have been rushed through or they're trying to rush through, be very careful with the legislation to not get himself into a bind again, and, again, be careful with what he's doing because this is an important issue, important legislation. The mandate is—it's slim. I'd say to the minister it's a very slim mandate; 1.9 percent separates the two parties, less than 500 votes out of 26,000 plan members, 44 percent voter turnout.

I'd say to the minister, be very careful. Make sure that, when you do bring in legislation, it's well thought out. I would say to the minister, now would be a good time to call all the parties in. Don't bring in the retired teachers and be mean-spirited towards them. Don't call in groups and be unkind to them, which the minister has been doing. I would say he should not do that kind of stuff. Work with the groups. There's a slim majority that agreed with it. It's not an overwhelming majority.

I think basically what retired teachers and active teachers are saying to this government is work through this issue. Consult and see if you can't come up with a proper compromise. I think this is what we would call in legal terms a hung jury. I would caution the minister with this legislation. Advice is—and far be it for me to give the minister any advice—I would call the various groups in and I would sit down with them and say, listen, I got the message. I think teachers have chosen wisely. They have sent a message to the minister. They have said, we want you to go back and deal with this and negotiate and talk again. This is not a mandate that you can take to the bank. This is a tepid response to it, and 44 percent turnout, less than 500 votes separating them, I think the teachers are saying to the minister, Minister, it's time to show leadership. Stand up to the plate; call in the groups and see what kind of a compromise you can come up with.

That's what I would suggest. We look forward to the months ahead when we will be debating this particular issue.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, as politicians, we should respect the outcomes of plebiscites. I must correct the member. I did not say this was rushed. I did say that the time frame was very restricted, and there's reason for that, because the Teachers' Society recognized the deadlines that we have to operate under within this Chamber in order for legislation to become law and to enact the legislation.

The member has suggested that I had asked for the plebiscite, but it was the Teachers' Society that had convened the Teachers' Pension Task Force for the purpose of holding the plebiscite and getting a sense of, a true sense of the support for the recommendations that came from the Teachers' Pension Task Force. Certainly, we can't discount a yes vote. This was a yes vote and that is the democratic process.

You know, I'll put it on the record right now that, as a plan holder who received a ballot, I thought I'd err on the side of caution and avoid any perception of conflict. I chose not to exercise my democratic right and vote, which is very painful for me to do because as somebody who is very passionate about the democratic system, and someone who's exercised that right every single opportunity that's presented itself to do so, I wanted to err on the side of caution in this particular matter to avoid any perception of conflict that might arise as a result.

But the bottom line is that 11,271 votes were cast, that there has been a yes vote that has supported the recommendations, and I would hope that the members, when we consider—we should seriously consider the introduction of legislation to implement the recommendations because those recommendations this year will double the COLA. In order to get it done this year—and perhaps that's the time lines that the Teachers' Society had in mind when they made the request for the plebiscite. They recognized the time lines that we are under in this Chamber and, perhaps, the plebiscite being held in that time line was for the purpose of sending us a signal that we have an opportunity here to work together, all parties to work together to consider legislation, to pass that legislation, and to support doubling the COLA for retired teachers.

I know, as I said before, and I'll repeat it to the member, during the election last year, the members

announced a two-thirds plan. That was their plan for the COLA. The plan would have provided approximately \$21.6 million, I believe, over 10 years, but the actuarial analysis that was invested in this process to find a reasonable compromise—the actuarial analysis suggested the cost would be approximately \$130 million to achieve up to two-thirds COLA. Those are the recommendations that are contained within the Sale report. Those are the recommendations that were endorsed by the Teachers' Pension Task Force.

So I think we, as elected officials, have an opportunity here to work together to correct a long-standing dispute on COLA and to double the COLA that teachers would receive. In order to do so, we should consider supporting this legislation when it's introduced. All parties should consider that and, certainly, as the member knows, there is an opportunity to hear from teachers, both retired and active, to come forward and have their say at the committee hearings. We know that that's the process, that it's something that it serves—can serve as an example to Manitobans. Support of any legislation that would be brought forward would double the COLA this year, and I would hope that members would consider that for those teachers that have been advocating for a better COLA and a fair COLA, their support for any legislation that's introduced and passed in a timely fashion would double the COLA, and that's something members have to take into consideration.

* (15:40)

Chairperson's Ruling

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): I have a ruling that I was unable to give because the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) wasn't here, but I am able to read it now.

During the consideration of the concurrence motion in the Committee of Supply on Monday, May 26, 2008, I took under advisement a point of order raised by the honourable Member for Russell about ministers of the Crown reflecting on members. I took the matter under advisement in order to peruse *Hansard*, as it had been difficult to hear the proceedings in the House at the time of the raising of the point of order.

After having had a chance to peruse *Hansard*, page 2401 indicates that the honourable Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) did say, I very much look forward to narrowing it down a little bit for the

Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) who seems to have trouble getting his brain around it.

I would, therefore, find that there is a point of order and ask the honourable minister to withdraw, but I would also like to give a gentle reminder to the House that it is not appropriate, when raising points of order, to use points of order to comment on the presence or absence of members from the House.

I would request the honourable minister to withdraw.

Mr. Struthers: I absolutely and unconditionally withdraw the remarks that caused the flap in the House.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you, Minister. This should end the matter.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): They say you shouldn't quit when you're on a roll, but I won't go that far, Madam Chair. I do wish to thank you for your ruling, and I wish to thank the minister for withdrawing that comment. I truly respect that.

I do have a question, Madam Chair, for the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), and it has to do with the school closure moratorium. There's a bit of anxiety in my neck of the woods, as the minister might know, because there were a number of schools that were slated for closure between now and 2013. Basically, it involved the consolidation of six high schools into two, and the construction of one super high school in the town of Shoal Lake that would accommodate the south part of the division.

All of this stems out of the Schaeffer report which the board took and then tried to adapt to, I guess, their wishes, and, also, after hearing the constituents, I think the board decided wisely to put not just one option before the residents but a number of options in front of the people.

But one of the issues that came to light when I was meeting with the board was that the minister and his deputy had been meeting with the board in late December and early January. Now I may be out. The time frame is not relevant here in that specifically, but in that period of time the board and the superintendent indicated to us that, in discussing the issue with the minister, he gave them every impression that they were in fact on the right track in consolidating the six schools into two high schools and closing not only the Kenton School but also transferring students from Shoal Lake elementary to

Strathclair and Strathclair high school students to Shoal Lake.

At no time were they given the impression that the minister would be moving in a direction that would not allow school divisions to close schools. I want to make it clear to the minister that I'm not opposed to what he did as minister, because he as the minister does have the right to do that. I just think that the process was somewhat flawed, in that divisions weren't consulted with beforehand because the minister will probably also know that the whole concept of closing the six high schools has caused a significant amount of consternation amongst people in that area.

I think, whether you're the MLA in the area or a trustee in the area, you're still wanting to make sure that you reflect the wishes of your people, and decisions like this are pretty significant and impact on not only families but also on communities.

So what I'd like to do is ask the minister if he could outline what he actually told the board when he met with them regarding his intended bill to disallow closure of schools.

Mr. Bjornson: As the member mentioned, this meeting had taken place, I believe it was in January, perhaps February. I can't confirm the date for the member right now. Considering that this is something that had taken place four, perhaps five months ago, I can't recall exactly what had been said, but I can assure the member that I don't believe I said that the division was on the right track.

I believe my comments would have been that, as the division was aware, we were currently undertaking a review of the procedures and policies that were in place. That review was at the request of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees.

I did say that those procedures and policies were the terms of reference that they would have been engaged in, until such time that there would be new policies and procedures in place or, in this case, legislation, because we're the only province in the jurisdiction of Canada that does not have legislation that governs school closures.

I am pleased to hear that the member now agrees and supports my prerogative, as minister, to do so because, when we started to look at the policies and procedures and the process, it was also the outcomes that were very evident to move forward with the moratorium.

In the last 20 years, 80 schools have closed in Manitoba. We all recognize that there are, perhaps, reasons that some of them should have closed, but we thought it was time to stop, take a step back, and look at how we can prevent this from happening.

As one rural Manitoban told me through this journey, he said, the licence to close a school is a licence to close a community in rural Manitoba. I see the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) agreeing with that. So we had to stop and take a look at the outcomes, not just the process.

So we have been engaged in a discussion on the process and, again, the outcomes seem to trump that. When I did talk to the school division, I believe I did not say that they were on the right track. I believe I suggested to them that they were following the existing guidelines and policies as a matter of course, until such time that any legislation or new policies and procedures would be introduced to supplant those policies and procedures.

I was aware of the review that they had undertaken. I was aware of the fact that they were considering the consolidation of high schools to one super high school; I don't recall that specifically being mentioned, or me suggesting that that, indeed, was the right track.

I had seen a lot of documents and a lot of discussion papers that had been forwarded on their proposals but, when I met with them specifically and met with community groups, parents and municipal officials on the issue, I don't believe they specifically focussed on the proposal for one super high school within the six catchment areas that currently exist, that currently have high schools.

Mr. Derkach: I thank the minister for that answer.

I think the minister, quite correctly, assesses what the impact of closing a school in a small community is. We've seen that over time. Communities, like Hamiota in that area and Birtle, which are small communities but fairly significant in the market area to the people who live in those areas, would simply be impacted fairly negatively, if those schools indeed were closed. Yet the numbers in those schools indicate that those schools should stay open at the present time.

I think, in making that decision, the minister also has to undertake to share with the school divisions some of the responsibility that goes along with keeping a small school open.

When I was with the school board, I indicated to them my experience as a Minister of Education some years ago, where divisions were facing special problems; the one that came to mind was Winnipeg No. 1 that was a conglomerate of many different cultures and, therefore, presented to the school division a number of different challenges that other school divisions didn't face.

* (15:50)

As a result of that, special programs were developed to assist the division in dealing with those special circumstances. So it meant that there was money that had to go into those school divisions over and above what was sort of their share under the FRAME accounting program, and I'm wondering whether the minister has taken a look at anything of this kind where school divisions who have dwindling populations still have the issues before them of keeping that school open, keeping the maintenance going. I think in Park West they told me their deficiency in building upkeep is something like \$6.5 million. That money, some of it has to come locally, but some of it has to come from the department. I think there is a logical way to do that if we sort of look at the longevity of the building and then say, here's the way that we're going to address these things. I think that's not the minister's job. That's the school division's job.

But I think there has to be a plan. Now that the bill is before us, if the minister could outline his long-term plan in terms of how these divisions are going to be able to cope financially so that students don't lose out by not being able to have the adequate number of teachers that should be required, and, No. 2, what the plan might be in terms of perhaps changing this whole mindset that we have when it relates to transportation.

I travel fairly significantly in my constituency, and oftentimes I'm on the road when school buses are travelling. It's very common to find a 60-passenger school bus barrelling down the road with two students in it. You wonder whether that is, in fact, the most efficient way to transport students any longer. Now at one time it may have been. Today, with the changing demographics, I'm wondering whether there isn't a need to overhaul the way in which students are transported to schools. I certainly don't have the answers to that, but I know that we've got enough experts in this province that could probably design something that is far more efficient than what we are doing today, especially when we

are talking about being greener, paying more attention to environmental issues, getting vehicles that are more fuel efficient. That might mean smaller vehicles but still safe and perhaps looking at that whole issue.

The other thing is in terms of special small schools grants, if you like, or enhancing that whole program to allow schools which are small in small communities to function in a way that is still going to provide those students with a quality of education. I mean, the minister I know has mentioned this that it might mean bringing in other services into the school. I'm thinking more in terms of the shortages of trades that we have in rural Manitoba. Why can't we aggressively pursue partnering with entities like the community colleges, the universities? Today we heard about the shortage of nurses, for example, in that whole western area. There is a significant shortage. There is no reason in my mind why we couldn't offer in a vacant part of a school through Assiniboine Community College or Brandon University or one of the colleges in our province a full-blown LPN program that would go from year to year. Then that center could, in fact, become one that does two things: one, it provides for the human resources and, secondly, utilizes the facility and contributes to the operation of that facility. So I would just like to hear the minister's comments if he has any in regard to that.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I thank the member for the question and there are a number of different issues that the member covered in that preamble to the question. First and foremost, I can assure the member that our support for small schools has steadily been increasing. The three categorical grants that we've provided, declining enrolment grant, small school grants, and sparsity grants have increased from \$3.2 million in 1999 to \$19 million in today's categorical funding. We certainly recognize that as enrolments decline it presents some challenges to the schools and their ability to offer programs. But I'm also hearing of a lot of innovation that has taken place through interactive television, which I had actually had the opportunity to teach on in Gimli High School. I didn't teach high school courses at the time. I actually taught a Red River Community College introductory psychology course to adult learners in Fisher Branch, Arborg and Riverton through that particular innovation. But ITV was something that has been expanding.

The number of on-line courses and the supports for on-line courses have been increasing, and we are

continually looking at ways to provide more opportunities for rural learners. In fact, we had a rural education research forum and there's a number of recommendations that will be coming forward with respect to rural education initiatives and we feel that the best opportunity to engage our learners is to engage the learners that will be benefiting from that through the minister's round tables and the ministerial forums that are held in Rural Forum. We heard a lot of feedback from rural students on the need to continually improve what we're doing for the delivery of rural education.

Certainly, with respect to the partnerships with community colleges, I've had the privilege now, as minister, to visit, I believe, 326 of our public schools in my tenure as minister, and I've always been impressed by the local initiatives that fit the demands locally for different career opportunities. I recall in Thompson seeing the aircraft mechanics course where many of the students end up, through a dual credit system, acquiring credits that are necessary to take distance learning and college opportunities to become aircraft mechanics and work on the planes in Thompson. Just as, I believe it was Minnedosa, where I saw a mechanics course where the students were being trained to conduct safeties on vehicles for local auto shops. I believe that was the example there.

So we are seeing really good examples that are generated locally to try and fit the needs of their communities, and there are lots of partnerships that do exist with off-campus, or Campus Manitoba and some of the adult learning centres, and certainly we would hope to see more of those initiatives.

I'd like to cite another part of the objectives of the school closure moratorium, and that is to look at community use. It's not just as educational institutions, but Dale Peake, the superintendent of Southwest Horizon School Division said, in the *Brandon Sun* on April 20, that his division has taken a stand, that small schools are a preference, and trying to keep them open as long as we can is important to the community, and he said that we have fitness centres, joint libraries, child care, nursery schools, and it brings people into the building; they see more reasons why they're paying taxes, and I think it's a plus.

So there are a lot of really good fits that I have seen in communities that I visited with respect to other institutional fits for education purposes, with respect to early childhood education centres, with

respect to community capacity building for other programs that, unfortunately, in some cases, are lacking in rural areas. But there's an opportunity to use that building for that purpose. Certainly, that's part of the bill, is to finding a community school and how we can truly make better use of these assets rather than close them and have them become liabilities. So I know that there's good examples out there of how it's been done, whether it's adult learning or early childhood centres, and I know that we'll look at those examples and look to those examples as we move forward with this legislation.

The other issue around the funding, I might add, before the member's next question, the transportation issue. We are looking at increasing resources because, as the member said, you have 90-passenger school buses and, unfortunately, as the number of students decline, the buses got bigger and the routes got substantially larger, and we are asking school boards to take their best efforts to reduce the travel time to one hour on either side of the day. I know, as a father of three children, I can't imagine my five-, eight-, or 10-year-old sitting on the bus more than an hour and a half going to school each day and returning. So we have asked them to take their best efforts to reduce the travel times, and there will be support for them to do so on capital and support for operation.

* (16:00)

The other funding issue that we have addressed already with respect to the day care or early childhood education centres is \$22.5 million over five years to renovate the existing spaces in our schools for the purpose of early childhood education centres. So there are a lot of things that we are going to take into consideration with this bill. Ultimately, as I said, I'd like to see these buildings continue to be assets in our communities, not shut down and becoming liabilities, and I'm looking forward to a lot of discussion with school boards on what works and what we can do better. So I thank the member for that question.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I have a question for the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers). I had the opportunity of having a ride with the minister this morning, and we viewed a burn area and I'd like to ask the minister if there's any use for the material that can't be used for lumber or for pulp, if he envisions that there's some use for that particular material.

Mr. Struthers: I thoroughly enjoyed the tour that the Member for Emerson and I were given. It included the reeve of the R.M. there, Marvin Hovorka, and some of our staff from Conservation. We took a real good look at both the most recent fire that threatened the member's community of Marchand and the fire from last year at Vassar.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

One of the things that we had talked about this morning was what do you do in a burn area after a fire has gone through and there's still some trees that have been scorched but they're still standing. Obviously, they don't have the leaves and the rest of it and some of the branches are gone, but there's still what's left of a tree standing there. What we've been doing is, first and foremost, we're working with the quota holders in the area who have been very co-operative—the southeast quota holders in this regard—in first and foremost cleaning up what's there so that we don't end up providing fuel for the next fire. If it was just left to its own, though, the timber that's standing will fall and become a hazard.

So, now, what do you do with that? You don't want it to be wasted, so many of the quota holders are working with our department officials to use as much of what's left of those trees as lumber, and they can salvage as much as they can to make boards and other products. What they can't use in that way, they try to use as chips. Now, as we were told this morning, part of the problem with the chips is that after they grind up what's left of the lumber, some of those chips end up being a bit fried. They end up being not suitable to be used as pulp. Some, obviously, can be used as pulp, but some can't. But as Reeve Hovorka said this morning when we were flying over the site, we're looking at ways in which we can have even the damaged chips used at a mill, we're hoping, in Ontario. So, as much as we can, we want to make use of what's left of the forest after a blaze has gone through there.

I was impressed with the advice that the MLA for Emerson gave, and I appreciate any good ideas that he may have on that.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for those comments, Mr. Minister.

I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture, if she's still in the House. The question I have for the Minister of Agriculture is a very short question. I understand that the crop insurance offers hail insurance again this year, as it always does.

However, I understand that the hail insurance is limited to \$150 an acre, and I'm wondering why it is so terribly low when, one, they're paying for the premium and, secondly, because the price of the grain has escalated quite high due to the shortage, a worldwide shortage.

Keeping in mind that our input costs have moved upwards exponentially, I'm wondering why the crop insurance has capped, or hail insurance, at \$150 an acre.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Madam Acting Chairperson, I thank the member for the question. Certainly we are getting into the season where we could be using hail insurance with the kind of weather that we've been experiencing. I can say to the member that hail insurance, the prices of it are reviewed on a regular basis just as the crop insurance is renewed and adjustments are made according to the price. With regard to the level that hail insurance is set at right now, I would like to have the opportunity to just check on that if that is accurate, that it is being maintained at \$150 per acre, and I would get back to the member with that question tomorrow.

Mr. Graydon: I appreciate that answer and I'll be looking forward to your comment tomorrow, unless you work too late tonight.

I'll turn it over to my colleague from Ste. Rose.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, too. I have recently met with the proponents, the owners of the small abattoir at McCreary. I believe it's called Oak Ridge Meats. They have a problem with the specified risk materials and I'd like to know what the province does in relationship to picking up specified risk materials. I understand that some places are picked up for free and other places are charged for. Could you expand on that a little?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is right. Smaller abattoirs are facing a real challenge because of the cost of transporting specified risk materials, and part of the issue is that there's a route where the pickup goes and there are some people that are left out of that loop, and it's becoming quite burdensome for a few.

We have been in discussion with those abattoirs that are not having product—that need some assistance with picking up of their SRMs, and we

should be able to have some positive news for them perhaps later this week.

Mr. Briese: Yes, in their case—what my understanding is, they have a burner there that burns diesel fuel and it's just about worn out. They kind of went state-of-the-art with it a little bit and it was \$20,000 to buy it, and it uses \$500 worth of diesel fuel a month. So they looked into having the specified risk materials hauled away by however they're hauled, and I think that was going to be something like \$300 a month, and they are experiencing some financial problems there that need to be addressed.

I guess the second part of that question would be on—is there money at all available through the Beef Enhancement Council to help out the smaller abattoirs at the present time? Because that one, I believe they're doing about 2,000 head a year and it's pretty critical to the area. They do, I think, need a little bit of assistance right now. I know that also when the Beef Enhancement Council gets involved, they want shares in the operation, and I don't think they're too happy about that. So could you expand on that a little?

Ms. Wowchuk: There are smaller abattoirs that are very important to the economy of the rural areas that are facing challenges. There is a program that the federal government has been funding for disposal of SRMs. There is a large number of people that have made application for those funds for feasibility studies of funds, but in the short term what these people are looking for is assistance in transporting the product, the waste material.

* (16:10)

As I said, we are reviewing that, and, hopefully, I'll be able to talk to them very shortly. But those people are looking at the program that is—the SRM program, disposal program, and there's quite a bit of money there that's available, but it's the size of the project.

People are being encouraged to look at different options because the product can be incinerated. It can also be composted in the right kinds of situations, so there are different ways that you can deal with SRMs. In the short term, it is the transportation. We have this gap to fill, until something else comes into the system to help move it to some site where they can be disposed of.

With regard to the Enhancement Council, those individuals who are interested in accessing funds

from the Enhancement Council would make application to the council; their application would be reviewed and then both the council would have to make a decision on a business case and the individuals who are making application would have to decide whether this is a viable use for their money.

There is one pot of money that's targeted towards the disposal of SRMs and that's the money that we're talking about right now.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Madam Acting Chairperson, as the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) knows, we could talk about agriculture for weeks and weeks and a number of issues that we need to talk about and just not quite enough time.

I want to focus on a couple of issues quickly, before the independent members from the Liberal Party have an opportunity to ask questions. One is in regard to agreements that were negotiated in the recent ministerial agricultural meetings that were held in Toronto.

I was wondering if she could update the House as far as environmental programs that were negotiated in the new Growing Forward program and, specifically, FSAM.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Acting Chairperson, the meeting that was held last week was to talk about Growing Forward and to talk about the livestock industry. We talked about the WTO agreement in those particular areas. Although we have come to agreement on what the business risk management tools will be, we are still working on the other part of the non-BRMs, non-business risk management components, of the program. Those are still in discussion. We hope to have things finalized for the ministers' meeting in July.

There have been consultations that have been held. In fact, last week, there were consultations with the industry here in Winnipeg with regard to the non-business risk management component of the program. The environmental farm programs are still on the table and will be part of the new program. We have an extension of the existing program for one more year. So we have time to work on these other components, but we will still continue to deliver environmental farm plans.

I'm not quite sure if the member would be more specific on his question about FSAM.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Acting Chairperson, the concern that producers have been calling me about in

regard to FSAM is whether or not—I know the minister had told us even earlier that there would be a one-year extension; however, that money has not flowed.

My understanding is there's only one person working in the office now at FSAM. As a result of that, they're concerned whether or not they will get the funding for the applications that have been made and approved on the past program, and now the new programs through the environmental licensing may not be approved, depending on whether or not an agreement will be reached. I guess, now, in July is when the next set of negotiations will take place.

Ms. Wowchuk: Because we are in a transition year and have an extension, environmental farm plans will still be delivered, the ones that are in the process. However, there will still have to be discussions as to the amount of money that we will have when we get into the next phase. There is a certain amount of money that's been designated in the carry-over program, and environmental farm plans are still being delivered. I want to give credit to staff in my department who have worked—they have provided the resources, Madam Acting Chairperson; they've been doing a lot of the technical work with the farmers on their environmental farm plans.

I also want to congratulate the farming community because there has been a tremendous uptake by farmers and farmers recognizing how important it is to look at their farm holistically and look at where changes have to be made to improve the environment on their farm. There has certainly been—I've been very pleased with the kind of uptake we've had.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I agree a hundred percent with the minister. We have seen great leadership in the farming community. We know that they take great pride in their land. They're great stewards of the land and they do a great job at keeping their records in order. I think that's one reason that we've seen the response to the environmental farm plans at the record level that we certainly see them. So I'd encourage the minister to continue her negotiations. I believe last year the budget was cut to some \$538,000, which the Province would be putting in their share in through labour donation in kind, which does make a significant impact. I certainly do agree with the minister that it's important that her staff stay involved and work with our producers in ensuring the fact that the environmental farm plan does move forward. So I'd encourage you to do that.

I do, also, want to get on the record—I know the minister and I talked unofficially about it yesterday, and I do thank her for that, her openness—but with the country-of-origin labelling with the new farm bill that's been passed unanimously in the United States, it's going to make it awful hard for the President of the United States to veto such bill, but where are we at in regard to COOL at a provincial level and through negotiations as provinces with the federal level?

Ms. Wowchuk: We did have a chance to talk about this and I did indicate to the member that country-of-origin labelling was on the agenda of the ministers' meeting. I was very pleased that it was on the agenda and that all ministers were taking an interest because we have been raising this issue for some time. I have not been able to get the kind of attention paid to it that I would have liked to have seen. Over the past several years, as we raised this issue, it didn't seem to get the attention. However, there was a much greater interest in it at this meeting and a commitment to work at it.

I can say to the member that we have hired a lawyer in Washington that is working on this issue for us, and we continue to pursue it. The member is right; it looks as though the law has been passed. A rule has to be written. We have tried to find out when that rule will be available. We were talking about implementation in September of '08. It's my understanding now that it'll be quite unlikely that it will be implemented. There will be delays in implementation because of the rule-writing process.

I can tell the member, also, that this was a very significant item on the western premiers' agenda, recognizing that this will have a tremendous impact on our exports. We are an exporting province, as are others, especially for livestock. If there's going to be this kind of a rule in place, that's why we have to look for solutions at home.

* (16:20)

I believe that we produce high-quality meat, and that if we can process it right here in this province and have it enter the market as a processed product with a Canadian label on it, we might even be more successful than selling live animals, because to sell live animals under this rule is going to not only create hardship for our producers, it's going to create a lot of hardship for processors in the United States. From the discussion that I have had, processors are saying—the smaller ones, in particular—they're not going to put two lines in. If they don't put two lines

in, then we cannot—it'll put pressure—it'll drive the price of our product down.

So, in that regard, we have staff that's working on it. The federal government is engaged in this. Really, right now, it is a matter of waiting to see that rule published—having that rule published—and then making comment on it and seeing how we deal with it. We are hearing different stories of what could be in the rule as to the kind of labelling, the number of days that a weanling has to spend in Canada before it's not considered a Canadian animal. So we need some clarity on that.

Mr. Eichler: I only have time for a couple of more questions, but also coming back to the ministerial conference that the minister participated in. Were there any discussions in regard to remuneration for the TB testing within the province of Manitoba, showing any signs of the federal government—as the minister knows, we have, on this side, wrote a letter of support for our producers, and if she could update the House on that issue.

Ms. Wowchuk: That's very much a Manitoba issue, and it did not make it onto the agenda at the ministers' meeting. However, I had the discussion with the federal Minister of Agriculture and have asked, time and again, both for CFIA and Parks Canada, to share in some of these costs. We have put our share forward to cover some of the costs of testing, but we have not been successful in convincing the federal government that this is in the best interest of our nation. They view it as a Manitoba issue, but, in reality, this could have an impact on livestock trade across the country, should it be that we have another case of TB. So we've raised it, we've put our support in, and we will continue to lobby.

I'm pleased that the member opposite is lobbying as well on behalf of the producers because this is a pretty significant issue for producers. Sometimes, I think, it's not even so much the cost; it's the time that it takes to put the cattle through the chute, and also the risk that comes with that. When you're handling animals, there's always a risk of an animal getting hurt. So I think there has to be a recognition that this is a benefit to everybody and that we will continue to pursue that.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Acting Chair, we will, in fact, be writing another letter to the federal Minister of Agriculture, asking them to move forward on that. I certainly appreciate the minister's comments.

One last quick question, and that's on the potential for drought. I know the severity that's out there in the southwestern part of the province is getting worse and not better. If the minister could outline the program that would be in place or what her plan is in regard to a backup plan for those producers in that area, not only the livestock producers but the grain producers there, as well.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is right. There is a part of the province that is facing quite a serious drought situation. The best solution would be a good rain. I pray every night and I'm just about tempted to start doing a rain dance if I thought it would help bring a little bit of rain, and if the member would join me, maybe we could have an impact. But it is serious. It is serious for the people that are in that area. A combination of lack of rain and cool temperatures. Both those two events have resulted in a very slow regrowth of pasture.

So there is pressure on producers to get their cattle out to pasture. I can say to the member that it's not only in the southwest part of the province, if the member were to travel to my part of the province, he would see as well that there is very little regrowth on the pastures and there are places where farmers are still feeding their livestock. That's quite unheard of for the beginning of June. It's not very often that we have to do that. But there are farmers that have not been able to put their cattle on pasture, farmers who are still giving some feed to their livestock.

We have a committee that's been established of all the departments that could be involved with regard to dealing with drought. Some of the immediate issues are hay supply, water supply for the animals where we haven't had enough dugouts that are not filled up.

There was equipment through PFRA where dugouts could be filled up. That equipment is now held by Conservation districts, so the equipment is still available, if it's necessary to pump water. There are existing programs that would deal with this situation.

I think, in the short term, we have to look at assisting those producers with a hay listing, where we might link them up with hay. Producers have called my office and asked if there are pastures in any other parts of the province where they might be able to move their livestock to.

That's being looked at. Is there some other part of the province where there is better growth? With the cool weather, that's not really happening. It is quite dry right across the province.

We have a drought committee that's working; we're looking at various options. With cropping, if there's a need to reseed, there's a program under—if they're insured through crop insurance, there's a reseeding component of the various insurances and then the basic programs that are available for everybody.

What we're watching is how do farmers manage within the amount of land they have, the water they have, the hay they have. There are some people that are making a decision to reduce their herds right now. The price is up a little bit, so that's helpful.

Everybody has to make a management decision for themselves and we have to continue to work on these options. That's why we have the drought committee.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), I understand that there was a very strong no vote on the Sale report at 48 percent.

My question is: Will the government be revising its position on the Sale report, in light of the heavy no vote?

Mr. Bjornson: I would suggest to the member that we have a yes vote that we have to take under consideration. The democratic process has been undertaken.

There was a yes vote. The Teachers' Society has been on the radio this morning with CJOB, endorsing the Sale report and the recommendations contained therein. They're urging us to go forward.

What the member should know is that failing to do so would mean that the COLA would not be adjusted this year. If all parties take a look at the recommendations and consider legislation, as we are seriously considering, given the fact that there is a yes vote on the table, we would hope that all members would consider supporting that.

This would mean that there's an opportunity for retired teachers to receive twice the COLA this year, if legislation was passed and we are able to enact that legislation to make the necessary adjustments to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund for the purpose of adjusting the COLAs.

I would hope that members would see this as an opportunity to improve the COLA for retired teachers.

Mr. Gerrard: My question to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), I understand that the minister's Web site indicates that there are no new cottage lot draws this year. Is that correct?

Mr. Struthers: Last fall, when we ended up with the blockade that everybody is aware that we were dealing with, actually right in question period at times, we decided then that we would put on hold the eastern draw with all of those lots and that we would work with the First Nation, with Hollow Water in specific, because many of those lots are at Driftwood and Blueberry which were the two subdivisions, and Wanipigow subdivision, which were at the heart of that disagreement.

* (16:30)

We've been working with the new chief who was elected back a couple of months ago, to find a way that we can move forward. If we want to have a spring draw we need to be up and running very soon, and so, as of today, we do not have a plan to bring forward those lots this spring, but we will continue to work on this, because there's some very beautiful lots there that Manitobans would like to participate in, in terms of getting started on building cottages.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the Minister of Conservation what the government's position is with regard to the Fisher Bay Park Reserve.

Mr. Struthers: We've had some very good meetings with the chief, Chief David Crate. We have an MOU signed with him in terms of moving forward with a cottage development which is part of the overall discussions of the Fisher Bay reserve. The Canada Parks and Wilderness Society has worked with us in terms of bringing forward that cottage development as part of the park reserve.

Just over two months ago, I met with the chief and with Ron Thiessen of CPAWS. We agreed at that time on a go-forward basis which included, as our act suggests, public input into the park reserve. It's our intention that we will move forward as our legislation suggests and with the co-operation first and foremost of Chief David Crate, who is very keen on this, and also other interested parties such as CPAWS.

Mr. Gerrard: I would like to know the government's position on logging in the Grass River Provincial Park and logging roads?

Mr. Struthers: The question that was brought up by the Member for River Heights in question period, I believe a week or two ago, centred on a proposal that Tolko has come forward to us in terms of building a road through the Grass River Park over the Grass River to access some wood that is located north of the Grass River Park. They have applied for an environmental licence. We have received a number of comments from people of Manitoba indicating concerns that they have, so we're right now in a position to work through the comments that we have received.

One of the things that I am most concerned about is, and this is why we hired caribou biologists and have utilized them in the north, I'm concerned about the impact on the Naosap caribou herd. It's one of our herds that is, of our 16 herds, one of the four that is really one that we should pay attention to. So decisions that we make will take into consideration impacts of forest operations on the herd. It'll take into consideration impacts of the road through the park.

This is not a proposal to log in the park; this is a proposal to build a road through the park to access wood that is north of the park. But there's an existing old forestry road that they are proposing they build on and there's a bridge across the river that needs to come into consideration when we look at the impact of the environment. So all those will certainly be taken into account.

Mr. Gerrard: Talking of caribou, we've talked before about the Owl Lake caribou herd and there's a rather sensitive calving area for the Owl Lake herd, which is in Nopiming Provincial Park, I believe, and why is the minister hesitating to give that area where the caribou calve protected area status?

Mr. Struthers: I hope I get this right. I was struggling to hear the member as he was asking the question, but my understanding was that he's asking why we're not protecting the calving grounds of the Owl Lake herd near Nopiming Park.

As I mentioned in my previous answer, we have hired caribou biologists that advise us on these matters. We work in co-ordination with First Nations all along the east side of Lake Winnipeg who have very much at stake in the decisions that we make in terms of the Owl Lake herd. We work with

stakeholders such as Tembec and Hydro and others who have ongoing interest, and mining companies that have ongoing interest in the area, and we're very clear that decisions that we make in terms of development need to be viewed from the lens of protecting that herd and its birthing areas, its calving areas. We've made that very clear, and we've put people in place that can offer us advice when we make decisions in terms of that calving ground.

We think with the management plans that we put in place, that we work on, that involve everybody who are not just stakeholders but First Nations who I consider more than just stakeholders in this. Our management plans work with them on that. Anytime, if it's Nopiming or Atikiki parks, we have management plans that we work through, that we work on, in those and other parks, and that is always a consideration when we put together those kind of management plans.

So that is first and foremost in our minds when we make decisions.

Mr. Gerrard: To the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers): There is some federal funding which is flowing because of the number of forestry industries which are affected, and my understanding is that the province has the control of the funds or is making decisions about how to spend those funds.

I would ask the minister, how many dollars are involved, what are they going to be used for, and what are the criteria for spending the dollars?

Mr. Struthers: Well, that is something we have worked with the federal government on. The federal government announced—in a way it was unfortunate, he announced this in a forestry town in New Brunswick, but what the federal government has looked at in terms of criteria wasn't just the forestry sector. We all know that the forestry sector is going through a hard time and that there will be and have been all around the country and certainly around the continent some major restructuring in terms of that forest industry which has meant layoffs, which has meant slowdowns, which has meant some expansions that haven't gone ahead. Some of the companies I've met with have told me about future plans to build plants in certain towns that have been put on hold or, in some cases, scrapped all together.

We, in Manitoba, have relatively been fortunate on that. We had some layoffs at Louisiana-Pacific that I think the member is aware of; we've had some

layoffs at Tolko; but certainly many of us were worried that there would be much more.

I believe, just going by memory, that the figure was in the area of \$41 million what our announcements have been in terms—and I think very good announcements. I'll give the member an example of two of them. One at Brandon and one at Neepawa having to do with upgrades in terms of water protection, upgrades to those facilities which are not just a win in terms of supporting the industry and supporting the slaughter capacity for hogs, which is a good thing because we know country-of-origin labelling and market conditions are doing to hogs what the market is also doing on the forestry side. It's a win because that gives us more options for our farmers in Manitoba, but it also gives us the ability to improve the removal of nutrients and the protection for water in Brandon and in Neepawa, whether you talk about the Assiniboine or whether you talk about the Whitemud River.

* (16:40)

It ends up being that we can use this package, which the federal minister announced initially as an economic development tool. We can actually use that not only for economic development but for environmental protection. Both goals, I think, are laudable, and both goals are what this provincial government has tried to attain.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I wasn't aware that Brandon was the forestry capital for Manitoba, so let me come back to the forestry industry here.

Can the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) tell me something about the distribution of those dollars relative to the forestry areas affected around Pine Falls, Swan River, The Pas, and so on?

Mr. Struthers: I'm glad that the member understands that Brandon's not the forestry capital of Manitoba, but I think he's aware that Swan River is the—and I have to try to get this right, and I would look for advice from the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). Swan River is the forestry capital of Canada. As you drive into town, there's a nice billboard indicating that community, my hometown's community, my hometown's success in terms of the forest industry.

As I pointed out, this fund that the federal government set up is not specifically intended, not specifically targeted to the forest industry. Although they made the announcement in a forestry town in New Brunswick, the minister, the federal minister

was clear that this is an economic development tool that he would work with the provinces in terms of dealing with the high dollar, dealing with market conditions, dealing with the international situation across the economic spectrum. Not just forestry, not just agriculture, not just manufacturing, but they would work with the provinces to make decisions that are strategic in each and every province. In Manitoba, we've looked at such things as the hog industry. We've looked at, yes, forestry companies within Manitoba as well.

I want to be quick to point out that, well before the federal government came forward with this fund, we were working with Tolko. We were working with Tembec. We were working with Louisiana-Pacific. We were working with Spruce Products in Swan River. We're working with a number of quota holders to do what we can to make sure that the forest industry is as sustainable as possible. Environmental sustainability, of course, but also economic sustainability. I was very happy to point out Swan River's position as the forestry capital of Canada. Is that what—*[interjection]* Forest capital of Canada, so we can't ignore the hard times in the forestry sector, but that's not the only reason that this fund is put together. I just want to point out that we have worked with companies to change the way in which we deal with stumpage fees, the way we deal with those tariffs, to make it more fair for companies and have it based on market conditions, so if the market is low, then the tariffs would reflect that. When the market returns to something stronger, then the tariffs would increase with them, much like they do in Alberta and Ontario and other jurisdictions.

That is something that companies such as Louisiana-Pacific have talked to us about, that we've been working on well before this fund was ever brought forward by the federal government. I'd be interested if the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has any good suggestions on the kind of sectors that need to be targeted, and I'd be open to his advice on that.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

House Business

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): *[inaudible]* As Deputy Government House Leader, I'd like to make a number of announcements: First of all to announce the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 5, to continue to consider the following bills: Bills 6, 25, 29 and 38.

I would also like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 5, to continue to consider the following bills: Bills 14, 26, 35, 37, 39 and 40.

I'd also like to announce, in compliance with rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one sponsored by the honourable Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) entitled Daycares – Early Childhood Family Support.

Madam Chairperson: On an issue of House business, it has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 5, to continue to consider the following bills: Bill 6, The Securities Amendment Act; Bill 25, The Embalmers and Funeral Directors Amendment Act; Bill 29, The Business Practices Amendment Act (Disclosing Motor Vehicle Information); Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

It's also announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 5, to continue to consider the following bills: Bill 14, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act; Bill 26, The Legal Professions Amendment Act; Bill 35, The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008; Bill 37, The Lobbyists Registration Act and Amendments to The Elections Act, The Elections Finances Act, The Legislative Assembly Act, and The Legislative Assembly Management Commission Act; Bill 39, The Court of Appeal Amendment Act; Bill 40, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment, and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act.

I'd also like to announce, in compliance with rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one sponsored by the honourable Member for Southdale entitled Daycares – Early Childhood Family Support.

* * *

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister and I look forward to a full report on how those dollars are spent and also to getting a list of the criteria for spending those monies shortly.

I'm going to now turn it over to the MLA for Inkster, my colleague.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Chair, I do have two areas I was hoping to be able to explore. The first would be with the Minister of Labour. We'll all recall last year the establishment of our holiday known as Louis Riel Day. Looking for confirmation from the minister, from what I understood of the process, it was supposed to go to the schools and then come back, and the name that came out as being the one with the most suggestions was Louis Riel Day. Is that not correct?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes, I just want to clarify the process for the MLA for Inkster. What happened was we had—is there a procedural problem here?

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. I'm sorry. We have to have agreement. Because you're not on the list, we need agreement for you.

An Honourable Member: By leave, I would ask.

Madam Chairperson: By leave? Yes. Is there leave? [Agreed]

* (16:50)

Ms. Allan: I just wanted to clarify the process for the MLA for Inkster. What happened was we had a youth council, the Manitoba Youth Council that is in the Department of Education. That youth council, the MB4Youth advisory council, they reviewed the 114 entries that we received from all of the schools across the province; there were criteria for the name. The criteria were the names submitted were required to be relevant to Manitoba and referenced citizenship, history, culture, the arts, sports, or a significant individual.

The name that was recommended to us was Louis Riel Day, and that was the name that was submitted by 11 schools. So that it is the process.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, I think that it's important to recognize that we could always review *Hansard* in terms of what has been said in the past.

My understanding was that there was a request from schools to be able to participate. The reason why it became Louis Riel Day was because that was the most common day. Is that not the most common suggestion that was made? Is that not the case?

Ms. Allan: Madam Chairperson, I think that's exactly what I just said, that my understanding of the recommendation that was made to us is it was the

one that was recommended and also met the criteria that were laid out in the process.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, what concerns me is the second part of the answer, and also. That and also was not highlighted in the past, to the best of my knowledge.

I do have the list that she refers to. I just want to quickly read a part of it: Family Get Together Day, Family Day, Family Fun Day, Family Winter Wellness and Fun Day, Family Day, Family Day, Family Day, Family Fun Day, Families Forever Day, Family Bonding Day, Family Day, Family Fun Day, Family Day, Family First Friday, Family Heritage Day, and Family Day.

Madam Chairperson—[interjection]

Madam Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Lamoureux: —as members from all sides of the House suggest, is it stuck? Twenty-one schools incorporated family. Does Family Day not incorporate the and also?

Was it that group of advisory youth that disqualified Family Day, because they didn't think it met the minister's criteria?

Ms. Allan: That's a question that the MLA would have to ask the MB4Youth advisory committee. They're the ones that made the recommendation to me, as minister.

Once again, I just want to remind the member opposite that there were criteria, and they were asked to reference citizenship, history, culture, the arts, sports or a significant individual.

I think that they did an excellent job and that it was a really fabulous process because we engaged young people in the history of our province. All across this province, we had 114 schools that were involved in the naming of this day. We are very, very pleased with how it turned out.

Now, if the member opposite is not happy with Louis Riel Day, I'm quite sure the Manitoba Métis Federation would be very interested in that. I'm quite sure, if you'd like to put some comments on the record about the fact that you are not happy with Louis Riel Day for some reason, if you've got a problem with that, I'm quite sure that the Manitoba Métis Federation would be more than interested in these kinds of questions, after everybody enjoyed an

excellent holiday that was named by the students here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) is trying to bait me into trying to be politically incorrect. I suspect that the minister knows full well that this has nothing to do with being anti-Louis Riel. No, it doesn't; it's an issue dealing with process.

Jack Layton, her own federal leader, other provincial parties in other jurisdictions, have indicated Family Day. Her caucus remarks and encourages the minister.

Madam Chairperson, the impression that was given was that the students of the province were being listened to and that did not occur. It's as simple as that. The day and the naming of the day were manipulated by this minister, and I think that fact needs to be made. It has nothing to do with being against Louis Riel Day; it has everything to do in terms of the process.

Madam Chairperson, because of the length of answers and possibly some questions earlier, I unfortunately have to limit my question to the minister on that. I do have some questions in regard to the minister of highways, and I understand the acting minister is here to answer some questions, so if I could have the leave to be able to go to that deputy minister.

Madam Chairperson: Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairperson. The taxi industry is a very important industry to the province of Manitoba, as I know the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) is very much aware of the issue and keeps himself up to date in terms of what's going on within that industry.

There are currently, I understand, about 409 plates that are issued for taxi owners. There's a great deal of concern from the driver owners in regard to what the taxi board is doing with applications, or the possibility of the taxi board issuing additional plates. I wonder if the minister could address that issue.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Acting Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): First of all, by the way, I want to put on the record I support Louis Riel Day. I'm really proud of that and, you know, we're finally recognizing Manitoba history. So I just couldn't resist saying that. It's taken us a little bit too long, but he was a founder of Confederation. I am very proud of that.

In terms of the taxi industry, I am very proud of the relationship that we've developed with the industry. Since we came into government, I had the privilege of being minister of Transportation, responsible for the taxi industry, when we, in working with the board, brought in some of the best security measures in the country. I'm very proud of the cameras, there's been a dramatic drop, the member knows that, in terms of what's happened. We made some significant changes the way we dealt with the ability of taxi drivers to have safety inspections performed, gave them the choice in terms of that. We developed a very good working relationship with the taxi board and I look forward to that continuing. Certainly, I continue to keep in close contact with the industry.

The member does know that there are a number of applications before the board and, obviously, the board will deal with any and all applications whether it's in regard to taxis, et cetera, but I want to put on the record that—I also have one other unique thing. I've not only been responsible for the taxi board, but I take taxis on a regular basis. I want to put on the record that the level of service that we have with the taxi industry, currently with the cabs that we have, I think, is an excellent one. I know there are often criticisms, but I've had nothing but the best in terms of service. I think, as we proceed, and the member is probably aware there has been discussion of working with the industry and doing a study on the industry, something I know that's been raised by various people in the industry. I think it's important that we maintain the excellent degree of service that we have.

I also want to put on the record that in the taxi industry it's a very significant employer. It's made a real difference for many families, I think that has to be a very significant factor, not only in terms of the security aspects I referenced, but, you know, the board over the last number of years has adjusted the fare schedule and made other decisions that ensure that degree of security.

I want to say that, certainly, whatever is going to happen over the next period of time with the taxi industry, the kind of co-operative relationship that we worked hard to develop is critical. The industry, both in terms of the existing industry, and anyone else that's out there, I think, should recognize that the kind of situation we had before 1999, when we had a very adversarial relationship between the taxi board and the taxi industry, we've made real progress by

avoiding that. So I would say to the member, even though I'm not directly responsible, having had some involvement with the taxi industry, we have to listen to the industry over the next weeks and months.

* (17:00)

Madam Chairperson: Order, please.

Given that a list of ministers has been tabled by the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Hawranik) for consideration and concurrence tomorrow, consisting of the ministers of Finance (Mr. Selinger), Justice (Mr. Chomiak), and Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) to be questioned concurrently, it is necessary to clarify and indicate on the record whether the questioning of the ministers of Agriculture, Food and Rural

Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk), Conservation (Mr. Struthers), and Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) is concluded.

Is the questioning of these three latter ministers concluded?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Chairperson: Agreed? It is concluded.

Committee rise. The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
Petitions	
Lake Dauphin Fishery Briese	2591
Long-Term Care Facility—Morden Dyck	2591
Pharmacare Deductibles Graydon	2591
Ministerial Statements	
Tribute to Captain Richard Steve Leary Doer	2592
McFadyen	2592
Gerrard	2592
Oral Questions	
Power Line Development McFadyen; Doer	2593
Bill 40 Graydon; Doer	2594
Jordan's Principle Rowat; Doer	2595
Rowat; Lathlin	2596
Lamoureux; Irvin-Ross	2600
Child and Family Services Briese; Mackintosh	2596
Bill 34 Mitchelson; Mackintosh	2597
Nurse Practitioners Maguire; Oswald	2598
Liquor Bottle Warning Labels Gerrard; Irvin-Ross	2599
Breast Cancer Screening Marcelino; Oswald	2600
Bill 17 Eichler; Struthers	2600
Members' Statements	
Jordan's Principle Rowat	2601
Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council Marcelino	2601
Duke of Edinburgh's Award Maguire	2602
Northern Forest Fires Jennissen	2602
Israel's 60th Anniversary Lamoureux	2603
ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)	
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Committee of Supply	
Concurrence Motion	2603

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